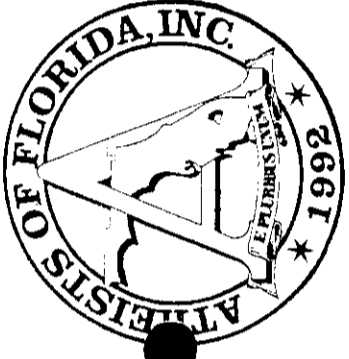




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Volume XI No. 7
May 2003

CHAPTER EVENTS

TAMPA BAY: Pinellas County—First Sunday of each even-numbered month (Feb., Apr., etc.), 1:00-3:30 at the Pinellas Park Library, 78th Ave N & 52nd Street.
Tampa—First Sunday of each odd-numbered month, 1:00-3:30, Platt Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa. Main Meeting Room.
FMI: Ed Golly, 813/839-7567, AthALFLE@aol.com.

DADE&BROWARD: Third Sunday of each month, 2:00 pm on the eighth floor of the Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave. Ft. Lauderdale. Our next meeting is scheduled for June 15.

Third Tuesday each month, 8:00 am. Breakfast meetings at *Denny's* Restaurant, 16751 NW 67th Ave, Hialeah. Specific meeting information and activities published in **NEWSNOTES**, included in all newsletters, or listen 24/7 to the message on 305/940-0442. atheist1@bellsouth.net

AT THE CRACK OF DAWN, under the drizzly, grisly autumn morning curtain of Friday November 22, Carlos Coronado and yours truly dove into the desolate streets of downtown Miami, fully determined to make this our best fair ever. In the same mood was our presi-

Miami Book Fair International 2002
Atheists of Florida on C-Span2
Report by Patrick Bens, Chapter Director Miami/Fort Lauderdale

dent Ed Golly, who traditionally flies in from Tampa Bay with his cute nifty private plane, this year came accompanied by the master of eloquence Jim Young. They joined us early and soon our booth was overflowing with new titles and for the first time ever in the history of

Ed Golly, right, displays a newsletter in the Atheists of Florida kiosk with Joe Reinhardt looking on. The 10 C's book covers rolled at lower right, were handed out to school children by the hundreds.



atheism, a Spanish language bulletin, opportunely "christened" **ELNOTICIEROATEO** (The atheist newsletter). This new piece of literature

Atheists of Florida

Sponsor of the MARK TWAIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND, Incorporated
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Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

Board of Directors meet
TAMPA—The 2003 meeting of the Atheists of Florida Board of Directors was held Sunday, February 9 at the Hilton Airport Westshore Hotel, site of the 2003 Atheist Alliance International convention.

The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, sponsored by Atheists of Florida, received donations totaling \$4,411.37. In addition, the Fund received a \$5,000.00 check from the Louis J. Appignani Foundation. Appignani specified that the Fund may use his donation to match dollar-for-dollar any contributions we receive in excess of \$4,000 for the 2003 calendar year.

The Fund received 31 applications and essays by students as far away as California and Wyoming. Their essays on the topic "Can Humankind ever be freed from the tyranny of religion, or is this merely a pipedream?" were profound and offer hope that a future generation will bring reality and thoughtful judgment, not dogma, to address the nation's problems (*the 2002 winning essay appears on page 4*).

The Board welcomed two new members recently elected by the board to fill vacancies plus Melinda Masters, Director of the newly formed Sarasota chapter (*see related story*). Roberto De Los Rios of Hialeah and Joe Reinhardt of Pinellas Park bring our roster to 14 members. Next year the A of F membership will elect a new board.

Sarasota/Manatee chapter forms

SARASOTA—With four meetings scheduled, the Sarasota/Manatee chapter of Atheists of Florida has formed under the direction of Melinda Masters.

Meetings are scheduled one Sunday each month from 1:30 to 3:30 at the Selby Library, 1331 First Street in downtown Sarasota. Specific dates can be found on the back page of our newsletters, and members in the geographic area of Sarasota/Manatee Counties will be notified by postcard or e-mail of the meetings.

As a special incentive, anyone from Sarasota or Manatee County who registered for the AAI convention received a free one-year membership in Atheists of Florida.
For more information regarding the chapter or meetings, call (813) 835-1500 or e-mail: ATHALFLE@aol.com.

De Los Rios will begin work on the creation of an Hispanic chapter for the South Florida area. The Board decided to investigate the possibility of producing Spanish videos and agreed to have a Spanish newsletter established which will be mailed separately from this newsletter.

Several new items are being added to the A of F Web site besides the newsletter. We will be adding a second Hispanic page and we are working on setting up credit card capability.

Several technical motions were approved concerning terms of board members and the filling of board vacancies.
Due to the increase in membership, the Board agreed that we will now set membership renewals on a quarterly basis rather than monthly to ease the workload. However, as we develop improvements to the management of our data base, we anticipate sending renewal notices by e-mail and again issuing Atheists of Florida membership cards which we did several years ago.

The Board also agreed to enhance cooperation between other freethought groups by sharing advertising and other ways that do not compromise the confidentiality of the A of F mailing list.

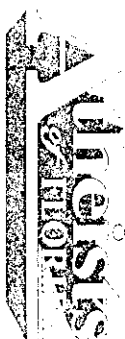
Copies of the minutes of the meeting are available at all chapter meetings and by e-mail request at ATHALFLE@aol.com, or by mail at the Tampa chapter address.



The Atheists of Florida kiosk at the Miami Book Fair International. Why can't they ever get it right? Fair organizers misspelled "Atheists" on our sign. Full story on back page.

Next Issue: Complete coverage of the 2003 Atheist Alliance International Convention

Although it is said that faith can move mountains, experience shows that dynamite works better.



www.atheistalliance.org/florida
www.lam.pabayatheists.org

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Mark Twain Scholarship Fund

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Membership dues

- Life Member \$ 500.00
- Sustaining 60.00 Yr
- Couple 50.00 Yr
- Individual 40.00 Yr
- Student (under 25 yrs) 10.00 Yr
- Limited Income (over 65) 10.00 Yr
- Newsletter (out of state) 10.00 Yr

Published eight times a year by Atheists of Florida, Inc., a nonprofit, educational corporation founded to heighten public awareness about atheism and monitor state/church separation issues. Newsletter is provided free to our members. Letters are published on a space-available basis. Send newsletter correspondence to Tampa Bay Chapter, address above. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Atheists of Florida, Inc. is a Member Society of the Atheist Alliance International.

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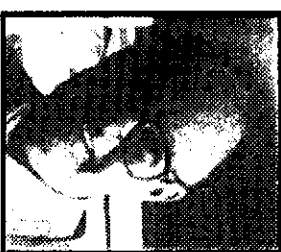
ALL OF THE STUDIES in Astronomy show that the Universe is evolving. All of the studies in Geology show that the Earth is evolving. What we sometimes forget is that these processes have a great effect on the evolution of living things.

It is obvious that the sun and moon have had an effect on the evolution of life on other minerals. Plants that live in the ocean protect their cells by having non-living cell walls. Animals that live in the ocean have protective skin and they have evolved ways of getting rid of excess salt.

The same can be said about deserts, the arctic, and rain forests. All have hostile environments for cells. All cells have had to evolve some way to protect themselves from the effect of these environments.

THE SOLUTION IS EVOLUTION
No. 20—Evolution and Geology

—Jim Strayer

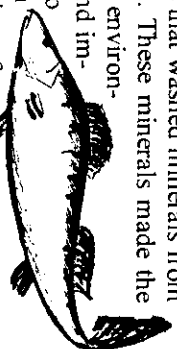


Earth. It may be more difficult to understand the effects of the changing Earth on evolution of living things.

We do not feel the continents move, a process called Plate Tectonics, but it happens. We do not see huge meteorites collide with the Earth, but it has happened. We do not feel the mountains rise, but it happens. All of these things can be measured by using scientific instruments. Add to that weather changes, volcanoes, hurricanes, and lightning and a very hostile environment is seen.

The only possible way that living things can possibly survive the physical changes that have occurred on the planet for billions of years is to evolve and adjust to these changes.

As an example, lets look at the creatures that live in the oceans. At one time in eons past the oceans had no minerals in them. The minerals that make the oceans salty came from rivers that washed minerals from land into the sea. These minerals made the ocean a hostile environment, a deadly and impossible place to live because such a high concentration of minerals will kill cells. So why is the ocean teaming with life? It is because the change in the ocean water took place so slowly that living things had a chance to evolve protection against the effects of salt water and

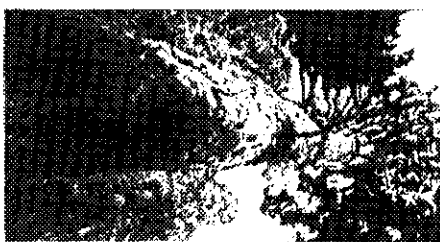


...there is no major college or university in the World...that does not accept the facts of evolution."

Because the physical changes on the planet are constantly changing the process of evolution continues. We humans have such a short life span compared to the earth that we must use science and scientific instruments to measure the rate of evolution. Considering the fact that we have only been at it for such a short time we have made amazing progress. It is true that the whole story of evolution is all around us and maybe we should have seen it sooner, but there have always been doubters standing in the way of scientific knowledge. Now there is no major college or university in the World, that carries on scientific research, that does not accept the facts of evolution. The only theory involved is how it took place and is continuing to take place.

The Solution is Evolution continues in the next newsletter. Jim Strayer is a retired biology teacher living with his wife, Bobbe, in Ormond-By-The-Sea, Florida.

Our own bodies are a good example. We have dead outer skin to keep us from losing too much water and protect us from sun and wind. We can produce heat to keep our cells at the right temperature and sweat as a cooling mechanism to keep us in balance.



Plants have had to go through the same process. Bark on trees is made up of dead cells which keeps them from drying out. The leaves of plants evaporate water which helps keep the cells in a temperature range so that they can function.

measure the rate of evolution. Considering the fact that we have only been at it for such a short time we have made amazing progress. It is true that the whole story of evolution is all around us and maybe we should have seen it sooner, but there have always been doubters standing in the way of scientific knowledge. Now there is no major college or university in the World, that carries on scientific research, that does not accept the facts of evolution. The only theory involved is how it took place and is continuing to take place.

ATHEISTS of FLORIDA Inc. has a number of movies and videos that may interest you. Please contact Patrick Bens, chapter director. 305-940-0442 atheist1@bellsouth.net

LETTERS

Caged speech
As a citizen who has been forced into a "FREE SPEECH CAGE," I know this practice must be stopped before all our rights are trampled. Free Speech Cages, Protest Zones, First Amendment Zones, Free Speech Areas—whatever they are called, they are a stain that corrupts the police who enforce them, brutalize peaceful protesters, demoralize the public, and shame all U.S. citizens in the eyes of the world.

The very words used to describe them are a mockery of our Constitution and Bill of Rights. The entire United States of America is one vast Free Speech Zone. It will remain so only as long as WE THE PEOPLE are willing to defy and oppose any unconstitutional police action or local ordinance that would usurp our First Amendment Right of Free Speech and Assembly. Benjamin Franklin said, "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

—GAEL R. MURPHY—EDUCATIONAL COORDINATOR
Florida Voices for Animals, Inc./Tampa

Forum viewer

Like your programs and watch them. Along with Joe Redner, you could start a new political consensus. My Dad was a Socialist—he was raised Catholic and on his way home from church one day, a light flashed in his head and he thought of the priest's sermon, analyzed it and concluded with this thought—"That S.O.B. doesn't know anymore about it than I do." So, I was not raised through a church—that itself made me a free entity.

—RENE LEWIS Tampa

The entire United States of America is one vast Free Speech Zone

I felt very inspired after attending the Atheist of South Florida meeting last Sunday. I would like to suggest some activities that would help the group.

1. Advertise each monthly meeting with a special flyer inviting the public to attend. Include on the flyer information about atheism and the group itself. Even if the person picking up the flyer does not attend it will serve to educate them about atheism.
2. Have the meetings in two parts. First do a "business" part. This would allow members to get "warmed up" for the second part. The second part would be for the public. It could be a lecture, a video etc.

Some general comments: I think that Atheism is in a similar position the gay rights movement was a few years ago. Atheists are regarded as a fringe group evil, suspect, or ill. Yet there must be millions of people who are "closet atheists." In my opinion atheist groups should not waste energy attacking religion. Science and scholarship are doing a wonderful job of that. Rather, they should concentrate on making atheism *legitimate*. People in the public eye such as entertainers and politicians should announce their atheism. Atheist groups should concentrate on public relations with the goal of demonstrating that atheism is a good alternative to theism for *normal people*. Publicity events

We welcome correspondence from readers. Address mail to: Atheists of Florida P. O. Box 130753 Tampa, FL 33681 Or e-mail: ATHALFLE@aol.com

could show atheists that are attractive intelligent people. A good model of this kind of effort can be found in the book *After the Ball: How America will conquer its fear and hatred of Gays in the 90s* by Kirk Marshall. Regardless of how you feel about gay rights this book has many effective techniques that we could use.

—PAUL CITRO *Dania Beach*

Comment on column

Hi Patrick
Your group does great work—you all have my admiration. I'll be sending in my membership application and dues this week.

I have a comment about your recent column in the newsletter (NEWSNOTES, Dec. 2002), in which you state that one must be either a theist or an atheist. I disagree. In order to believe or disbelieve a proposition, the proposition must have content, must make sense. For example, we cannot either believe or disbelieve the proposition "Fwinderflopies exist in the Himalayas" because it has no content value. "God exists" is the same sort of case. No one I've ever spoken to or read has offered a coherent definition of "God," and so it has no more sense than "Fwinderflopies." "Claiming to be an atheist actually admits too much, because it's allowing that 'the other side' makes sense! I'm not a theist, or an agnostic, or an atheist."

By the way, I used to be a philosophy professor, and my favorite course to teach was philosophy of religion. Regards,

—DENNY FRIED

Bens' response:
That's why these editorials are written, to get people engaged to come to our meetings and express their philosophies or write the next column.

FYI: "real" atheists are people who live without religion (the meaning of a). Many do not know the existence of religions (like my children). So, no atheists are not believers or non-believers. Just like not all theists are believers! Some are doubters, who cannot live without a bit of religious philosophy now and then.

Truth in government

It is apparent that the religious powers and the media in this country are using "God" as if evidence exists to prove that there is such a super natural being. We would not be deluged with "Faith Based" in government if such proof existed.

My American Heritage College Dictionary defines Alleged as: "Represented as existing or as being such as described, but not so proved." Sounds like God to me.

Every religion that I know of expects faith in a super natural power. I believe that it is time that the media uses "Alleged God" where appropriate in reporting. Also all government uses of the word God should be "Alleged God," as on currency and in the pledge of allegiance.

This would solve many problems because it would still let religions rely on faith and at the same time let non believers know that government and media respect truthful statements and reporting.

—JIM STRAYER *Ormond-By-The-Sea*

Faith-based victory

WASHINGTON—For more than three years, U.S. Senator Rick Santorum, a Pennsylvania Republican, has been promoting legislation that would unconstitutionally give your tax dollars to “faith-based” organizations so they can run social services, all the while practicing discrimination in hiring.

The “buzzword BS” title of this bill is CARE (Charitable Aid, Recovery and Empowerment Act). On March 27, Santorum, unable to

budge the bill in the Senate where it bogged down over concerns about state/church separation and government funding of religious discrimination, scaled back the bill. It now focuses on tax breaks designed to make charitable giving more attractive to Americans. The ACLU said the compromise legislation should send a strong signal to the White House that it ought to abandon efforts to allow religious groups benefiting from taxpayers’ dollars to discriminate based on religion in their hiring practices.

“President Bush and his faith-based initiative have eroded 200 years of carefully protected separation between church and state.”

—U.S. Senator Richard Durbin

NEWSFILES

Vouchers flop...for the most part

TALLAHASSEE—Virtual schools are a virtual con. But when it comes to the Florida legislature, what’s new?

At the beginning of the 2003 session, voucher supporters were ready to slam it to the taxpayers. Instead, the budget contains just one new “choice” program: an online school for students in grades K through 8 which will allow up to 1,000 students to learn full-time at home next year using computers and printers paid for by the taxpayers.

Unlike private schools that operate their curriculum barring any state supervision, online courses must follow state standards, teachers must be certified in Florida and students must take the FCAT and have attended public school the previous year.

One of the two vendors who will operate the program under state contracts was co-founded by William Bennett, former U.S. education secretary and author of *The Book of Virtues*. Bennett’s company, K12, already runs online schools for 6,000 students in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Arkansas, Colorado and California. If enacted in Florida, the program will siphon \$4.8 million from the public schools at the rate of \$4,800 per student.

Democratic lawmakers and the teachers union call the program a “virtual voucher” and another example of Republicans diverting public money into private education ventures. They claim the nearly \$5 million expenditure is especially ill-timed when Florida public schools are cutting programs and personnel.

The *St. Pete Times* quoted Marshall Ogletree of the Florida Education Association saying, “It sounds like a cross between homeschooling and vouchers in many ways. If you’ve already made the decision to homeschool your child, it’s not a whole lot different, except the state is going to buy your computer for you.” Ogletree worries that the online school will get more and more money in future years without having to prove its validity.

How are existing voucher programs faring elsewhere? A researcher at Princeton University has concluded that African-American children in New York City who received vouchers through a privately funded program did not receive academic gains. The same held true for Hispanic students in the program, which has been in operation since 1997.

No one home at House

WASHINGTON—Remember when the Ninth Circuit Court properly ruled that the Prayer of Allegiance is unconstitutional? The U.S. House of Representatives voted in March to condemn the ruling. Big deal!

The nonbinding resolution, passed 400-7 with 15 members voting present, states that the phrase “one nation under God” in the pledge reflects the religious faith central to the founding of the nation and that its recitation is a patriotic act, not a statement of religious faith.

Every single one of Florida’s representatives voted in favor of the resolution.

“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT (ERA)—the wording has not changed since 1943. It offers the same hope to Americans since it was first expressed as the

Surprising success for Florida’s first ERA effort in 20 years—Sandy Oestreich

Declaration of Sentiments in 1848! It benefits men, too. Please note that many of the major sex discrimination cases are brought by men!

I accepted the national ERA Campaign Network’s offer to be their Chair for Florida two years ago. Hardly anyone remembered that the ERA hadn’t passed in 1982 after 10 years of active struggle. But the good news is that 88% of citizens independently polled said, “Yes, we want the ERA in the US Constitution.”

So as a lone voice, I began presenting the ERA facts to anybody who’d listen, speaking around Florida. Few remained blasé. Thirty-three organizations signed on, one of which (Florida Women’s Consortium) umbrellas 26 organizations of its own, comprising a huge 250,000 professional and business women! League of Women Voters of Florida and Florida NOW each appointed me to lead their ERA efforts.

We have 6 regional ERA Action Teams around Florida, 2 newspapers endorsements, endorsements by one city and 3 counties, and counting! We get media coverage somewhere in Florida every day now.

ERA got a life of its own. I got a lobbyist, we got two bills filed, and one has just been voted out of the Senate Judiciary Committee, 6

Sandy Oestreich is Founder & Chair, Florida’s Equal Rights Alliance, Inc. She lives in St. Petersburg, Florida.

to 3! FWC and LWVF and the others all worked hard. NO legislator is unaware of the ERA now!

It is amazing to us, given the short time to get up to full speed and the marked resistance by some of the Florida leadership, that we have gotten so far. It bodes very well for the next Session when we plan to hold their feet to the fire.

Why won’t they get behind a drive to make sure each American truly is treated equally? They won’t say YET. But they will. And when they do, Floridians will read that all this fretting about unisex toilets, women in combat, abortion, and same sex marriages that keeps them from ratifying the ERA is nothing more than a smokescreen designed to cover up the real goal, which is status quo so that big business (especially the insurance industry) can continue to improve their bottom lines on the backs of underpaid women. It’s nice to have a hapless pool of workers and insurees so salaries and payouts stay low, and rates stay high! We are NOT going to let them swarm the Legislature floor before the vote and turn it around with threats of withdrawn campaign funds! Fifty-two percent of Americans are still paid less than 75% of men’s salaries for the same or comparable work. We wonder why men don’t complain about the average loss in family income of \$4,205/year? Is there something else than common sense going on? If you think so and think that’s not

so smart, join us as we begin to fuel our tanks for the next Legislative Session. Long before, we promise you, we will be in the legislators’ offices! Join us in making history.

Everything ERA is ongoing! We approved our 5 year Strategic Plan, Goals, and Principles months ago. We are a tightly organized and well-functioning organization now incorporated as a nonprofit the Equal Rights Alliance, Inc., and have formed a marketing, fundraising and lobbying group separately. Session is not over yet, but we have just held our scheduled Strategic Planning Session. We know what to do now and how to do it. This summer we will polish our tools, fuel our funds, tune up our engines. We WILL get the ERA. Absolutely. Come along. Help in some way. E-mail me at SandyJOestreich@cs.com or phone (727) 393-0932. See our web site: www.ERACampaignFL.net with links to the two marvelous national ones!

For now, please call frequently: House Speaker Johnny Byrd, (850) 488-0807, and Senate President Jim King, (850) 487-5229, and Senator Anna Cowin (I), (850) 487-5014. Ask them “To schedule HOUSE BILL 615 / OR SENATE BILL 1166 for an IMMEDIATE HEARING”. The public deserves to hear what their objections are. Thank you.

Here’s the news we’ve been waiting for! On May 21st, the Illinois Assembly (equivalent to our Florida House of Representatives) passed the ERA ratification bill, by a vote of 76 to 41!

Now it will go immediately to their Senate, where the Senate President, Emil Jones, is the chief sponsor! And either of the two committees it will go to next is headed by a cosponsor of the bill! Keep tuned, though things look very good in Illinois, it’s not a slam-dunk for the ERA there.

Once that the 21 year-old gridlock is broken, let’s see which state is next to ratify—Arizona, Missouri or FLORIDA!

CHEERS!

John W. MacKay, P.A.
Board Certified Civil Trial Lawyer
Certified Circuit Court Mediator

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Each year, The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund conducts an essay contest open to college-level students who fit the criteria found in our qualifications specifications. The Board of Trustees selects a different topic for the essay which must be no less than 750 words. This year's first place winner is Paul E. Crider II of the University of Tulsa.

Can Humankind ever be freed from the tyranny of religion, or is this merely a pipedream?

Our topic for this year was:

IN HIS ESSAY, *PRUSES OF THE MIND*, biologist Richard Dawkins described religion as a virus. A traditional virus is a sequence of genetic information that invades an organism and uses the resources of that organism to further replicate itself, likewise, a memetic virus is a sequence of information, an idea, that invades a human's brain and replicates itself via that brain's communication with other brains. In order to be successful, a memetic virus must readily copy itself and resist removal from its host. The idea of God, an omnipotent, eternal being who demands worship from humans, is the shining example of such a virus. This viral nature of God ensures that the idea will continue to cripple mankind and prevent progress for as long as we exist.

The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund God: The Incurable Virus

—Paul Crider

Religions, which can be thought of as variations of the God virus, command their hosts to "spread the good news" to other brains. While it is true that there can be religions that do not seek to spread themselves to other brains, these religions, like those that command their hosts to commit suicide, quickly oust themselves from the meme pool and are of no further consequence; most religions do seek their own perpetuation and these are the ones that demand our attention.



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sades, the Inquisition, and the many religious wars described in the Old Testament and perpetrated today in the Middle East are a few examples. The most insidious method of conversion is that employed against the helpless young. The very moment a toddler can mouth the words, infected parents teach her to sing catchy religious jingles and to pray before she sleeps at night. Indoctrination is thus set into motion before the child even learns arithmetic or the art of reading. When she does begin to read, she is given childish (read more childish) versions of the same myths that infect her parents.

Converts are easy to win, but are they easy to keep? God is an even wittier foe in this arena. The first line of defense is simple ease of habit. It is far easier not to think than to think. Making life-changing decisions requires enough intellectual energy to discourage most curious individuals from the effort. But if some impetus overcomes this energy, God is already prepared. Religions come with built-in guilt mechanisms should the host begin to question the religion, something like a computer's discouraging statements when you try to delete some file necessary for its operating system. When guilt is conquered, fear still remains. Immortality in Heaven is double-edged: even after the host has realized that his god's existence is logically impossible, he clings to belief because if in the infinitely improbable event his god does exist, then he will face hellfire for eternity. Finally, even if the host is courageous enough to accept what his own reason tells him, he had better be quiet about it. Violence is still allowed in much of the world, and it is as effective for keeping converts as for winning them.

Unlike physical viruses, memetic viruses offer no hope for physical remedy. Any physical remedy devised for believing in God would violate the rights of the host, because she obviously would not consent to the treatment. The means would be worse than the end. The only hope for curing the believer lies in rational persuasion. But reason too, that precious prerequisite to progress beyond hunting with sharp rocks, is ineffective against the God virus. When the concerned atheist uses reason to prove that her god cannot logically exist, she abandons reason. She claims "God is beyond reason, for he created reason." Like Monty Python's literally disarmed and "dislegged" knight, the host will not admit defeat and accept reality, despite the utter annihilation of any meaningful defense. Yet, apostates exist, so rational persuasion must work some of the time.

The difference between those who accept reason in the question of theism and those who do not is neither one of intelligence nor education. Geniuses and PhDs (including scientists) have been theists, and even a child can understand why God cannot exist (and why, if God cannot exist, then he does not exist). The difference is strength of will. Strong-willed individuals have the courage to accept life without God; weak-willed individuals psychologically need something outside their own selves, so they remain hosts to the virus. If this is the case, then there might still be hope. We just

need to redouble our efforts at persuading the strong-willed individuals we find, and, as they reproduce, eventually strong-wills will outnumber the weak.

Unfortunately, this has been our default strategy from the beginning, and we are no closer to success than ever before. Even otherwise irreligious individuals now look to pseudo sciences like psychics and Tarot cards and place a theism-like faith in them. And traditional religion is far, far from faltering. This seemingly sound strategy is doomed to failure because a population of strong-wills is not stable. In primitive societies, strong-wills (capable of hard work, innovation, free thought, and scientific inquiry) will begin to spread among weak-wills, because strength of will is necessary for life. But as these strong-wills take over, the free-rider problem arises, as relatively few strong-wills are needed to provide for a much larger society. It becomes advantageous to be weak-willed. Weak-wills will therefore always outnumber strong-wills. Individuals psychologically incapable of accepting life without God will always outnumber the individuals capable of breaking free.

Sadly, we cannot hope to free mankind, for God is too strong a foe. If God actu-

ally existed, perhaps in the form of some super villain from the pages of a comic book, we in all our human ingenuity could surely have toppled him. But how can we defeat a pattern of electrical signals in the brains of billions of human beings? We cannot. Does this mean we should give up? God, no! Just because there is no life after death does not mean

we should not live life to the fullest, and just because we cannot ultimately end the tyrannical reign of religion over mankind does not mean we should meekly offer up the white flag. We can save some, and we owe it to them and to ourselves to save as many as we can from the clutches of God.

Atheist Alliance Report New Freethought Directory has CD-ROM option!

—Constance Edwards

THE *FREETHOUGHT DIRECTORY 2003* edition was released April 18, 2003 at the Atheist Alliance International Convention. This year's edition introduces the electronic *Freethought Directory*, a CD-ROM with the complete PDF for use on any computer with the free Adobe Acrobat Reader. Also included on the disk are two versions of software that will allow the user to upload the PDF to a Palm device.

The *2003 Freethought Directory* is the most complete directory AAI has ever presented. With 30 new US listings and more than a dozen new international listings, this year's edition is the culmination of many years of work by AAI volunteers.

The *2003 Freethought Directory* has been set in an easy-read typeface and is perfect bound. At 8 inches by 5 inches, it is highly portable. The Directory is available from the Atheist Alliance International Web site, at www.atheistalliance.org directory, or by mail to:

Atheist Alliance International
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The print version of the *2003 Freethought Directory* costs \$18.00, and the CD-ROM version costs \$12.00. Both versions include shipping and handling, nationally and internationally.



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Oddlygolly

A sampling of interesting internet news blurbs from the last few weeks. If you do not receive them yet, send your email address to atheist@BELLSOUTH.net.

No to JayCee

BY GUYA HOLLAND, AP
WASHINGTON—The court refused to hear an appeal from the city of Burbank, Calif., a Los Angeles suburb of about 200,000 people. Two lower courts ruled that the Burbank City Council may not begin meetings with sectarian prayers such as one that invoked the name Jesus Christ. It triggered a lawsuit by Irv Rubin, the late chairman of the Jewish Defense League.

Miracle or mystery?

www.gva.be
ROME, Italy—Zenit press agency reports that the Vatican released statistics indicating that in the last 25 years, the number of seminarians (those who prepare to be ordained priests) has doubled. Worldwide, there were 63,882 prospective priests in 1978. That grew to 122,244 by 2001, the last year a count was made.

To the pope this is a miracle; to everyone else it's a mystery as a time that the number of priests is in sharp decline from 420,971 in 1978 to 405,067 in 2001—give or take a few hundred arrested for pedophilia. The number of believers worldwide is also dropping steadily from 990,768,000 in 1978 to 792,317,000 in 2001.

The report made mention that Europe and North America and some countries in South America are losing adherents, while some other countries in South America, Asia and Africa are gaining.

Holy rib

STOCKHOLM, Sweden—Aboard the Scandinavian Airline Systems flight from Stockholm to Kalmár was part of St. Birgitta's ribs, nestled safely on the lap of Maria Malmloef, head of Kalmár's provincial museum. "It felt like a very heavy responsibility," Malmloef told AP. She carried the nearly inch-long relic with part of Birgitta's stroud in a small package during the 45-minute flight.

St. Birgitta is the Scandinavian country's only saint. She lived from 1303-1373 and was renowned for her delusions of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Her rib was acquired by a private family before it was given to the Kalmár museum. It was lent to the

Stockholm Historical Museum for an exhibition, so it can be displayed for the 700th anniversary of her birth. Churches and museums throughout the Lutheran country of 8.9 million are expected to mark the anniversary.

No omnipotent

At the Vatican, papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the threat of SARS might scuttle plans for a papal visit to Mongolia, a predominantly Buddhist Asian nation with a Catholic community of less than 200 people.

Behind the veil

ORLANDO, Fla.—A Muslim woman fighting to get her driver's license back may argue the state infringed upon her freedom of religion and due process rights. But Judge Janet C. Thorpe rejected Sultaana Freeman's argument that Florida violated her rights to privacy and free speech when it took her driver's license. Freeman, 34, is suing to get the license back, which has a photo that hides most of her face, except her eyes, behind a veil known as a niqab. She wears the veil for religious reasons.

Freeman got the license wearing the veil after she moved from Illinois. But after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles told her to replace the photo.

Her attorney, Howard Marks, argued driving is a right and not a privilege, as the state claims, and that Freeman has a constitutional right to wear a veil while driving.

Wanted: Bishop

LONDON (Reuters)—The 470-year old Church of England has broken with tradition to publicly advertise for a bishop in the classified sections of two church papers.

The Church, founded in 1534 by Henry the Eighth, is seeking nominations for the post of Bishop of Hereford, in western England, at a salary of 33,000 pounds (\$53,500), the Sunday Times newspaper reported. Until now the nomination of bishops, among the most senior church appointments, has been done by a committee in private.

Nuns to shape up

By Larry Fine
NEW YORK (Reuters)—Jewish fitness guru Debbie Mandel thinks it's time for nuns to shape up. She has devised a light workout for nuns aged 60 to 88, aimed at alleviating stress and promoting strength and fitness. "We can't cut ourselves off at the neck," she said. Mandel will turn the whole exercise into a book to be called: "Changing Habits: The Sisters' Workout," which she expects to be published later this year.

unused, possibly triggering ill feelings.

Hot air

KANSAS CITY, Kansas—The parents of a Shawnee Mission East High School student are up in arms after the film *Inherit the Wind* was shown in their daughter's biology class. Celcie Johnson said the film, which depicts the famed Scopes "Monkey" Trial, offended her child's religious beliefs. "It's 98 percent pure Hollywood fabrication," Johnson said. "It's just intentional offensive bigotry against Christians."

The 1925 trial depicted in the film concerned a high school biology teacher who taught evolution in his classroom.

A snake in the grass

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters)—A former Catholic priest who helped draft legal guidelines on child abuse crimes has been charged himself with molesting a boy.

Marin County filed a criminal complaint against Gregory Ingels, 60, on charges he engaged in sexual activity with a 15-year student while a Catholic high school teacher. Two years later he became a priest and later a canon lawyer specializing in Church law.

Amid a growing international scandal over child abuse in the church, the San Francisco Archdiocese passed on information to the district attorney and Ingels became part of a committee of four who drafted guidelines on dealing with priests accused of crimes like the one he committed himself.

An eye for an eye

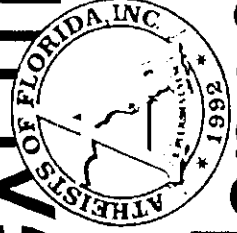
BRIGHTON, Colo.—A judge threw out a convicted killer's death sentence, saying the jury improperly relied on the "eye for an eye" teachings of the Bible to reach its decision. All 12 jurors testified at a hearing that they read aloud Bible citations Leviticus 24:20: "fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him."

Judge John Vigil ordered a new trial.

NEWSNOTES

Monthly Bulletin for the members of ATHEISTS of FLORIDA Inc. Chapter DADE&BROWARD

Our next meeting is planned for



June 15, 2003

at 2pm on the 8th floor of the

BROWARD COUNTY
 MAIN LIBRARY

100 S Andrews Ave
 Fort Lauderdale

Topic:

Classics of atheism:

"The Atheist: Madalyn O'Hair"

On-video book review by Bryan LeBeau

Our chapter holds a NON-PRAYER BREAKFAST at 8 am on Tuesday 05.20.03 at

Denny's Restaurant,

16751 NW 67 Avenue, Hialeah, (entrance, New Testament Boulevard).

For directions call 305-821-7032

You can read all about Dr. Michael Newdow and leave him a message if you go on: <http://www.restorethepledge.com>

NOOSENOTES

EXPOSING THE DANGERS OF RELIGION

Divided we Fallwell, again and again!

Muhammad a terrorist?

NEW YORK—The Rev. Jerry Falwell says in an interview on the CBS television program *60 Minutes*: "I think Muhammad was a terrorist."

IRONICALLY, IT WAS NOT Muhammad (or maybe so, I don't know that much about him) who was a terrorist, but Jesus!

I used to think that probably Jesus wasn't a real person, but probably an amalgam of several persons of that time, largely mythologized. However, current scholars (obviously not of the Christian apologetics ilk) have located his existence largely through his brothers, especially James (who actually wielded more power in the early church than Jesus). But, of course, he still was nothing like the mythologies contained in the gospels.

From the writings of Josephus and Philo, along with information coming out of the Dead Sea scrolls, along with also some from early "church fathers", we can reconstruct that Jesus was a follower and proponent of the Zealot/Essene movement, which sought to revolt against Rome, and eventually did so some years after Jesus' death.

Just a note: the Essenes were not all ascetics, as has been popularly thought. Some of the Zealots were also of the Saccari party, i.e., assassins (hence, Judas Iscariot).

Not only was Jesus different than the "man of peace" as he has often been portrayed (although even the Gospels have him saying some very violent things), but the early church was very different from the Pauline theology and mission that later emerged victorious. That's because the early church was basically a Jewish sect waging armed rebellion against Rome.

Thus all those of that persuasion were annihilated in the sack of Jerusalem in 66-70 c.e. and again in 138 c.e. Paul's message survived because he used his Roman connections to avoid persecution and his message to the gentiles differed greatly from the Jerusalem and Palestinian faction.

So Jesus would have more in common with Ararat's Palestinians than with any of the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches bearing his name.

—Nan Owens
 Former President
 ATHEISTS of FLORIDA Inc.

13 QUESTIONS

An atheist's profile

Subject:
Kelly Walsh
minister_of_despair
@hotmail.com

1. **Where did you attend school?**
At a private Christian church school.
2. **What is your occupation?**
Child care.
3. **What influenced you to choose that occupation?**
Love of children, wanting to make a difference in the world.
4. **In your choice of career, were there any obstacles you had to conquer?**
I started when I was 21, which seemed young to most people.
5. **If you ever wanted another occupation, what would it be?** Book or movie reviewer.
6. **What are your hobbies?**
Playing on the computer, movies, music; going to concerts.
7. **What is your all time favorite book and why?**
The Plague by Albert Camus; this is a great existentialist writing that portrays many of the thoughts and feelings that I have. It clearly demonstrates that "life" & "death" happens to all of us regardless of beliefs, age, sex, social standing, etc.
8. **What is your all time favorite movie and why?**
Fight Club; I love what this movie has to say about the atrocities of organized belief.

Mail Interviews with atheists across the Internet by **NEWSNOTES** from reporter **Fabiola Bens**

Bend it like Beckham
Currently in a theatre near you is showing a "feel-good" movie about a young Indian girl Jessi, who lives near Heathrow Airport, west of London. Her foot can bend the soccer ball like David Beckham, today's #1 player, and she is a star with her friends each time she plays in the park.
Trouble starts when her highly religious, highly traditional and highly emotional parents find out that she has joined a team.
The movie is so sweet, there are no negatives about it.
Without giving away the plot nor the story line, which are both very suited for family viewing during the summer especially for the armchair traveler, I feel obliged to tell you

Where is the money?
In a former newsletter our editor Ed Golly asked: "Where is the money stolen from the O'Hairs?"
The Court TV program *Without a Prayer*, the inquest of the murders and the discovery of the remains of the O'Hair family, which aired on Sep 13 at 9:30 pm during *Forensic Files*, reveals that the storage facility where David Waters kept and cut up the bodies, was broken into by a gang looking for TVs, computers and electronic stuff.
According to the program, they are the ones who found and re-robbed the \$600,000 worth of gold coins.

Quote

Rabbi Adin STEINSALTZ at the Vatican on improving relationships between Jews and Roman Catholics.
"Basically, monotheistic religions cannot be tolerant; when you speak about truth ... Can you speak about two truths?"
I am looking for secular meetings for alcoholics and drug addicts in the Miami area. I'm coming up very empty handed in my search! Thanks for any help you may be able to provide. KelliRohlt2@aol.com

A Sikh mind
As a man of reason, I just can't accept the prevalent idea that women are second class citizens in much of the world. I understand at the recent UN Conference in South Africa, the delegates couldn't reach a quorum agreeing that women should be entitled to equal opportunities and treatment under the law. It is a travesty that half of the world population should be viewed less able, less meritorious, or unworthy—simply based on their gender.
Here's a personal story. Canada accepts many immigrants from around the world. I had the opportunity of working closely with a fellow originally from India. He was a Sikh, wearing a turban and had an immense beard and moustache. He was brought up and it was reinforced by his religion that men and women aren't equal, and that a woman's place is not in the workplace. To this degree, the fellow conducted himself in a particularly rude and arrogant manner toward the women in the office, often offending very capable women who knew their work better than him. Anyway, he beat on his wife, and ended up spending some nights in lockup. It was only after the fellow had left the company that the full extent of his disruption, menace and malice came to light.
Now I find it hard to shake the idea that a man who ostensibly dresses with a full turban and behaves as a committed Sikh, could properly accept the idea of women as equals. Apparently, it flies in the face of their faith.
Richard Spain

How religions is the Easter Bunny?

Quite a few pagan cultures hold innocent, vulnerable creature that celebrations in the spring. It's the time of year when plants return to life after being dormant all winter and when animals mate and procreate. These festivities celebrate the renewal of life and promote the fertility of crops, animals, and even people, which was important in these agrarian communities. The Saxons believed in a maiden goddess of fertility named **Eastre** or **Eostre** (Oestre in Latin, Oester in German) and honored her with a spring festival. Hares and rabbits were considered sacred to Eastre because they are notoriously fertile animals.
In the second century, A.D., Christian missionaries tried to convert northern European tribes. To help make Christianity attractive, the missionaries turned pagan festivals into Christian holidays. The pagan Eastre festival occurred around the same time as the Christian celebration marking Christ's resurrection so the two celebrations blended into one, rabbit and all.
Over time, Eastre became Easter, and the symbolism changed as well. Instead of the Easter rabbit symbolizing fertility, the rabbit may symbolize an

WWJD
By EMERY P. DALESIO, AP
Business Writer
RALEIGH, North Carolina—Car buyers in four states will soon hear a religious appeal to their environmental conscience: "What would Jesus drive?"
"We think he is Lord of our transportation choices as well as all our other choices," said Rev. Jim Ball, an ordained American Baptist minister. His Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign plans to send mailings this month to 100,000 congregations and synagogues discussing the relationship between fuel economy and religious teachings.
In a telephone interview Ball said: "Global warming and smoggy air worsened by vehicle exhausts threaten the health of humans, plants and animals worldwide, and the faithful are called to preserve God's creation."
http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?utm_source=story&u=ap/20021113/ap_wo_en_po_us_jesus_drives_

1. No disrespect meant, but this really cracked me up.
2. First Phillips, Chapter 66, verse 3-16
3. And, verify them. Jesus turned the water into pure oil, and where there had been not enough in the can to move the fleet of his followers but a few feet, the same can was used to fill many tanks, and it topped them all off, and when the apostles shook the gasoline can, it was still full.
4. And the apostles stoppeth many times while driving in the holy caravan, and they did render succor to those motorists who were stucketh on the shoulder, and when they were brokeneth, then Jesus cometh forth and did laveth on the hands, and Lo! All the vehicles so treated were able to start, and also if they were out of fuel, the apostles would bring forth the same small can and it would fill the tanks of the vehicle no matter how large they were, and the drivers looketh on this and they believed!
5. They were able to drive many leagues, and none ran low or even below half full, for while they were in the caravan of Jesus, their tanks did not runeth dry.
6. And the mechanics were amazed. Surely, some would have runeth low on gasoline or needeth repairs. But none did. And while the vehicles droveth in the caravan of the Lord, no Low Fuel light even lit.
7. And on the third day of driving, when the children began the chant of "Are We There Yet?" Jesus turned to look at them, and sayeth,
8. Whosoever ever asketh of me, Are we there yet, it is the same as if he asketh of the father. Are we there yet, and whosoever asketh of the Father, are we there yet, will getteth a shapeth. So one should refrain.
9. And the children did refrain, the refrain of the 99 bottles, and it droveth the apostles crazy.
10. And on the mount, at the motel, Jesus did say:
11. When thou picketh a vehicle, thou should not allow thy vanity to control the size of the vehicle that thou drivest.
12. In Chrome, thou mayest indulge, but not so that it adds many pounds to the vehicle. And thou may choose the color that pleases you. For a clean, shiny car is a blessing from the Lord.
13. But thou should picketh a vehicle that is appropriate for the size of the goods and passengers that thou transporteth.
14. Neither shall thou fail to walketh a short distance, or take public transportation an it is available, or pooleth thy car with the poor, or fail to offer a ride to the sick and infirm, for what thy car exhaleth, thy neighbor will inhaleth.
15. An even as thou offereth a ride to the least of my followers, it is as thou offereth a ride unto me.
16. For it is harder for the driver of an SUV to take the off ramp into heaven than it is for a Lexus driver to resist cutting in front of someone in traffic.

Making a bequest is like strengthening the First Amendment.

I'm often asked why we do not solicit bequests. It's a sensitive issue, but it has to be dealt with. We all need to come to a decision one day what we will write into our Last Will and Testament. And often we need advice. The advice I give is that me too I have made the decision to leave "something" behind that will make an impact on the next generations and how they will be protected by the First Amendment. Bequeathing to ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA INC. is like adding strength to the fundamental right of Freedom of Speech and the Separation of State and Church. We have free legal counsel available. Contact me after the monthly meeting or leave a message at 305-940-0442 or atheist1@bellsouth.net, PB.

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mailto:njs@scri.squawk.com
http://self.squawk.com/njs.html