

Atheists of Florida

DADE&BROWARD: Third Sunday of each month, 2:00 alternating between Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave. Ft. Lauderdale, or Biscayne Cafeteria, 147 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables. Specific meeting information and activities in **NEWSNOTES**, included in all newsletters.
FMI: Patrick Bens, 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441.
atheist1@bellsouth.net

OVER THE LAST FIFTY thousand years or so, Americans have become the most superstitious and credulous people on the face of the Earth. Programmed as we are from birth to accept the subjective, the contradictory and the preposterous, we have thoughtlessly

Slip sliding away

— Norman B. LeClair

adopted as gospel the most lurid lies, the most morbid myths and pious panaceas ever conjured up by pope or prelate.

In our eagerness to embrace the irrational, the arbitrary and the bizarre we routinely put faith before fact, litany before logic, revelation before reason and salvation before sanity.

Atheists of Florida member Norman LeClair lives in Navarre, Florida.

AAI Offers Outreach Support

ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL is committed to helping local groups become strong and effective. The Alliance now has a matching funds program available which we can tap into for help in covering the costs of any project that involves public outreach.

The basic grant per year at this time is \$200, so if we raise any amount up to \$200, AAI will match it, giving us more bang for our local bucks. Very shortly, AAI expects to have additional funds available for more ambitious projects, but this is a start. An eligible project can be almost anything that lets the public know we exist—a listing in the phone book, an ad in the local paper, a public forum, public access TV production, and the Miami Book Fair International.

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, Children's Reading Room.
FMI: Ed Golly, 813/839-7567, AthALFLE@aol.com.

Americans evidently love to be deceived for we spend enormous sums of money maintaining a whole army of very slick, specially trained professional liars whose chief connivance in life is to perpetuate the fraud, keep the coffers filled, the lie alive and all those tax-free millions steadily rolling in.

If superstition and fundamentalism are the harbinger of a nation's decline, then America is careening down a very steep and slippery slope straight into the cesspool of theocracy. In this bastion of bigotry the warning signs are glaring and proliferating.

In politics, for example, we put into office only those party hacks, bureaucrats and politicians who will feed our fantasies, pander to our prejudices and promote our paranoia. In our halls of justice we recklessly champion every effort made to breach the state/church wall of separation between while we foolishly sanction the insidious attempts of right wing magistrates and legislators to weaken and subvert our Constitution.

In our centers of learning we will go to any length and sacrifice any principle to keep the miraculous, the mystical and the supernatural always in the forefront. Reason, common sense, logic and knowledge have taken a back seat to the irrational, the nonsensical, the illogical and the blindly emotional. We spend thousands of funds to inculcate and indoctrinate but nary a pittance to educate, cultivate and enlighten. Meticide (the killing of the mind) is our obvious, but unstated mission. Group thinks and group contagion our apparent goal. As every knee is pressured and persuaded to bend, so every mind is disposed to degenerate and ossify.

The hope that our rational faculties will come to dominate and hold sway over the more delusional and hysterical failings of our violent and primitive nature becomes evermore unlikely with each passing day. If the events of the past five decades are any indication, Americans, like their superstitious fundamentalist brethren in Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, are doomed by their myths and by their pathological cravings for the chimerical.

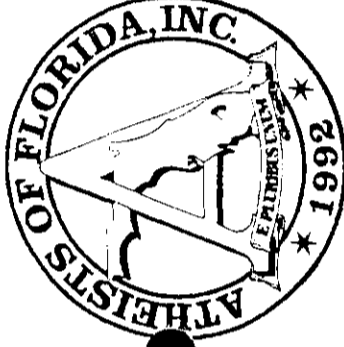
Atheists of Florida

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Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church
Sponsor of the MARK TWAIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND, Incorporated
www.atheistalliance.org/florida
A Member Society of Atheist Alliance International, the Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies

Fla. Division of Motor Vehicles declares "Atheist" obscene

GAINESVILLE—Steven Miles has been driving around Gainesville for more than sixteen years sporting the Florida license plate "Atheist" and has survived to tell about it.

And why not? Hardly ashamed to be a self-proclaimed atheist, Miles is vice president of Atheists of Florida.

There had never been any problem with the vanity tag until he received a Feb. 20 letter from the State of Florida Division of Motor Vehicles. Miles was told "the plate is considered obscene or objectionable," and the plate must be cancelled. He was instructed to return the plate and make another choice for a personalized tag.

This incident swept through the A of F board of directors. Atheists of Florida founder and board member Christos Tzanetakos remarked, "I am infuriated, to say the least, from the ridiculous and unacceptable action of the Florida Department of Transportation. Nellie Causey (who signed the letter) and the Department should issue a public apology to Steve Miles and to the Atheists of Florida, Inc."

Tzanetakos penned this response which he sent to the DMV:

Mr. Miles has been privileged to own the License plate "ATHEIST" for more than 16 years.

Your letter states that the word ATHEIST is obscene or objectionable. Therefore, as Founder of Atheists of Florida, Inc. I would appreciate an explanation as to which of the two cited reasons the Department is basing the revocation of Mr. Miles' license plate, and the pertinent arguments for this decision.

I hope your Department would escape the prevailing condition in our country which, since September 11, has been immersed in religious frenzy and nationalistic paroxysm.

Atheists of Florida President Nan Owens notes that this action will affect more people than just Steve. "To what other group of people would they dare to deny such publicity?" asked Owens. "Through the ages, atheists have been highly productive and heroic, including the most effective of our own founding fathers."

The Florida ACLU was contacted and Randall Marshall from Miami has already spoken with Miles saying that he will assign an attorney to the case. However, the ACLU is backed up with cases and Atheists of Florida board members are reacting right now.

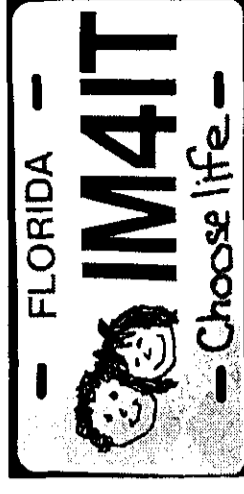
We will report developments in the next newsletter.

Choose sanity

Meanwhile, on Feb. 1, abortion rights activists asked a federal judge to stop the distribution of fees from state license plates bearing the "Choose Life" slogan because pro choice groups aren't eligible for any of the money.

The state gave about \$500,000 in fees from tag sales to counties in the first round of payments last August and plans to send out new checks in June.

The money is reserved for adoption counseling by agencies that offer no abortions services. Some counties have given the money to Catholic Charities.



"The counties are essentially giving away the power of the purse to a private religious entity," according to Brigitte Amiri, attorney for the New York-based Center for Reproductive Law and Policy. The distribution "demonstrates that the counties prefer one religion over all others."

The state distributes 53 themed license plates. The "Choose Life" plate is "the only license plate that restricts speech," Amiri said. The state responds by claiming it is free to advocate one message over another and delegate its money as it sees fit.

Amiri's group won a court decision against a "Choose Life" plate in Louisiana, but the ruling is being appealed.



Atheists of Florida member Lou Appignani, right, chats with A of F president Nan Owens and August Berkshire representing the Atheist Alliance. Why are they talking? Find out on page 3 of **NEWSNOTES** inside this newsletter.

Who is Lou Appignani? We'll profile him and his remarkable concept in the next issue of our newsletter.

Religion: A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to ignorance the nature of the Unknowable.

—Ambrose Bierce

No babble in public schools

CHATTANOOGA—The Tennessee county that grappled with religion in the classroom when it was the site of the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925 was ordered by a federal judge early last month to stop holding Bible classes in its elementary schools.

Thirty-minute classes had been held weekly for students from kindergarten through fifth grade in Rhea County's three elementary schools for 51 years. The classes had been taught by students from Bryan College, a Christian college in Dayton named for the orator and presidential candidate William J. Bryan.

The Rhea County school system claimed the Bible classes include "character education." But the judge saw through it, ruling that school officials "acted with both purpose and effect to endorse and advance religion in the public schools." The school board chairman said the decision would be appealed.



Inglis Mayor completely insane

INGLIS—The poor Christians of this country are always being discriminated against, aren't they?

Halloween last year, Inglis Mayor Carolyn Risher, 61, attended a cookout at Yankeeetown Church of God and was inspired by the pastor who called for a 40-day fast in the name of who else? Returning home, Risher had been so moved she began to write furiously. "Be it known from this day forward that Satan, ruler of darkness, giver of evil, destroyer of what is good and just, is not now, nor ever again will be, a part of this town of Inglis. Satan is hereby declared powerless, no longer ruling over, nor influencing, our citizens." We never knew it was that simple.

She made five copies, posting one on her office wall. The other four were stuffed into hollowed-out posts placed at the four entrances to the town. The posts, painted with the words "Repent," "Request" and "Resist," were sealed and capped.

A waitress is apparently the only sane citizen in town. For two months, Polly Bowser traded arguments with the mayor in newspapers and on radio and TV. Bowser understood the declaration was a state/church separation violation, while Risher defended her right of expression.

In late January the debate went to the Town Commission, which promptly declared the proclamation the work of an individual, not a town official, because it was never authorized, despite being on town stationery. The ACLU Gainesville chapter, which had been standing by to enact a lawsuit on Bowser's behalf, was satisfied. Said Town

Commissioner Floyd Craig, who will challenge Risher next year, "We're getting a lot of media attention lately, and it's made the town the dang laughing stock of the country." Religion has a way of doing that.

Sign of the mimes

FRANKLINTON, LA—"It seems the ACLU is trying to de-Christianize the community," said the pastor of Hill Crest Baptist Church. The Louisiana branch of the ACLU said they were merely defending the Constitution. It began when officials in this town of 4,000 decided to establish religion by posting signs on the road leading into town that said "Jesus is Lord Over Franklinton."

The ACLU filed a federal lawsuit demanding the removal of the signs claiming public money had been used to erect the signs. New Orleans resident Linton Carney joined the ACLU as a plaintiff saying he was offended when he first saw the signs in July while driving through Franklinton. "I was so upset to see such a sign that makes non-Christians unwelcome in Franklinton," Carney said at the time the suit was filed. "Can you imagine the hostility that Jews, Muslims, members of other minority faiths and nonbelievers must feel when living in or passing through that community?"

As word about the lawsuit spread, residents hatched the idea to put signs on their own private property. Homeowners put them in their yards, inside car windows, and in front of businesses. Like a plague, the word spread to neighboring towns.

By now, it's difficult to find a yard in some neighborhoods that doesn't have a light blue sign with white lettering proclaiming the superstition. "Now they're in every town in Washington Parrish," said Scott Blair, owner of the shop that makes the signs. Spreading through the South like a bad case of measles, a traveling salesman has even bought 1,000 signs and is hawking them in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Florida.

Joe Cook, executive director of the Louisiana ACLU, said he's satisfied that his suit removed religious content from public property. He said residents are mistaken to think the ACLU is anti-Christian, saying, "To suggest that the ACLU is anti-religious...is totally untrue."

God graffiti-coming soon to a school near you?

RICHMOND, VA—The state Senate passed legislation last month requiring public schools to post signs reading, "In God We Trust."

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Nick Rerras, (R) excused the blemish claiming the national motto offers a much-needed expression of hope in an era of terrorism and weakening moral values.

The bill passed 30-10, and a similar bill has passed the state's House of Delegates. The two Legislative branches still need to consider each other's bills.

School districts could allow voluntary student prayer at graduations and other non-required student assemblies under a bill the state House passed on Feb. 12.

TALLAHASSEE—It was the third time in less than a year the House has passed a school prayer measure. A similar proposal passed last

Florida House again passes school prayer bill

spring and again in a special session in October but the Senate took up neither.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Wilbert "Tee" Holloway, would let school districts permit invocations, benedictions or inspirational messages at graduations and other assemblies. It passed 88-28.

Duval County, which includes Jacksonville, has such a policy allowing student-led prayers that has been upheld in the federal courts

as constitutional.

Holloway has said the bill (CS HB 667) simply clarifies that it's OK for other districts to do the same. He said it would permit districts to allow prayers or inspirational messages, such as a poem, not require them to, and was non-sectarian.

"This bill is not intended to advance or endorse any religious belief," said Holloway, D-Miami.

A similar bill (SB 572) is pending in the Senate.

Gov. Jeb Bush had not had time to review the legislation but questioned whether it was needed in light of the Jacksonville ruling.

"I'm not sure what the difference here is compared to what already exists and I'm not sure we need to pass laws if it's already allowed," he said.

Jewish members of the Legislature have been the most vocal opponents, saying it infringes on freedom of religion.

"Well, here we go again," said

Atheists of Florida member John Kieffer took serious issue with this bill, especially since he has a daughter in public school. He asks that we all call, write and/or email our Florida House and Senate Legislators ASAP to oppose House Bill # 0667 and companion Senate Bill # 0572. Here is his correspondence with his representative.

Subject: Opposition to HB 0667 (Invocation/Benediction at Secondary School events.)

Dear Honorable Representative Renier Diaz de la Portilla, I am a US Army veteran that personally fought to defend and protect our US Constitution as a combat Infantryman in Vietnam.

Those Constitutional freedoms include those found in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights and thus I am perplexed by HB 0667.

I have a child in public school (Hillsborough County) that will be negatively affected by this pending legislation. It will violate the very Constitutional rights that I risked my life defending.

I vehemently oppose HB 0667 because it constitutes government-sanctioned religious speech which is prohibited by the First Amendment.

My child should not be forced to make the choice between not attending a school function or attending and having to listen to someone pray.

Furthermore, this legislation fails to

Rep. Mark Weissman, D-Parkland. He said the measure's supporters were trying "to force the religious will of the majority on all the minority religions in our pluralistic society" and said the bill smacked of the religious intolerance of the Taliban.

Rep. Ken Gottlieb said the proposal restricted religious freedom because if districts adopt such policies it would force non-Christian students to listen to Christian prayers or forgo important events such as graduation.

Gottlieb, D-Hollywood, said students already have the right to pray individually and in groups or discuss their religious beliefs with their peers as long as they are not disruptive.

Under the House bill, a prayer or inspirational message could be delivered by a student volunteer and would have to be "nonsectarian and nonproselytizing." The bill specifies school staff can't participate in the message.

specify how "student volunteers" are to be chosen to give a religious message. Will the messages of religious minorities such as Scientology, Islam, Wicca or Secular Humanists be realistically represented in these invocations?

It is obvious that the clear intent of this bill is to impose the majority religion on my child at school functions.

What unforeseen combative situations will this legislation provoke? As a parent, I am concerned that my child will be ostracized and harassed when she demonstrates her objections to these forced prayers.

The makers of the Constitution had it right... please honor the intent and the spirit of that great document and oppose HB 0667.

Sincerely,
John Kieffer
Member: Veterans of Foreign Wars, Chapter #10538 Vietnam Veterans Association, Chapter # 787

To find and contact your Florida House and Senate legislators, just look on your Voter Registration Card to find State House and Senate District information, then go to these websites arranged by county.

State House—
legislators->Member Pages: Online Sunshine

State Senate—
legislators->Member Pages: Online Sunshine

We can make a difference!



TERCERA CONFERENCIA RACIONALISTA INTERNA- CIONAL

La visita de nuestra secretaria **PATRICIA ELKINS** a Nueva Delhi, India, del 8 al 12 de febrero de 2002

India no es sólo la tierra de centenares de monumentos de belleza arrobadora; también es la tierra donde floreció por primera vez en la historia una tradición racionalista. En el presente, la India tiene uno de los movimientos racionalistas más activos y vibrantes del mundo. La Tercera Conferencia Racionalista Internacional fue en Nueva Delhi, la capital histórica de la India, donde el pasado y el presente se mezclan y donde el futuro espera desplegando sus

FRAGMENTOS DE LA AUTOBIOGRAFIA ESCRITA POR EL CIENTIFICO NATURALISTA INGLES **CHARLES DARWIN** **(1809-1882)** RELATIVOS A SUS IDEAS **SOBRE LA RELIGIÓN**

Parte 4

Versión al Español de LEANDRO PERDOMO

INMORTALIDAD

Con respecto a la inmortalidad hago esta observación: creyendo, como yo lo creo, que el hombre en un futuro distante será una criatura más perfecta de lo que ahora es, constituye una perspectiva inadmisiblemente que él y todos los demás seres sensibles estén condenados a la más completa aniquilación después de haber estado progresando continuamente por tan largo tiempo, como lo pretende la opinión sostenida ahora por muchos físicos de que el sol con todos los planetas se dirigen a un enfriamiento adverso para la vida, a menos que, oportunamente, algún gran cuerpo choque en el interior del sol y le dé así nueva vida.

Sin embargo, a quienes admiten la inmortalidad del alma humana esa destrucción de nuestro mundo no se les presentará tan espantoso: ambas opiniones extremas nos demuestran cuán rígida y casi inflexible puede llegar a ser una creencia.

Otra fuente de convicción en la existencia de Dios conectada no con los sentimientos sino con la ra-

zón, y que me da la impresión de tener mucho más peso, es lo que se sigue de la extrema dificultad, o tal vez imposibilidad, de concebir este inmenso y maravilloso universo, incluyendo al hombre con su capacidad de mirar muy lejos hacia atrás y muy lejos hacia el futuro, como resultado de la ciega causalidad o de la necesidad. Cuando se reflexiona de este modo, uno se siente incitado a buscar una primera causa que tenga una mente inteligente de cierta forma a como ocurre en el hombre, por lo que se merecería ser calificado de teísta. Recuerdo que esta percepción estaba afianzada en mi mente por el tiempo en que escribí "El Origen de las Especies", y fue a partir de ese entonces que se fue debilitando, con muchas fluctuaciones y muy gradualmente.

Por esa época me surgió una duda: ¿Puede la mente humana, la cual tiene, como lo creo completamente, la confiable facultad de sacar las más grandes conclusiones, haberse ido desarrollando desde una mente tan baja como la poseída por los animales más inferiores? ¿Pueden ser esas conclusiones el resultado no de la conexión entre causa y efecto que nos golpea como una necesidad sino que, simple y probablemente, dependen de la experiencia heredada? Nosotros no debemos pasar por alto la probabilidad de que al inculcarse constantemente la creencia en Dios sobre la mente de los niños se haya producido tal vez un fuerte efecto hereditario en sus cerebros no completamente desarrollados, lo que haría para ellos tan difícil deshacerse de esa creencia como para un mono lo es deshacerse de su miedo instintivo hacia las serpientes.

(Sera continuado)

NEWSNOTES

EXPOSING THE DANGERS OF RELIGION

FRONT PAGE

ATHEISM

Lessons learned from the NRA and the MADD.

By Patrick Bens, Chapter Director
August Berkshire
(august@mtn.org) of ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL, who, under the leadership of Marie Alena Castle, (mac@mtn.org) president of Minnesota Atheists, lobbied Governor JESSE VENTURA in his home state and who, here in Miami, was newly appointed to the Board of Directors of the LOUIS APPIGNANI FOUNDATION (FOR THE PROMOTION OF ATHEISM), brought to my attention by email an intriguing front page article in the WALL STREET JOURNAL (01.22.02) describing the aggressive, somewhat vicious, lobbying methods in use by the NRA, the National Rifle Association.

To make a short story long, I'm prompted by his message to dig a little deeper into the article, not to find anything glorifying about NRA president CHARLTON HESTON, who played a top-drawer Moses in THE TEN COMMANDMENTS directed by Cecil B. DeMill when I was ten, still in Catholic boarding school, and dazzled that he could fill our little Flemish provincial cinema to capacity, but to see what, if anything, we as atheists can learn from

(Continued on page 2)

There's atheism on: www.beliefnet.com

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

Our next meeting is planned for



March 17, 2002

At 2 pm

8 th Floor

Broward County Main Library

100 S Andrews Ave

Fort Lauderdale

Review of the atheist comedy "Chocolat" as seen on
STARZ

during the entire month of February and on March 17 at 10 a.m.

BOOKREVIEW

"Why God Won't Go Away"

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