

## 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. Meeting notifications and activities available in **NEWSNOTES** now included in all newsletters. FMI: Patrick Bens, 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441. atheist1@bellsouth.net

**PALM BEACH:** Meetings are held the third Sunday of each month at 2:30pm. Members notified by postcard. For driving directions or more information, call Charles Schister 561/627-6340 or 561/624-9359.

**JACKSONVILLE**—It only takes one. Duval County students reading Harry Potter books from school libraries will need a permission slip from their parents after one parent complained that the books contain witchcraft. According to school district guidelines, a committee must review any book challenged

## Parents go berserk over Potter

by a parent. Once challenged, students must get parental permission to take out the book. The review committee consists of parents, teachers and librarians. It makes its recommendation to the superintendent who has the final decision. Sure, we wonder about the Bible.

Author J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books are about a boy who is discovering his powers as a wizard at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry. The stories include references to potions, curses and death. Friendship, loyalty and good triumph over evil.

Last year, the Jacksonville Public Library stopped handing out "witchcraft" certificates to young fans of the novel series, after some parents complained and a national religious freedom organization, Orlando-based Liberty Counsel, threatened to sue. **A**

### Answers to Quiz (from page 5)

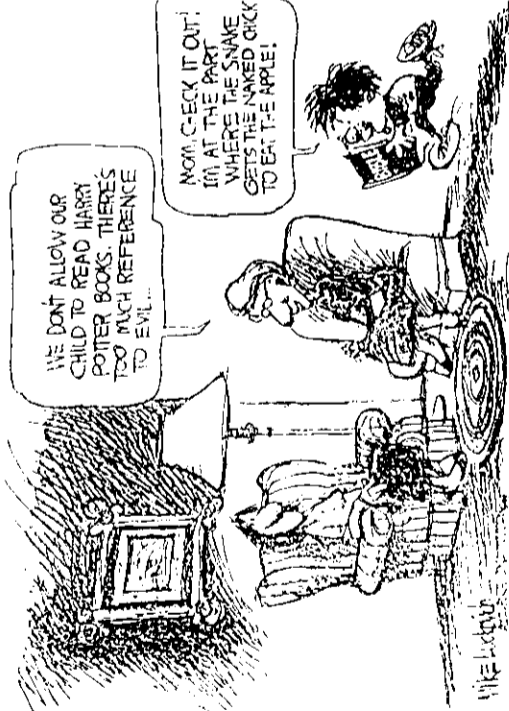
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## CHAPTER EVENTS

**TAMPA BAY:** A completely new schedule for meetings is planned for 2002. We have formed a small board to run the chapter which will meet the first Sunday of January (5th), 12:45 to 2:30, at the Platt Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa. The conference room is being converted to a coffee shop, so we will meet in the children's reading room. Members welcome.

The first Sunday of February will be a special meeting. Agenda and location to be announced. Special meetings will be designed to offer interesting programs to members and new prospects and will alternate between Tampa and Pinellas County every three months. They will also be heavily promoted in the newsletter, by e-mail and postcards, and with notices placed in the Public Libraries.

FMI: Ed Golly, 813/839-7567, AthALFLE@aol.com.



## Greetings: Miami Book Fair and Circus McGurkis sign-ups!

Here is the first of your three complimentary newsletters including **NEWSNOTES**, the publication of the Dade/Broward chapter.

Information on membership in Atheists of Florida is in the masthead on page 2. Comments are welcome at the address on page 7. All sign-ups will be notified after the third issue is sent.



Volume X No. 6  
November/December, 2001

# Atheists of Florida

*Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church*

Sponsor of the MARK TWAIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND, Incorporated

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## South Florida Atheists in Sun-Sentinel

Sun-Sentinel reporter Victor Greto posted an article titled "Merging patriotism, religion worries South Florida Atheists."

The story featured several members of Atheists of Florida

**MIAMI**—The bloat of religious infestation in our culture following 9/11 prompted Greto to interview atheists for their reaction. Noting that the atmosphere implicitly excludes atheists who may feel just as passionately American, Greto first sought Atheists of Florida member Rebecca Porto.

"The feelings that everyone had after Sept. 11 were the same," said Porto, a Cuban-born, Miami-based pathologist.

"I was in the lab when a technician told me that a plane hit the World Trade Center. I was in tears. Upset for days."

The event reinforced how she feels about her adopted country. "My family came to escape communism to be free," said Porto. Just as importantly, however, freedom also means liberty from religion, if not both subtle and overt peer pressure.

Porto told Greto she began questioning her Catholic beliefs when she found out the truth about Santa Claus. Having been told by people she trusted that there was a Santa, then coming to the realization that it's not true led her to question what else may not be true.

"I get concerned when a political person invokes a deity," she said. "Because it seems like everyone is then under this umbrella of 'God bless America.' Does that mean if you don't believe in God you don't love America?"

"The way I see it," she concluded, "religion creates artificial separations between people, when really all our basic human aspects are the same."

John Kieffer, a retired Army lieutenant and Vietnam veteran who lives in Tampa was not so subtle in talking about what he sees as the insidious effects of religion.

The people who participated in the terrorist attacks, Kieffer pointed out, "were basically people who believe in God, who believe in heaven, who believe in Satan and the whole general package of mythology—not much different than what the general public in the United States believes."

Kieffer explained that he put his life on the line in Nam for the ideals of our Constitution and therefore considers himself very patriotic. He lost his faith there when the arbitrariness of

war convinced him that religion meant nothing. "When I saw the priest setting up the communion out in the field," he told Greto of a Mass celebrated outdoors during the war, "I realized: This is how they get people willing to die, by making them believe they're going to live."

Kieffer complained that the critical thinkers and leaders are silent. How politically correct can you be at a time like this, he asked, arguing not to go overboard because it is this God-belief that started everything? "What we have now is a heard mentality."

Brent Yaciw of Wesley Chapel, just north of Tampa, told Greto that religion causes people to look in the wrong direction for answers.

"I don't think we're going to solve our problems by looking outside when the problems are coming from inside," said the college teacher.

Yaciw explained that we must change the way people think. Once people have accepted an outside authority to allow them to do anything, that leaves them open to that behavior being OK. "I'm not saying you're not going to find an atheist who doesn't do bad things," he said. "But no one is more cheerfully willing to do horrendous things than someone who believes they're doing them because their God told them to."

Nor does Yaciw accept the proposition that religion comforts people, even—and especially—at this time.

"It was religion that caused this problem in the first place," he reiterated of Kieffer. "These guys thought their religion gave them the right to crash these planes, and they killed thousands of people who didn't even know they existed."

The president, according to Yaciw, is saying "God bless America" and acting like the preacher-in-chief and not the commander-in-chief. This instills negativity in the extremism of patriotic expression and the lack of separation of state and church. As many other atheists had expressed it, Yaciw says he wants his country to stand for something quite different from "In God we trust" or "God bless America."

"I want the U.S. to be more like the founding fathers envisioned it," he claimed, "a country of tolerance and understanding and openness to reasoning and thinking. I have no problem with persuading someone to think my way but never would consider legitimate a situation that would force my viewpoint on someone else."

As usual, our atheists made exemplary points. **A**

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them." —Mark Twain



Rebecca Porto



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Membership dues

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JUST WHAT IS A lower form of life? It depends on the definition used. If the definition is one of structure and physiology then the lowest form would probably be bacteria. (Virus is not considered living. It is classified as an infectious chemical.) If the definition includes the functions of all organisms in the biosphere, it is a different

THE SOLUTION IS EVOLUTION
NO. 11—Lowest Form of life?

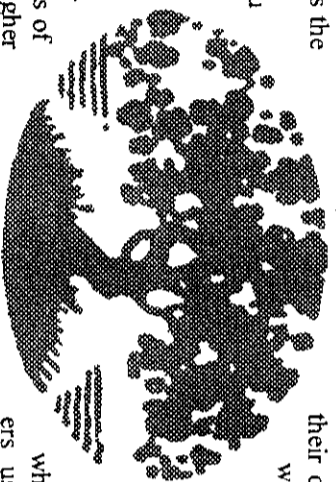
—Jim Strayer



story. Bacteria are not lowly. They are one of the main sources of decomposition, and life on this earth would not be possible without them. The same can be said for the Fungus. Just what would an eco-biologist classify as lower forms of life?

The best way to answer that is to ask, "What would an eco-biologist classify as the highest form of life?"

Hands down it is a Maple tree (You may substitute any other tree that is wind-pollinated, but be careful). Maple trees overproduce leaves which fall to the ground and with the help of bacteria, become soil. They carry on photosynthesis and overproduce sugar which is the building block for all forms of life (without sugar there would be no higher forms of life—you are basically sugar). Through this same process they over-



produce oxygen. They use some, but the rest is snapped up by the environment and makes a suitable environment for animals. This process also takes ground water and releases it into the atmosphere, helping to make rain clouds. The Maple tree also overproduces seeds, billions of them. The extra serve as a great source of nourishment for a multitude of critters. While this is going on, the tree is an ecosystem for hundreds of living things. They give off enough warm moisture, through transpiration, to cause air currents. The Maple tree produce very tiny male plants called pollen. This pollen travels with these air currents to other trees where they meet a female plant which has an ovary. The little pollen grain then grows a tube to unite with the ovary. It then produces a sperm which swims through this tube and fertilizes the egg produced by the ovary. It even make its own delivery system for sex.

I tell you this story to let you know that the Maple tree is almost completely self sufficient.

Let's add this up. Maple trees make their own soil, which others use. They make their own food which others use. They make their own oxygen, which others use. They make their own rain clouds, which others use. They furnish habitat for others. They do not count on other living things for reproduction. So if some biologists think the maple tree is the highest form of life, what is the lowest? Next time.

It's not one world...

If the Earth's population were proportioned to a village of only 100 people, it would break down as follows:

- 57 would be Asians
21 would be Europeans
14 from the Western Hemisphere
8 would be Africans
70 would be non-Christians
30 would be Christians
50% of the village's wealth would belong to six people
70 could not read
50 would suffer from malnutrition
80 would live in substandard housing
1 would have a college education

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Good Website

Atheists of Florida, I was searching for information on Cyril Ponape-ruma, recipient of the Nobel prize in science regarding the origin of life. My Internet search brought me to this URL: http://www.crowhiline.net/cc/death.html In terms of adding to the argument for atheism, the site may provide an article worth publication in a future issue of the membership newsletter.

Regardless, it is interesting reading of a personal outlook of conversion from mythology. Advocate of Reality, —Earl Johnson

LETTERS

Liked newsletter

Congratulations!! The best ever. I enjoyed it very much and I'm still laughing at the stuff in the onion. Thanks —Herb Williams

Talk whispers, Behavior SHOUTS

Editor:

Great October newsletter. It was a beacon in my prayer filled world. Happy Solstice! —Ed MacDougall Spring Hill

Misguided missiles

I'm sure everyone remembers those stirring patriotic words of our nation's founders, "Give me liberty, or take away my liberties so the majority can feel safer in their beliefs!" You don't? Amazing, because with all of the arm-chair patriots advocating the giving up of freedoms, I thought surely I must have missed something like that in my history classes! Forced prayers and pledges aren't what our ancestors fought for, and those who advocate the destruction of state-church separation dishonor them in ways no flag-burning Afghan ever could. Our legislators should crawl back under their rocks in shame! —Brent Yaciv Wesley Chapel, FL

screened, unless the ticking can be heard 10 feet away.

Not buying it

People in this country have been transformed into god-damn, #@%\*! little obsequious worms. Here we have planes crashing all over the place and the rich, pompous moron who took over this country by force in the last "election" would not let the Airline Security bill pass. At the same time he limits funds for what he calls "a threat to civilization itself," his buddy conglomerates get countless billions under the newly disguised trickle down demolition project of the middle class dogs. Federaliz-

ing, standardizing, training and monitoring security screening positions would violate the first tenet of political power, which is to feed the inner circle supporters and then let the crumbs drop down into the cups of the programmed & praising masses. I don't believe this plane crash was an accident. Too many events converged at one instant to give the honest, everyday crash theory credence. I was shocked to learn that checked baggage in this country is not screened, unless the ticking can be heard 10 feet away. That means I can put a bomb in my checked bag, then set it off remotely with my laptop, while casually chatting with the chap next to me. A week after the big NY bombings I inadvertently passed through Detroit Metro security with a can of "Lysol" in my backpack—and I even had a giant beard!

We are \*f\*cked and we deserve it, because the thinking, progressive folks among us have been passive and completely silent for 20+ years, when we should have been violently screaming in unison about our support for terrorism, with U.S. funding for the Taliban, Iraq and many other of our friends, including our current support of the fine folks in the Northern Alliance. We are a sweet country. —Randylle Clinton Williams Daytona Beach

I just wanted to thank you for writing about and working for the cause of Atheism. I saw and have enjoyed some of your writing located at writtenby.me.com. I'm also an Atheist living here in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Often I feel that people who pray and worship to a Gee-oh-dee, haven't thought things through properly. Often I have to control myself not to come out and tell them my feelings. Of course, some of them think of me as missing something special. The worst thing is my sister with 3 young girls converted to Cat-oh-lic. Now, the girls lead prayers at the dinner table if we visit. Richard Dawkins calls religion a mind virus, and these sweet innocent girls have the mind virus implanted in them at church and at the Cat-oh-lic school. They have been taught to believe that everything is related to Gee-oh-dee. These girls are so young, but the flawed thinking has been pushed on them before they had the defense of thinking for themselves.

Another issue is how some people only believe that members of organized religions have morality. Why do people need to believe in Gee-oh-dee before they can have moral views? I don't understand. Occasionally, the JW's come to visit me. I'm always polite and do accept their magazines, but it bothers me somewhat because privately I think their ideas are akin to having an extra hole in their heads. I probably should be honest with them, and explain that there is no Gee-oh-dee, and I would never convert. Again thanks and please keep up the good work. —Richard Spizan Mechanical Designer rspaan@fanning.ca

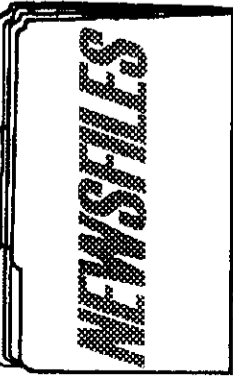
Glad we're here

I'm sure everyone remembers those stirring patriotic words of our nation's founders, "Give me liberty, or take away my liberties so the majority can feel safer in their beliefs!" You don't? Amazing, because with all of the arm-chair patriots advocating the giving up of freedoms, I thought surely I must have missed something like that in my history classes! Forced prayers and pledges aren't what our ancestors fought for, and those who advocate the destruction of state-church separation dishonor them in ways no flag-burning Afghan ever could. Our legislators should crawl back under their rocks in shame! —Brent Yaciv Wesley Chapel, FL

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**U. S. Supreme Court news**  
**Court agrees to hear arguments in Cleveland voucher case**  
*Announcement sets stage for historic state/church showdown at high court*

WASHINGTON—The United States Supreme Court will hear arguments in a case challenging the constitutionality of a religious school voucher program in Cleveland.



The justices have agreed to hear *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris*, which deals with a controversial program created six years ago that provides tax dollars to finance tuition at religious and other private schools.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which is co-sponsoring the lawsuit with other organizations, said this case will settle the question over the legality of vouchers once and for all.

"This is probably the most important state/church case in the last half-century," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "It will be a historic showdown over government funding of religion."

"Vouchers are bad public policy," said Julie Underwood, the general counsel for the National School Boards Association. "Vouchers are not the educational silver bullet; they're not the path to improving public schools."

The Cleveland voucher program, passed by the Ohio legislature in 1995, finances vouchers of up to \$2,500 for Cleveland public school students to attend religious and other private schools. Currently, 56 private schools participate in the Ohio voucher program. Forty-six of them are religious in nature. During the

**"...this is a time when the nation should come to prayer."**

**Robertson resigns from C. C.**

TV preacher Pat Robertson, 71, announced his resignation December 5th as president of the Christian Coalition. The right-wing political organization he founded in 1989 became a mainstay of support for the Republican Party throughout the 1990s. Observers on both sides of the political spectrum said his departure signified further evidence of the decline of the coalition and the religious right in general.

"The Christian Coalition has been a sinking ship for several years, and now the captain's jumped overboard," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Without Robertson's money and political clout, it's only a matter of time before the organization collapses outright."

Added Lynn, "The sooner the Christian Coalition collapses the better as far as I'm concerned. Its activities have taken politics closer to the gutter than to Heaven. The country will be better off without it."

The group has fallen on hard times in recent years. Its budget has plummeted from \$25 million annually to less than \$3 million. Top staffers have fled the group in droves, and earlier this year it was sued by several African American employees who alleged racial discrimination at the Coalition's Washington, D.C., offices.

1999-2000 school year, 96% of students were attending religious schools. The program was funded at \$11.2 million in 2000. The Cleveland voucher scheme has already been rejected by two federal courts. In December 2000, the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals concluded that taxpayer funding of religious schools violates the separation of church and state.

"To approve this program," observed the court, "would approve the actual diversion of government aid to religious institutions in endorsement of religious education, something 'in tension' with the precedents of the Supreme Court." (The program has continued to run while the final appeal to the Supreme Court was pursued.)

**IN OTHER COURT NEWS**, on December 10 the court refused to hear the Jacksonville prayer case. The court did not comment in turning down an appeal from a high school student in Duval County who objected to the school's policy of letting the senior class select a classmate to deliver a graduation "message."

The chosen student often is the class chaplain, an elected office such as president or treasurer.

The court's action was not a decision on the merits of the policy, but will be read as a signal that other schools can avoid constitutional problems if they use the same policy. Such policies are permissible in Florida, Georgia and Alabama.

**Intelligence in Alabama Board of Education just a theory**

The Board voted in November to add "disclaimers" to the covers of 40,000 new biology textbooks that warn public school science students about the reliability of evolution.

The stickers tell readers that evolution is "a controversial theory. Instructional material associated with controversy should be approached with an open mind studied carefully, and critically considered." The vote was unanimous despite the complaints of the Alabama Academy of Science, which told board members that evolutionary biology is not controversial among nearly all the world's scientists.

**9/11 hysteria abused for religious agenda in Florida**

TALLAHASSEE—During the special session to balance the state budget, the House voted 87-30 in October to approve a bill that would allow local school boards to establish "student-led" prayer at graduation and other "noncompulsory" school events. The state Senate did not take up the measure but may do so later during other special sessions.

The measure's sponsor, Rep. Wilbert Holloway (D-Miami) ignored charges that House members were wasting time debating the measure. "The urgency is, our nation is called to prayer, and this is a time when the nation should come to prayer," he said.

**Intelligent Design—another pathetic attempt to substantiate superstition.**  
*Published June 14 - 20, 2001*

**WE SEATTLEITES** ARE suckers for national media attention, but even the most boosterish among us may admit to

**Darwin hits back**

—Roger Downey

qualms about our latest claim on the spotlight: as a mail-order nursery for an attractive yet noxious intellectual weed called Intelligent Design—a supposed scientific alternative to the Godless materialism of evolutionary theory as taught by Charles Darwin and his followers.

Intelligent Design has been rattling around the back alleys of academia for a decade, but it really got going about five years ago when Seattle's Discovery Institute embarked on a well-funded campaign to propagate it: publishing numerous books on the subject by salaried Institute "fellows" and hosting a highly publicized congressional seminar on the subject. The movement's big breakthrough came in April, when, in the wake of the state of Kansas' restoration of Darwin to the curriculum, both the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* and ran prominent articles on the Institute's campaign to give anti-evolutionism intellectual credibility.

Intelligent Design drives mainstream scientists crazy because it presents its arguments as scientific, yet it refuses to phrase them in the only way scientists recognize as valid: as assertions subject to disproof. Instead it appeals to emotion and intuition. Given the sheer complexity of the natural world, and living things in particular, proponents say, how can anyone believe that Mind and Will were not required to give shape to Creation?

Today's advocates of this idea have no better evidence to support

it than Saint Augustine did in the 5th century, but they do their best to veil this weakness by finding people with reputable scientific credentials to act as spokespersons capable of dazzling a lay audience with myriad conundrums drawn from materialistic science itself. The argument boils down to "I've got a Ph.D. and I believe it, so why shouldn't you?"

The only answer a scientist can give to that argument is: "Having a Ph.D. doesn't prove that what you say is right; in the long run a scientist's credibility depends on just one thing: whether he or she can come up with evidence capable of convincing other scientists. You are not qualified to judge a scientific question if you're not willing to accept scientific rules of what evidence is and then work through the evidence yourself. The opinion of the man in the street doesn't count."

Put that way, the argument sounds distressingly "elitist." And unfortunately, outside the realm of the lab and the scientific journal, the opinion of the man on the street counts for quite a lot. So reputable scientists tend to keep their elitist mouths shut and hope the whole issue will blow over, however much they disapprove of the intellectual shenanigans of the Discovery Institute and its "fellows," funded by millions donated by conservative Christians like the McCallies of Tennessee and the Ahmanson of southern California.

**FORTUNATELY**, there are other people with money, and some are willing to spend it to counter the covert Christian campaigners of Intelligent Design. Some of the most committed—and monied, for that matter—are also based right here in Discoveryland. On Sept. 24, the Public Broadcast System kicked off a seven-part, 8-hour mega-series bravely titled *Evolution*, supplemented by simultaneous publication of a companion book by one of America's most respected science writers, a massive educational campaign to supply study materials to schools

across the country, and an interactive Web site to tie the whole sprawling project together.

You could pore for hours over the background materials in the *Evolution Project's* CD-ROM publicity package and still not notice who put up the numerous millions to make it possible. Only in the small print will you learn that the production of the NOVA Science Unit of Boston's WGBH was financed by Clear Blue Sky, the film production arm of Paul Allen's Bellevue-based media conglomerate Vulcan Northwest.

With discretion unwonted in an Allen enterprise, Clear Blue Sky has already made a considerable mark in the independent film scene since its foundation in 1997, having backed Julie Taymor's extravagant film version of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* starring Anthony Hopkins, John Sayles' Latin American revolutionary drama *Men with Guns*, and, currently in theaters, the John Turturro/Emily Watson vehicle *The Luzhin Defense*.

Blue Sky has also funded two recent documentaries by the -Up director Michael Apter, but *Evolution* is by far its most ambitious educational project yet. If properly designed, programs like this become part of the permanent "lending library" of American education, cycling endlessly on educational cable channels, serving as materials for classroom and distance-learning programs.

Up till now, substantial Allen money has not been directed toward traditional educational goals. With this one project, the Allens deserve a place among the nation's Pews and Annenbergs: families committed to building America by making Americans smarter, better informed, and harder to fool. The Discovery Institute's Darwinian disinformation campaign will still appeal to those looking for pseudoscientific support for their private ideologies. But in persuading a dispassionate public that they've got something more than propaganda to offer, they've now a formidable opponent to contend with.



THE PREPOSTEROUS AND DIABOLICAL concept of life after death, besides being an oxymoron and an unmitigated lie is, nevertheless, the determining and motivating factor that propels the religious zealot into sacrificing his life (or yours) for his holy and fraudulent cause.

The founding fathers tried desperately to give this new nation of ours a fresh beginning devoid of the intrigue, the mysticism, the intolerance, hatred and fanaticism that had consumed Europe and the Middle East for thousands of years.

A nation free of that kind of deviant mentality that forever generates obscenities like the crusades, the inquisitions, the witch hunts, the endless holy wars of extermination, the pogroms and the final solutions. They gave us a fleeting opportunity to leave the dark ages forever behind us and embark on a new age of enlightenment, knowledge and reason.

## The curse of Humanity

—Norman B. LeClair

For those in need of such support they even provided us with a new religion. Deism, the religion of Jefferson, Madison, Paine and other great thinkers of the enlightenment. A religion devoid of the supernatural, free of superstition and ignorance, free of spirits and spooks and all those invisible aberrations that

forever tease and torment the credulous.

But unfortunately for us all our ancestors turned their backs on the promise and potential of a new renaissance and instead made the fateful decision to return to the darkness of the cave. By foolishly embracing and adopting the three most pathological belief systems the savage and superstitions Middle East ever conjured up we are now and forever embroiled in the same unending cycle of violence, bloodshed and death all "true believers" eventually find themselves in.

The colossal blunder of adopting an alien religion from an alien land with their alien gods and alien holy books was, and is, a sure fire recipe for disaster. The handwriting was clearly posted on the wall of history for all of us to see. We, of all people, should have realized long ago that the sickness above is the cause of the sickness below.

The line from 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13 Verse 11— "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became grown, I put away childish things—plus the events of 11 September 2001 prompts the observation that it doesn't look as if humankind will be putting away their childish beliefs any time soon. Or perhaps a paraphrase of that sobering reflection made by Will Durant in his marvelous *Story of Civilization* would be more fitting considering the latest example of religious fanaticism. "Civilizations come and go; they conquer the earth and crumble into dust: but superstition, ignorance and credulity survives every desolation."

14 September 2001

WHILE POLITICIANS JUMPED on the 9/11 bandwagon trying to create the illusion that the entire United States seeks the blessings of some make-believe god, whatever that means, we noticed a *Nevsday* article that endorsed what

## We're making progress

Center of the City University of New York recently released a study that found the number of adults who say they subscribe to no religion jumped from 14.3 million (8% of the total) in 1990, to 29.4 million (14%) in 2001.

### What would Jesus do?

- LOS ANGELES—Televangelists Jan and Paul Crouch of the Costa Mesa, Calif.-based Trinity Broadcasting Network, have purchased a Newport Beach house for close to \$5 million.
- The home is described as "a palatial estate with ocean and city views." It has six bedrooms, nine bathrooms, a billiard room, a climate-controlled wine cellar, a sweeping staircase and a crystal chandelier.
- Sitting on slightly more than an acre, the three-story, nearly 9,500-square-foot house has an elevator, a six-car garage, a tennis court and a pool with a fountain. They needed a bigger yard for the dogs, sources said.

"The present survey has detected a wide and possibly growing swath of secularism among Americans," wrote the study directors. "These are the seculars, the un-churched, the people who profess no faith in any religion." In other words, the community of reason.

The study was based on phone surveys of 50,000 adults selected at random. The findings, which have a margin of error of 0.5%, were weighted to represent 208 million adults in the United States.

The survey also found that:

- Twelve percent of Floridians have no religious identification, third among respondents to Catholics (26%) and Baptists (18%).
  - Women are more likely to say their outlook is religious.
  - Catholic adults increased from 46 million to nearly 50.8 million, but their proportion in the population dropped by nearly 2 percentage points, to 24.5%.
  - Although Protestants remain in the majority, their proportion slid sharply from 60% to 52%.
  - The number who gave their religion as Jewish decreased from 3.1 million to 2.8 million. Another 2½ million, who say they have no religion or identify with another religion, are of Jewish heritage.
  - The number of Muslim adults has nearly doubled, to 1.1 million.
- The report is available at [www.gc.cuny.edu/folio/index.htm](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/folio/index.htm).

MINNEAPOLIS—IMAGINE YOURSELF ATTENDING two marvelous atheist conferences and having an opportunity to tour around a bit on European soils. You needn't just imagine it. You can come along! AAI is arranging a tour for September 16-30, 2002 that will include a conference in Paris and one in Speyer, Germany.

At the 2000 Atheist Alliance convention in Sacramento, many attendees signed up as interested in attend-

## Atheist Alliance Report AAI Trip to Germany and France— You're Invited!

—August Berkshire,

ing an International Conference in Paris in 2002 to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists in which he said the purpose of the First Amendment was to establish a "wall of separation between church and state." This event will be co-sponsored by AAI and our French colleagues, La Libre Pensée, in Paris.

The trip has been expanded to include a conference hosted by our German colleagues, IBKA (Internationaler Bund der Konfessio nstlosen und Atheis-

ten) in Speyer Germany. Plans are now firming up for the journey.

This is an important international event, so do plan to join in. The tour dates come on Mondays, which saves on plane fares. Participants will be flying from their home cities on Sept. 16<sup>th</sup> to Frankfurt, and returning to their home cities on the 30<sup>th</sup> from Paris. In between, there will be chartered bus tours of Germany, the IBKA conference in Speyer, a train trip to Paris for more chartered bus tours, and attendance at the La Libre Pensée conference at the famed Sorbonne University. Total per person cost of the trip should be around \$2,500. More information will be forthcoming.

The travel agent for the trip is Irene Filmore (651-489-2996 or 800-526-9737). She accomplished logistics miracles when coordinating AAI's tour of India in 1996 for the 4<sup>th</sup> World Atheist Congress at Atheist Centre in Vijayawada. Irene has reserved seats on Northwest Airlines, but she will put us on other airlines if they have less expensive flights available when we call.

If you have interest in this trip, please let me know. Send your name, address, phone and email address to me via phone (612-338-4548), email ([august@atm.org](mailto:august@atm.org)) or postal mail to the AAI at P O Box 6261, Minneapolis MN 55406.

### How much did you forget?

Christiansanity has distanced humanity from nature. As people came to perceive god as a singular supremacy detached from the physical world, they lost their reverence for nature. In Christian eyes, the physical world became the realm of the devil. A society that had once celebrated nature through seasonal festivals began to commemorate biblical events bearing no connection to the earth. Holidays lost much of their celebratory spirit and took on a tone of penance and sorrow. Time, once thought to be cyclical like

the seasons, was now perceived to be linear. In their rejection of the cyclical nature of life, orthodox Christians came to focus more upon death than upon life.

In Helen Eilerbe's *The Dark Side of Christian History* we found this chart. The Christian adaptations are scrambled. Match the correct adaptation in the box in column 3 with the correct pagan tradition. Answers on back page.

TIME OF YEAR	PRE-CHRISTMAS OR PAGAN TRADITION	CHRISTIAN ADAPTATION
1. Winter Solstice	The feminine gives birth to the sun or a masculine fertility figure. Often celebrated with yule fires, processions of light, tree decorating.	A. All Soul's Day All Saint's Day
2. Winter Season	A time of nurturing and honoring inspiration and creativity. Common practices involving festivals of light, wearing animal masks and skins in hopes of augmenting the coming year's supply.	B. Christmas Epiphany
3. Spring Equinox	The sun is resurrected and gains prominence over the night. Fertility celebrations involving symbols such as the egg and the prolific hare.	C. Assumption Day
4. Spring Season	The making of the earth and sky from which will come the year's harvest. Often celebrated with maypole dancing, decorating with new foliage.	D. Michaelmas Nativity of Mary
5. Summer Solstice	The sun's energy transfers to the crops. Ritual blessings of the harvest, herbs, fields, mountains, and ocean. Making figures of dolls or grain.	E. Pentecost Feast of the Ascension
6. Summer Season	The sun's energy transfers to the crops. Ritual blessings of the harvest, herbs, fields mountains, and ocean. Making figures of dolls or grain.	F. Feast of St. John
7. Fall Equinox	A time of gratitude for the harvest. Feasts and decorating with fall fruits, grains and vegetables.	G. Candlemas
8. Fall Season	Acknowledgment of the year's completion. Honoring the dead, honoring and releasing the past.	H. Easter

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

Parte 2 Versión al español de LEANDRO PERDOMO

Sin embargo, estaba yo muy poco dispuesto a renunciar a mis creencias. Incluso me sentía seguro de éstas porque a menudo imaginaba sueños en los que viejas cartas cursadas entre romanos distinguídos o supuestos manuscritos descubiertos en Pompeya o en otros lugares venían a confirmar de forma notoria cuanto había sido escrito en los Evangelios. No obstante, cada vez encontré más y más dificultades, aun dándole la mayor libertad de acción a mi imaginación para inventar evidencias que fueran lo suficientemente aceptables como para dejarme convencer. Así, la incredulidad se fue abriendo paso sigilosamente en mi mente, y la razón, deslizándose poco a poco sobre mí, finalmente me atrapó por completo. El proceso de razonamiento se operó tan lenta y suavemente en mí que no sentí dolor, angustia o aflicción, y desde entonces no he dudado nunca, ni por un solo segundo, que mi conclusión definitiva fue la correcta.

En realidad, yo pudiera, como cualquier otra persona, desear al menos que el cristianismo fuera verdad; pero, de ser así, el lenguaje del texto bíblico parece presentar por lo claro que los hombres que no sean creyentes, y esto incluye a mi padre, mi hermano y casi todos mis amigos, serían castigados eternamente.

Aunque yo no pensé mucho respecto a la existencia de un Dios personal hasta un período de tiempo considerablemente tardío de mi vida, diré aquí a qué conclusiones generales me vi obligado en este asunto.

El viejo argumento de un diseño en la Naturaleza que anteriormente me había parecido tan decisivo, ahora, con el descubrimiento de la ley de la selección natural, fallaba por entero. Nosotros no podemos sostener por más tiempo que, por ejemplo, la hermosa bisagra de la concha bivalva debió haber sido hecha por un ser inteligente como se hace la bisagra de una puerta por un obrero especializado. Cada cosa en la Naturaleza es el resultado de leyes fijas, y este tema lo tengo tratado al final de mi libro sobre la variación de animales y plantas domésticas: hasta donde puedo yo ver, el argumento que allí expuse nunca ha sido respondido adversamente.

Pero, pasando por encima de las bellas e interminables adaptaciones con las que nos encontramos por dondequiera, cabe preguntarse ¿como pueden ser explicados, en general, los arre-

glos y ajustes beneficiosos que se observan en el mundo? Algunos escritores están muy impresionados por la cantidad de dolor y sufrimiento que hay por todas partes en el mundo y llegan a dudar si, en efecto, contamos con seres benévolos, si hay más miseria o más felicidad, si el mundo en su conjunto es bueno o malo. Conforme a mi opinión, prevalece decididamente la felicidad, aunque sea muy difícil demostrarlo. Si la certeza de esta conclusión fuera concedida, armonizaría bien con los resultados que pueden esperarse de la selección natural. Si todos los individuos de cualquier especie experimentarían los mismos sufrimientos y contratiempos a un grado extremo, desatenderían y abandonarían su propia propagación, pero nosotros no tenemos motivo para creer que esto suceda jamás o que al menos haya ocurrido con frecuencia. Por otra parte, algunas consideraciones llevan a opinar que todo ser consciente, con sentimientos, ha sido formado de ese modo precisamente para disfrutar, como regla general, de la felicidad.

DARWINISMO

Quien crea, como yo, que todos los órganos corporales y mentales (excepto aquellos que no son provechosos ni desventajosos para su poseedor) de todos los seres han sido desarrollados a través de la selección natural o la sobrevivencia del más fuerte junto con el uso o hábito, admitirá que estos órganos se han formado de acuerdo al éxito que han tenido en su competencia con otros seres, incrementando de este modo su número.

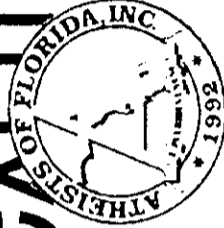
Un animal puede seguir el curso de acción que resulte más benéfico para su especie y propagación tomando ventaja de sufrimientos tales como dolor, hambre, sed y miedo; o por medio de placer, como comiendo, bebiendo, etc.; o por medio de ambas formas combinadas, como cuando realiza la búsqueda del alimento. Pero el dolor, o el sufrimiento de cualquier clase, si continúa por mucho tiempo, causa depresión y disminuye el poder de la acción; sin embargo, aun así, sabrá adaptarse bien y se hará una criatura capaz de protegerse por sí misma contra cualquier daño grande o repentino.

De otro lado, las sensaciones placenteras o agradables pueden ser mantenidas por largo tiempo sin ningún efecto depresivo; por el contrario, ellas estimulan al sistema entero a aumentar su actividad. De aquí que todos o la mayor parte de los seres orgánicos se han desarrollado a través de la selección natural teniendo a las sensaciones agradables como sus pautas habituales. Nosotros vemos esto en el empleo enérgico de la fuerza o del ánimo para conseguir algo y, especialmente, en el deleite de nuestras comidas diarias y en el placer derivado de la sociabilidad y del amor a nuestras familias. La suma total de placeres como éstos, los cuales son habituales o repetidos con frecuencia, proporcionan a la mayor parte de los seres, como difícilmente puedo poner en duda, un exceso de felicidad por encima de la miseria, aunque muchos sufran bastante de vez en cuando.

(Sera continuado)

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

Our next meeting is planned for



January 20, 2002 2 pm

Join us for a Viewing of

"Chocolat"

\*\*\* nominated for 5 Academy Awards \*\*\*

Starring Juliette Binoch and Judi Dench

Colorful, tasteful and with chunky atheism. (120 minutes)

@

The Broward County Main Library

8th Floor

100 South Andrews Avenue Ft. Lauderdale

EMI: 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441 Atheist.l@bellsouth.net

READING à la BUSH

By Patrick Bens, Director

If reading to a child helps it with learning more vocabulary earlier, as Laura BUSH maintains in a NPR interview of 08.02.01 - and I don't disagree with that statement at all---then little Dubya did not get read to or often enough. His vocabulary and reading skills are minimal. His articulation and pronunciation are abominable.

In the former BUSH administration, first lady Barbara BUSH took it upon herself to help stamp out illiteracy. The current first Lady, Laura BUSH aims at eradicating e-literacy. How?

Reading to children is a beautiful ritual. Reading per se, is an intelligent habit. To instill this marvelous habit in a sibling, the child has to first see, hear and feel a parent reading. It's not enough to sit a child down on your lap and read it a story. This can be to a toddler as passive as watching videos. If immediately afterwards you go back to watch the sports networks or clean your gun, the child will feel like it has been duped away from its TV viewing or, worse, its toys.

From my own experiences, I discovered that the best way to have one child or an entire class reap the benefits of a good reading is to read a lot yourself. Observe the reaction of a small child while you are reading peacefully. Your being absorbed in intense reading will initiate in your child a sign of curiosity. If you genuinely enjoy reading to yourself, the child feels that enjoyment. If you burst out in laughter once in a while, the child will come running to crawl into your lap to share in the joy. That's the time to open a book of children's stories.

When the children's story has ended, it's playtime again. Casually, you return to your own reading, allowing the child time to explore its imagination, based on the story it just experienced. With its toys and various objects it's allowed to touch, your child gradually learns to recreate parts of the story, eventually from beginning to end, and through these experiments starts learning the fundamentals of reasoning. Children who play creatively respect the coopera-

# UNITED WE STAND DIVIDED WE FALWELL

By Patrick Bens

"The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way—all of them who have tried to secularize America—I point the finger in their face and say — you helped this happen." —Reverend Jerry FALWELL.

This year, in unison with the country, mourning the loss of so many innocent lives in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington DC, on 9/11, the festive theme of our booth at the MIAMI BOOKFAIR INTERNATIONAL 2001 was "United We Stand," with American flags and tricolor ribbons, stars and stripes galore, to show the fair our commitment to support a lifestyle with freedom of thought.

"Divided we FALWELL" was therefore a sharp warning that, if permitted, the forces of religion, which turned Afghanistan into the chaos it's in, could easily throw a veil over our precious democratic lifestyle and equally destroy it.

Moral Majority Mullah Jerry FALWELL's comments about 9/11, which were e-mailed around the world and count for many years to come as the standard of theocracy the United States is increasingly dealing with, were conspicuously exhibited as the center piece of our table and, believe me, drew a lot of attention.

This year, our booth was in a different location, attracting a different public. For good or for worse, we were well received there and in excellent company: the ACLU had their kiosk right across from us.

This new location, near an impressive entrance to the MIAMI-DADDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, fed us a constant stream of college students, who eagerly picked up the pen to sign in for a traditional free three-month trial subscription to our newsletter. From Bayside Mall, a popular shopping center on the other side of Biscayne Boulevard, families entered the street fair in droves and one of the first booths they were met with was ours. So we were in a very prominent spot to educate the young. This gave us ample opportunity to distribute the glossy, high quality book covers we were proud to offer free of charge to every school kid. I'm sure that our chairman Ed Golly can elaborate on these beautiful items and say lots of things in praise of them.

Manning the booth this year with Ed were our president Nan Owens, our founder Christos Tzanetakos, Tom O'Neill, yours truly and my daughters Mariana and Fabiola. A special table overflowing with Spanish atheist books was manned by Carlos Coronado and visiting from the university city of Lima, PERU, philosophy professor Manuel Abraham Paz Y Mino. Our volunteers are increasingly popular with the public and fellow vendors alike. We encounter many repeat visitors. However, there are still men and women who walk up to the booth and, while signing-in, proclaim: "I didn't know an organization like ATHEISTS of FLORIDA existed." This should alert us that advertising is a must.

How do we measure our success at the BOOKFAIR?

No matter how much or how well we argue against religion, it's from statements like the one by the right reverend Jerry FALWELL, idol of conservative conservative republican presidents, (and an ideal stand-in for Archie BUNKER) that we gain the most.

Comments on this article can be read on:

[www.writtenby.me.com/content/70563](http://www.writtenby.me.com/content/70563)

tive efforts of others. They reach out to their peers and try to communicate, eager to share knowledge.

During the interview, Laura BUSH was asked to read a few paragraphs from one of her favorite literary works. The title of the novel and the name of the author were unknown to me and therefore escaped me. I do however remember specifically that the passage she read on the air was cobwebbed with spiritual remarks and in reference to a biblical anecdote. If, by her preference of faith-based literature, the first lady hinted that she regards the bible as the best material for children, I have another experience to draw on.

From observing religious tenants on numerous occasions, I came away with the following sad impression: reading from the bible as a preconditioned ritual—like attending mass—can ruin in any child the lust for learning. The concentration of the child ceases soon after the last word is uttered, if not long before. Boredom replaces curiosity. Fear replaces joy. All Bible stories are too dogmatic to allow freedom of expression in consequent plays or games. This leads to an early apprenticeship of frustration and insecurity. Bible reading has no creative motive. It is hopelessly removed from reality and the environment. Children who grow up being subjected to repeated bible recitations loose the chance to develop their own unlimited world of make-believe, where a chair becomes a throne and a table is a castle. They can never enjoy the magical values of paper bags being helmets, cardboard boxes being ships and a blanket being the ocean wide.

Theists are pushing reading beyond the limit. They are forcing it down to the youngest children, forsaking their play-time schedule. Now they are even reading from the bible to fetuses because indoctrination starts at conception.

Reading to children is not the destination. It's the train on which we put our child in the driver's seat. The fantasies the child is allowed to sculpt, the vocabulary it subconsciously absorbs, and the initiatives it is motivated to, represent the luggage it will take into the future.

If First Lady Laura BUSH sincerely wishes the nation to read to its children, it will be necessary to first teach parents to disqualify the bible as literature for juveniles. The *à la BUSH* bible recitation stifles freedom of expression, leaving children thinking that reading is a religious chore, instead of a universally enjoyed communicative pleasure that has built-trained great kids into great scientists.

Comments on this article can be read on:  
[www.writtenby.me.com/content/57801](http://www.writtenby.me.com/content/57801)



# LOOSENOTES



## Century Village

"WE THE PEOPLE NEWS" is the free community newspaper of the CONCERNED VILLAGERS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION. It serves Century Village, Davie, Cooper City, Miramar, Pembroke Pines, Hollywood and Sunrise to "advise, entertain and enlighten without fear or favor" and I think we should consider running a small ad in a publication with such a democratic name and such a noble mission and such a widespread readership of which many are atheists.

On the first and third Sunday of each month "WE THE PEOPLE NEWS" meets in room 104 to discuss current and future editions of the paper. This meeting is open to any and all residents of CENTURY VILLAGE. Lively and interesting discussions are held on a variety of subjects affecting both residents and non-residents. The meeting begins at 10:00 a.m. Since there are no dues, it is advised that those atheists of *Century Village* who have the time and fervor to spend a couple of hours in excellent company, join in and express their ideas and opinions on matters from religion and politics to poetry and plays.

Members of ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA, who reside in CENTURY VILLAGE, ought to go to these meetings on a scouting mission and report back during our regularly scheduled Chapter meetings in the BROWARD COUNTY MAIN LIBRARY. We will thus be able to determine if we can infiltrate those meetings regularly to help in our recruitment drive, utilize the services of their newspaper "WE THE PEOPLE NEWS" for propaganda ads and who knows, convince the management of the paper to carry articles showing our standpoint on matters of concern on separation of State and churches, religion-free living and the perils of faith-based governmental agencies.

West Broward is rapidly becoming the fastest growing part of South Florida where we find many prospective members. *Century Village* is a hub for politically active democratic voices. You can be sure that it is a fertile patch for us to harvest from. *Century Village* is often courted by politicians both local and national. A foot in the door at *Century Village* could be providing us with a forum to pass our separatist demands onto these visiting future leaders.

The pages of "WE THE PEOPLE NEWS" are loaded with challenging opinions by concerned residents. We will fit right in. Because of the important voting block the residents of Century Village represent, our articles in "WE THE PEOPLE NEWS" will reach the eyes of every politician running in the next election—if we act now.

I'm glad to report that, on the eve of the MIAMI BOOKFAIR INTER-TZANETAKOS joined me in the

*Atheist Classics*

our participation in the street fair NATIONAL, our founder Christos Tzanetakos joined me in the quest to re-publish the classics of Atheism by issuing a version in Spanish of VOLTAIRE's *ZAPATA*, offered for sale in stapled booklet form at the price of \$3. This wonderful work will be forever available to the reading public thanks to our educational mission and our dedication to inform the reader of the perils of religious indoctrination.

Our chapter's location is unique to penetrate the Hispanic community. Our educational efforts are therefore substantially directed to allow the Hispanic inquiring mind to indulge, year after year, in more and more translations of classic atheist texts. Previously our chapter has offered translations of essays by Charles DARWIN, Bertrand RUSSELL and Percy B. SHELLY. In the future we will make others available by Robert INGERSOLL, Giordano BRUNO, Madalyn O'HAIR and others.

**Did you know?** ... that Charles DARWIN almost didn't get to go on the 5 year long exploration around the world that resulted in "THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES" because captain FitzRoy of the HMS BEAGLE thought his nose was too big!!!

## MEMBER LIST

1. Woody Allen
2. Maria Callas
3. Andy Williams
4. Franco
5. Strom Thurmond
6. Dave Brubeck
7. Harry Chapin
8. Sinead O'Connor
9. Kirk Douglas
10. Emily Dickinson
11. Hector Berlioz
12. Frank Sinatra
13. Carlos Montoya
14. Paul Eluard
15. A.A. Eiffel
16. Jane Austen
17. Ford Madox Ford
18. Steven Spielberg
19. Edith Piaf
20. Uri Geller
21. Phil Donahue
22. Giacomo Puccini
23. Joseph Smith
24. Ignatius Loyola
25. Steve Sadat
26. Steve Allen
27. Louis Pasteur
28. Manuel Puig
29. Mme de Pompadour
30. Rudyard Kipling
31. John Denver