

Atheists of Florida

MIAMI: Sunday, September 17, 2-4pm on the 8th floor of the Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft Lauderdale. Mr. John Del Rossi will review the book *A Case Against Crete-O-Dee* by George H. Smith. Seating is limited, so be first! FMI—(305) 940-0442 or (954) 929-0441.

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

Court from page 7

Justice John Paul Stevens' majority opinion striking down a Texas school district's practice of opening high-school football games with "student-led" prayer "points out how critical the next choice of president is for appointing Supreme Court Justices." Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family claims that Stevens' opinion "ups the stakes in the presidential race, since [he] tops the list of Justices expected to retire soon."

The Court's decision striking down the Nebraska abortion ban also riled numerous right-wing commentators, including convicted Watergate conspirator and founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries Chuck Colson. Even in

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10 June/July 2000



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CHAPTER EVENTS

TAMPA: Saturday, September 30, (last Saturday of each month), 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. in meeting room A of the Clear-water East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater.

Monthly Dinner—Probably **Wednesday, September 27th, at 6:30 pm.** Dinner will be at the Red Lobster on the Tampa side of the Campbell Causeway, in the Captain's room. FMI on dinners: Ed Golly—813/839-7567 or Jerry Moore—727/526-4223.

October 28—no meeting. We will have a table at Circus McGurkis, the People's Fair, in Lakeview Park, 20th St & 28th Ave. South in St. Petersburg. All members are invited to help. Call Golly or Moore for details.

defeat. Colson managed to find hope, pointing out that the 5-4 margin of the decision shows that the Religious Right is "just one vote away from changing the balance of the Court." The Free Congress Foundation's Tom Jipping also attacked the Court's decision, though he sarcastically commended Justice Anthony Kennedy's dissenting opinion, stating that "When it comes to playing with the Constitution, Kennedy is like the drunk who needs a 12-step program." Though he falls off the jurisprudential wagon often enough to need help, here he stayed sober and did the right thing.

Most Religious Right leaders are satisfied with Bush's public statements that he will appoint "strict constructionists" in the mold of Scalia and Thomas, and they are giving him their full support.

D. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries is not waiting for the next president and future Supreme Court Justices. Kennedy is requesting that his supporters sign a petition blaming previous Court decisions for "school shootings, teenage pregnancy, sexual perversion, horrendous illiteracy and dangerous gangs." The petition demands that the Court reverse nine state-church precedents "that contradict the intended meaning of the Constitution," acknowledge that the Ten Commandments can be posted in public buildings and allow the Bible to be used as a textbook in public schools.

The Religious Right knows that the future of the Supreme Court, and the country, is up for grabs in this election, and they sense that they may be only one election away from achieving the political goals that have eluded them for the past 20 years. A Court dominated by conservative justices could lead to a drastic ideological shift that would have a devastating affect on our civil rights and civil liberties. The Religious Right is working to assure that the November election result does just that.

Atheists of Florida

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A of F Board meets

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of Atheists of Florida, Inc. held its annual meeting in Tampa on Sunday, May 21, 2000.

Treasurer Charles Ross had resigned due to lack of time to devote to his position. Our checkbook balance stood at about \$1,000. Life membership funds were being held in Certificates of Deposit and were due to be renewed in June. The Board voted to invest the funds in the Vanguard 500 Index Fund, a no-load mutual fund with very low operating expenses.

A student at FGCU in Ft. Myers had expressed interest in starting a chapter of Atheists of Florida in that area and we agreed to investigate that possibility.

Last year, the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund distributed first and second place awards of \$500.00 each for our essay contest. Third and fourth place winners received \$300.00 each. We plan to distribute the same awards this year.

Our table at the Miami Book Fair International has been renewed and, by doing so before June 30 we received a discount.

In the Tampa Bay area we continue to advise Atheists of Florida in the classified section which keeps our phone ringing with inquiries.

The A of F Web page is complete and published as an extension of the Atheist Alliance site. As a result of our membership in the Alliance, our page is published at no charge to us. The site consists of eleven pages and has ample room for expansion. The address is incorporated in our nameplate on the left side of this page. At a special board meeting last year, \$450.00 had been pledged by three board members to cover anticipated expenses for production and publication of the Web page. Since no costs were incurred, the Board offered to return the donations. All three members declined. Board Member Steve Miles (Gainesville) directed that his donation of \$300.00 be utilized for our participation in the Miami Book Fair International this year.

Earlier this year we began producing and distributing our new laminated membership cards. All new members and annual renewals receive one by mail.

The Board established a building fund for the purpose of eventually having facilities.

continued on page 5

"By the year 2000 we will, I hope, convince our children to believe in human potential, not God."

—Gloria Steinem

Message from your new President — Nan Owens

Dear Friends in Florida:

Greetings from us up in here in the clouds. No, we're not in heaven—just up high in the "mile-high city!"

Actually, I'm looking forward to being back in Florida at the end of summer. True, the mountains here are beautiful. But I miss the water and tropics of Florida. Most of all, I miss my very good, intelligent and committed friends from there in Florida.

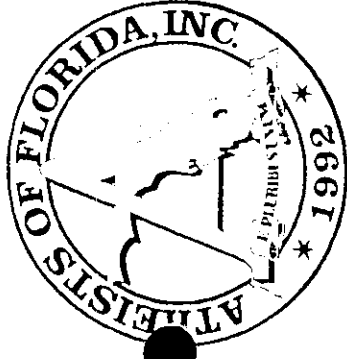
Also, I'm excitedly looking forward to the coming year with Atheists of Florida. Just some of the things I'd like to see emphasized this year are:

1. Plan two or three regional 1-day meetings to enable multiple chapters to get together. Attendance would not be limited to the chapters in that area, but the purpose would be to make it particularly easy for all people in that area to get together and attend (e.g. the east coast, west coast, central Florida, etc.)
2. Broach new ways to raise funds—and promote our current avenues to build the strength of the organization.
3. Boost our visibility and public relations through positive, community-enhancing methods and issues.

Right now, I'm working long hours to help get a World Conference on Assisted Dying come off effective. The advantage to these efforts is to advance an issue of choice and legal freedom to be available to people according to their own conscience, philosophy and medical counsel. An additional strong advantage is that, as we pursue areas of promotion, sponsorship and media relations, I can bring these ideas back to our Florida goals.

By the way, the World Conference, being held in Boston over Labor Day week-end, promises to be an important milestone. Attendees and speakers are coming from all over the world—Europe, Australia, Japan, South America, Africa and Asia—specialists in medicine, law, psychology, bioethics, and human experience. Family members who participated in assisted deaths will tell of their experiences. And, the very first Right to Die Film Festival will be featured. For more information, visit www.hemlock.org on the net. Or call 800-247-7421.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at nanowens@aix.netcom.com any time with ideas and/or questions. I look forward to visiting your chapter and meeting all of you soon.

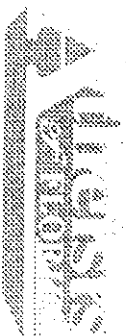


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Atheists of Florida

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 THE DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE of Autonomous Atheist Societies



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Membership dues
Life Member \$ 500.00
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Send no-sticker correspondence to:
Atheists of Florida, Inc.,
The A of F Newsletter is produced for our members as a means of exchanging letters from our members are published on a staggered alphabetical basis. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Address of Florida is a Member Secretary of the national Atheist Alliance.

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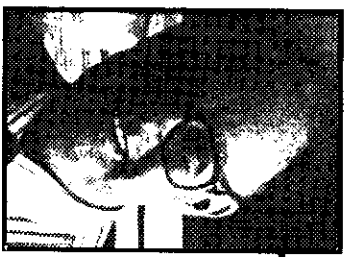
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LAST MONTH we discussed how plants produce sugar and that sugar eventually ends up being the basic material from which all plants and animals are made. Of course, there are other elements combined with that sugar, but basically it is the carbon in sugar which is the basis of life.

Animals are just like plants in that they

The Solution Is Evolution

No. 3 - Jim Strayver



must combine sugar with oxygen to release the stored light energy. This oxygen is all produced by plants and other living things that contain chlorophyll.

Almost all of the oxygen in our atmosphere was and still is produced by chlorophyll. Before the cells which carry on photosynthesis evolved, the earth's atmosphere was mostly ammonia and methane and hydrogen.

Oxygen is essential in this process, because it combines with the larger carbon molecules (sugar) to release the energy that it takes to hold these molecules together. Remember that photosynthesis is the process which takes two small molecules, water and carbon dioxide, and combines them to make larger molecules (sugar) and free oxygen. This takes energy, which the sun supplies. When plant and animal cells use the products that are made from sugar, the process is reversed. Oxygen combines with sugar and carbon dioxide and water are formed. Plus the energy from the sun that held the larger molecules together is released. That is what enables warm blooded animals like humans to have a 98.6 degree temperature. It is also why heat is released when wood or oil is burned. The burning of any carbon compound is just turning big molecules into small molecules. The same process happens in our bodies; it just happens much more slowly.

So, the short answer to the question is Plant cells evolved the ability to produce sugar and free oxygen for their survival. Animal cells evolved to survive off of the extra sugar and oxygen that plant cells produce. It is the over production by plants that

enables animals to survive.

There must be some other basic differences between plant and animal cells.

The really interesting difference between plants and animals is their method of handling cell waste. Excretion is a process that must take place or the cell will die. All animals have some method of removing waste. Some of the simple animals like sponges do not have a special organ to accomplish this. The more complex animals have kidneys that filter waste out of their blood. Each functioning cell deposits its waste in

the blood which then gets pumped to the kidney where it is filtered. In the higher animals this waste is then stored in the urinary bladder until it is emptied. It is a very different story for plants. Because plants have evolved a cell wall around some cells, they cannot get rid of waste. Instead it is stored in the cell in a special bubble-like structure called a vacuole. When the vacuole gets full the cell dies. This is no problem for parts of plants that only live a few months, like flowers and leaves. And it turns out to be a very good thing for some parts of the plant, like roots and stems.

These special cells that have evolved cell walls and that neat little vacuole are referred to as Xylem, better known by most of us as wood. It is the xylem that enables trees and bushes to reach for the sky. Before wood evolved there were no tall plants, no shrubs, and no vines. That stringy stuff in celery is xylem. If there were more of it in the celery, we would call it wood. It is good for us—it is the roughage of our diet.

Because animals can get rid of waste, they can rebuild and repair cells. Some of the cells in your body will live for years because they can be repaired and the waste removed. That is good for us and all animals.

Plants have evolved a different method and it is just as successful for them. They evolved so that almost all of their cells live less than a year.

These short articles on evolution should be making you ask more questions than they answer. In science it is easier to answer the "how" questions than the "why" questions. We can answer *how* it is that certain plants have opposite leaves, but we cannot answer *why* it is that certain plants have opposite leaves.

Mentally adrift

A of F secretary Jim Young responded to one of the typical letters in the Tampa Tribune espousing the usual misguided atonement that the sole basis of social fabric is derived exclusively from the Bible.

Re: Drifted from foundation

LETTERS



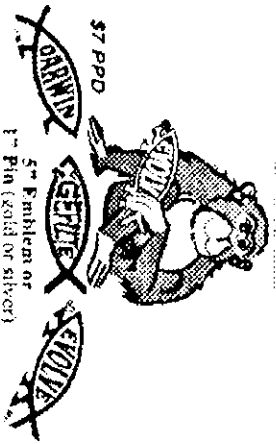
Arch Young, in his Feb 26th letter, laments over how this once-Christian nation has drifted from its moral foundation. It is appropriate that we not forget the atrocities that Christian moral foundation both advocated and executed. Yes, we're talking about the same moral foundation held by Christians as they drove native Indians from their lands, murdering them to near extinction. It was the same moral foundation held by Christians as they enriched themselves at the expense of suffering black slaves. Today, with a church on every other street and the highest crime rate in the world, it is the same moral foundation which today nurtures hate, bigotry, inequality, and racism.

Following God's commandments, none of us would survive to adulthood.

Oh, I forgot, we can blame all today's problems on a handful of humanists and atheists.

While Arch applauds the ten commandments, he forgets that the penalty ordered by God for breaking one of them is death. Those execution orders were commandments, too. Following God's commandments, none of us would survive to adulthood.

As Arch sees it, hospitals shouldn't make medical decisions based upon medicine. He thinks the church should decide what medical treatments we receive. He forgets that Christianity has opposed virtually all medical research and treatment for centuries.



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like him should go back to their bibles and read James 5:14-15. If they follow those directives they will have no need to grace the hospital corridors of Bayfront or any other hospital. They can leave hospitals and modern medicine to non-believers. In which case, we would like to have credible doctors deciding our important medical policies, not priests.

James A. Young
Lithia, FL

"Just say no!" to entanglement

Yaciw penned this response to a letter to the St. Petersburg Times in April.

Re: "One who is devout does not change." letter

Let me see if I've got this straight. According to the letter writer, devout essentially means one who has stopped thinking about their religious beliefs, regardless of any evidence that might call them into question or any reason whatsoever that might cause a change in position. In other words, he defines devout as synonymous with a stubborn and close-minded fool clinging irrevocably to an idea that was probably accepted before they were capable of understanding it at all. I'll grant the letter writer the right to apply that description to himself, and even to Robert Lynch if he wishes, but I would suspect that many who would describe themselves as devout (Catholic or otherwise) would find this characterization of them both inaccurate and offensive.

He is, at least, right about one thing: there should be NO operating agreements between Bayfront or any government-supported agency, and the Catholic Church or any religious organization. The deceptive practices of religious organizations, constantly trying to get the camel's nose under that wall of separation by initially denying their intentions, that is the root of all the problems. I'm sorry, those neurosighted individuals who continue to paint this as "Catholic bashing" cannot seem to comprehend the basic necessity for the absolute separation principle, which should be applied in all circumstances. The problem is likely to get worse: both presidential candidates are supporting government assistance for "faith-based" charities and social agencies, which will inevitably lead to more conflicts such as the current Bayfront issue. If such policies are put into effect, Bayfront will become just another of many such controversies, and our country could become as torn with religious strife as others with church-state entanglement.

I urge us not to let that happen. I urge everyone, of both parties, to write their candidate and tell them to "Just Say No!" to state/church entanglements. Our country's future depends on it.

Brent Yaciw
Tampa
athalnb@aol.com

Oklahoma House passes bill requiring science textbooks to acknowledge 'God as the creator of human life'

OKLAHOMA CITY—State legislators are inviting a lawsuit if they pass a bill requiring religious language in science textbooks. Americans United for Separation of Church and State has warned.

The Oklahoma State House unanimously passed a bill in April requiring the state's public schools to use science textbooks that acknowledge "one God as the creator of human life in the universe."

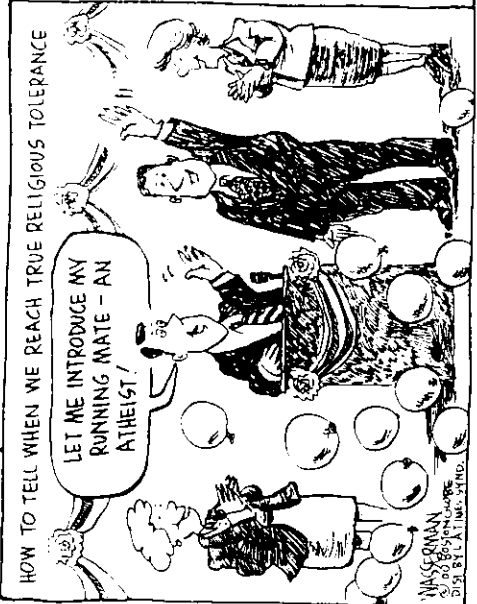
"This legislation is outrageous and unconstitutional," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "This is America, not Iran. Our legislators are not supposed to be judges of religious truth. The Constitution requires public schools to be neutral on religious matters. Forcing science books to acknowledge 'God as the creator' is a far cry from neutrality."

Oklahoma entered the national evolution controversy in November when the state's Textbook Committee voted to add anti-evolution disclaimers to public school biology textbooks. Earlier this year, however, Oklahoma Attorney General Drew Edmondson issued an opinion that the committee lacked the authority to alter texts with disclaimers of any kind.

In response, members of the Oklahoma legislature introduced a bill creating specific qualifications for members of the textbook committee. On April 6, the House added two amendments. One gives the committee the authority to insert "a one-page summary, opinion or disclaimer" into all textbooks; the other mandates that science textbooks acknowledge God as the creator of life.

"Religious Right groups and their allies have done everything possible to force their religious beliefs into public schools," added Lynn. "Now, in states like Oklahoma, they're targeting public school science classes with their schemes. We must not allow our science classes to turn into Sunday school classes."

At this point, the bill (SB 1139) will go to a conference committee where legislators will work out differences.



between the House version with the controversial amendments and the Senate version.

"The conference committee should have no question about what will happen if this bill becomes law," Lynn concluded. "Americans United will not hesitate to file suit, and I am confident that courts would strike down this patently unconstitutional effort."

Oklahoma joins a plethora of other states that have fought over the evolution issue in recent months, including state legislatures and boards of education in Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, New Mexico and Ohio.

Charitable Choice Legislation could subsidize religious bigotry, sponsor concedes

WASHINGTON—Churches can engage in open religious bigotry and continue to receive federal housing funding under "charitable choice" legislation approved by the House of Representatives in April.

The House was considering the American Homeownership and Economic Opportunity Act (H.R. 1176), a \$6.9-billion program intended to make it easier for municipal employees to buy a home. An amendment sponsored by Rep. Mark Souder (R-Ind.) added charitable choice language to the bill that makes religious institutions eligible for funding under the legislation. Souder's controversial amendment passed 299-124 (The full bill passed by a 417-8 vote.)

During a floor debate, Souder was forced to concede that under his proposal, churches affiliated with institutions such as Bob Jones University could engage in federally funded religious discrimination. Souder also conceded that some minority religious groups would probably be denied funding under his plan.

On the House floor, Rep. Chet Edwards (D-Texas) asked Souder, "Next year, would a church associated with Bob Jones University be able to put out a sign saying, 'Using your tax dollars, no Catholics need apply here for a job?'"

In response, Souder said, "If Secretary Cuomo or the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development chose to give [federal funding] to a place that would discriminate on that basis, which could include Jewish, Catholic, evangelical, then that could happen." Souder went on to acknowledge that some minority religious groups probably would not get funding under his proposal.

Edwards asked Souder, "Would the Wiccans be able to apply for federal tax funding?"

Souder, apparently looking beyond the November election, responded, "It is unlikely under President Bush that the witches would get funding." Under Souder's approach, religious groups he approves of get aid from the government, and groups he doesn't like get left out. For a member of Congress to endorse this narrow-minded approach is shameful and offensive.

Board continued

Recently, a few long-time members of A of F have written to decline renewal due to their financial hardships incurred as they age. We baited to see these members drop out. Consequently, the Board approved a new Limited Income membership category of \$10.00 per year. All membership categories are listed in the manual on page 2.

The Board of Atheists of Florida has routinely worked by forming committees to accomplish projects. The difficulty has been geographical; we are spread out all over a very large state. Therefore, the Board decided to eliminate all but the Publications Committee and convert standing committee chairmen into Project Managers. Managers may now utilize any personnel they deem necessary to complete the task at hand.

Atheist Alliance International, of which we are a founding Member Society, no longer requires dues of its members. However, the Alliance still needs funds. The Board voted to contribute \$125.00 to the Alliance which may be paid in full or in quarterly installments at the discretion of the Treasurer. That works out to roughly one dollar per membership. Besides contributions from other Member Societies, additional income to the Alliance is derived from conventions and their Web site.

The first three Honorary Life Memberships have been bestowed by the Board. They are:

- **Gael Murphy**, (Tampa) for her stand against God-oriented oaths for jurists in the Hillsborough County Court system
- **Max Weatherly** (Del Ray) for his contributions to Atheism. Max was one of the founding members of A of F.
- **Michael Zaccar** (North Miami Beach) another long-time member of the Miami Dade chapter who recently amended an annuity naming Atheists of Florida, Inc. the beneficiary. The

amount of the annuity is over \$98,000.00!

All Life Members will receive a certificate along with their membership card. Mr. Zaccar will receive a plaque in honor of being the first Floridian beneficiary. As President, Ed Golly sent him a letter expressing our deepest thanks and appreciation on behalf of all members of A of F.

Three new Project Managers were appointed Golly, Tampa Bay Chapter Director, accepted the position of Advertising Manager, responsible for advertising A of F and finding advertising funds over and above our regular treasury.

Patrick Bens, Miami/Dade Chapter Director, was appointed our Spanish language outreach coordinator.

Tampa member Brent Yaciv was placed in charge of Cable TV production which we hope to resume.

The resignation of Charles Ross created a vacancy on our Mark Twain Scholarship Fund Board of Trustees. Yaciv was elected to the position while the four remaining trustees, Dr. Reuben Porto (Miami), Charles Schisler (North Palm Beach), Christos Traneakos (Ft. Pierce), and Dr. James Williamson (Winter Park) remain in place.

The Board voted to ask the Atheist Alliance International to file an official complaint and demand the repeal of the "Holy See" as a U.N. Non-member State Permanent Observer.

Finally, the new officers for this year were elected. Our new president is Nan Owens (Seffner /see page 1/), while Charles Schisler remains Vice President. Both will serve as our representatives on the Atheist Alliance board. James Young (Lithia) is Secretary and Ed Golly (Tampa) is both Treasurer and Chairman of the Board.

Thanks to all members for your continued support for and confidence in the Board of Directors of Atheists of Florida.

The X-Rated Bible

Ben Edward Akerley
Published by Ferel House



Sex in the scriptures

Book review by —James A. Cox, Midwest Book Review

Author Ben Edward Akerley is a retired professor of the University of Southern California, lectures on the Judeo-Christian anti-sexual ethic, and plays organ n Sunday.

Copies of The X-Rated Bible are available from Atheists of Florida, P.O. Box 130753 / Tampa, FL 33681. Suggested donation — \$15.00.

When first published in 1985 by Madalyn Murray O'Hair and the American Atheist Press, Ben Akerley's irreverent survey of sex in the scriptures, *The X-Rated Bible*, caused a national furor. A new edition has been revised and enlarged by Ferel House, showcasing the weird and steamy actions that occur throughout the Bible. Akerley demonstrates and documents that the "Holy Bible" is a book filled with incest, rape, adultery, exhibitionism, debauchery, abortion, prostitution, drugs, bestiality, castration, scatology and the rest of the kind of thing that daytime soap operas and degenerate Hollywood movies are made of. *The X-Rated Bible* is astonishing reading. These are the kinds of scriptural stories that rarely make it into Sunday School curriculums.



Establishing lasting links with international atheists takes a focused game plan and finesse. Here, a veteran atheist shares some tips for boosting atheism across the Internet.

South Florida's Advantage

Building bridges across the globe
—Patrick Bens



If you want to expand atheism across international borders, there is truly no better time than the present. With advances such as the Internet making it easier to communicate with potential members, I think the global audience is the one to reach out for and you'll touch many more than just someone. Today, 80% of homes in the U.S. are wired for the Internet. And within five years half the world will be.

For Atheists of Florida, working to attract foreign atheists to our shores is a natural calling. Especially in South Florida, where the demand for computer jocks is high in businesses geared to trade with the Americas and Europe alike, we must give premiere consideration that every atheist we attract is a prospective member and a potential voter. Atheists are avid worldwide travelers. Many of our members were born or have lived in foreign countries.

During these first-hand experiences, they were fortunate to learn about customs and business practices that are unique to these countries. While this background certainly will help develop international links, it is necessary, in global atheism, for us to work at it to boost our successes. It just takes a good game plan and a certain finesse.

Here are a few good tips

Multilingual is a Plus

I recommend that when you enter a chat room or e-mail a foreign atheist that you at least write the greeting in the native language. Most foreigners and all intellectual atheists who want to come to the U.S. speak a good dose of English.

However, it is always nice to hear someone say "Hi" and "Bye" in your native tongue. Nevertheless, the main body of the message will be appreciated when it is written in clear, concise, everyday English. I do recommend however, that if you want your sons and daughters to trade e-mails with foreign atheists' sons and daughters, it may be very wise and pragmatic to learn to understand

Patrick Bens is a native of Belgium and director of the Miami-Dade chapter. A real estate investor and business-sman, he lives in North Dade with his wife, Celina and two daughters. He also edits NEWSNOTES, the monthly bulletin of the chapter Dade&Broward.

and eventually become manageable. Fluent in the language of the country or countries in which you want to cultivate atheist friends, I myself speak five languages and I'll tell you, most greetings and salutations in many other languages are similar to the ones I know.

So if you target one country or one language group, you should not have to cramp your lifestyle. But a little study can't hurt. And—believe it or not—errors draw usually empathy, praise and encouragement. One new word per message will be gratefully appreciated. Remember, most foreigners want to improve on their English. They'll rely on you. So when you correct their mistakes, they'll thank you for it.

You'll soon notice that people learn languages at different paces. The earlier in life you start, the better you pick up vocabulary and grammar. Later in life one will have to devote more time on evening classes, private tutoring or (as I dream of) taking lessons at our very own club house, where I'll be one of the teachers...

Travel is a Must

Becoming involved in international atheism means you must schedule time each year to travel to the countries where you have made atheist e-friends. On average it may be necessary to take one or two trips a year to organize a meeting with these foreign freethinkers, to view situations, instill trust, exchange literature and update on site information. Over the years, as friendships solidify, partnerships may be created that lead to travel back and forth, eventually to atheist conventions in the U.S. or in the country abroad. These trips may consist of enough people to travel in a group at group prices.

Talented, young atheists, eager to start a career or study in the Sunshine State can do with someone they can trust over here. Being part of that group will more rapidly spread that confidence both by physical presence while in the country or by reference while on the Internet. Being part of a group like this, you automatically become a resource of trust. They conclude that your background has been checked and that you are a genuine member of a reputable atheist network. Word of mouth will spread the message as fast as it not faster than the Internet.

Establish Contacts In Countries

Even with partners in one country, you may want to travel to another to open contacts there too. Therefore, it is recommended to make durable contacts in places like universities, high schools or sports clubs in each key city where you want to establish a niche. A local atheist can organize the meeting and make your next meeting an efficient one. Also (s)he can follow up on e-letters. Of course you'll have to share a lunch now and then or spend some time on campus, but this trouble will prove itself well worth it. For instance, our chapter has a contact in Lima, whom one of our

AS IN ANY ELECTION YEAR, presidential candidates are staking out positions and filling the airwaves with promises and programs revolving around the politically hot issues of the moment. While these issues are each important in their own right, there is one issue with far-reaching implications that are only beginning to be discussed: the future of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court and the Religious Right

Source: People for the American Way

The Supreme Court's 1999-2000 term produced a multitude of important decisions on everything from reproductive freedom to state/church separation. Many cases were decided by narrow margins, highlighting the importance of the next President's Supreme Court appointments.

Given the age and health of the current Justices (three are over 70) it is likely that the next President

will have the opportunity to appoint two, three, or even four new Justices, shaping the Court's direction for decades to come.

Presidential candidate George W. Bush has publicly stated that Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, the current Court's most far-right Justices, will be the models for his appointments. One, two or more new Justices who share their judicial philosophy would drastically shift the balance on the Court, spelling disaster for myriad constitutional rights and liberties.

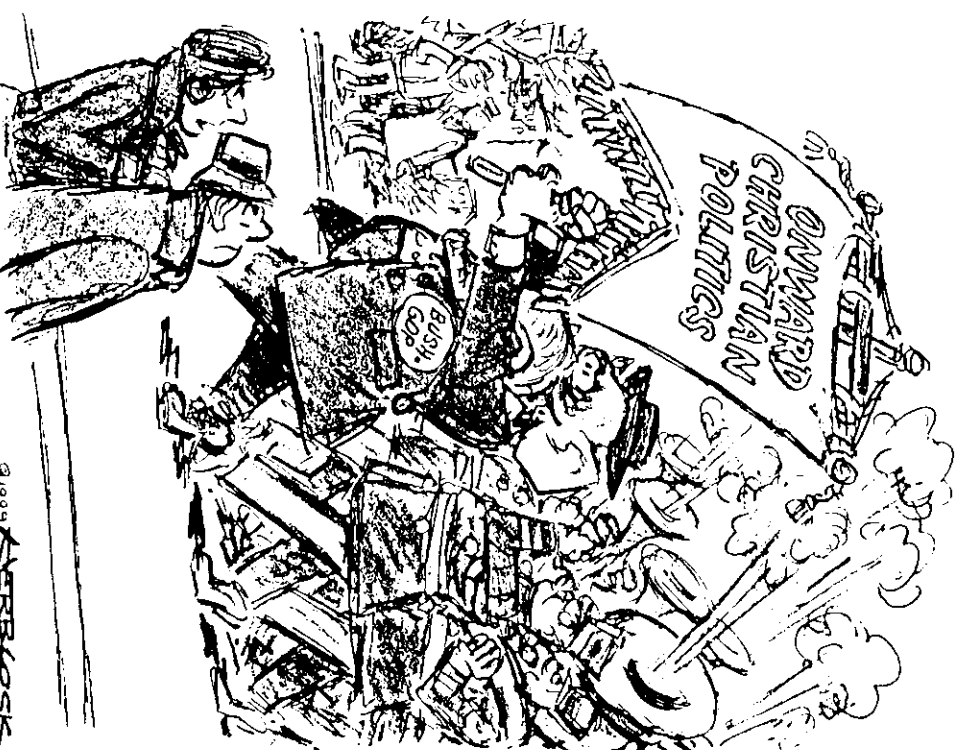
Right-wing leaders are well aware of what is at stake in the coming election and have been vocal about the importance of capturing the White House. Pat Robertson has promised to distribute "no less than 70 million voter guides" and to "train and equip 10 highly motivated Christian activists in each of the 175,000 precincts in America." Robertson has claimed that recent Court decisions are "utter tyranny." He called a ruling upholding separation of state and church akin to "[T]he Nazis in Germany, the way they treated the Jewish people." He has focused on the need for new right-wing Justices to repeal *Roe v. Wade*, saying, "you aren't going to name those Justices without winning the White House."

The Family Research Council is likewise mobilizing its forces. FRC spokesperson Janet Parshall attacked the Court's recent 5-4 decision striking down Nebraska's "partial birth" abortion ban, but assured her listeners that there was still hope. "Several Supreme Court Justices are likely to leave the Court within the next few years. It is imperative that Congress confirm only judges who read the Constitution correctly." The FRC, along with over 55 other right-wing organizations, have formed a coalition to ensure that the Republican party re-adopt the pro-life plank in its 2000 platform, demanding that the GOP "maintain its commitment to the appointment of judges who will respect the sanctity of innocent human life" and put it into practice "when vacancies occur in the federal judiciary, particularly on the Supreme Court."

Gary Bauer, the former head of the Family Research Council who left to run for the GOP presidential nomination, made future Supreme Court appointments a central part of his campaign. While speaking at the Christian Coalition Annual Road to Victory Conference, Bauer complained that seven of the nine current Justices are Republican appointees and that "Abortion ought to be over! Gay rights ought to be blocked! School prayer ought to be back already!" The fact that some Republican-appointed Justices have failed to carry out the right-wing agenda has led to a renewed determination to demand the appointment of individuals with ultra-conservative credentials, with Bauer demanding that the GOP "be more serious about the men and women we put on the high bench."

Many other Religious Right organizations are also using the Supreme Court as a tool for voter mobilization. Concerned Women for America claims that Jus-

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Prompted by a letter appearing in the Tampa Tribune by Ms. Young, Yaciw's response was more of an article assessing the offensiveness of public prayer.

ALACK OF CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS runs rampant through our society today. Skills which would go far in reducing the problems of drinking, smoking, drug abuse and other social ills.

Public prayer — public nuisance



—Brent Yaciw

To begin with, all three are drug abuse. All seek chemical aid to alter the mood, and to some extent an escape from dealing with life's burdens. Naturally, they have some things in common, and I have no beef with treating them equally, except where there are significant differences.

A patron drinking alcohol at the table next to me is only going to affect me if he begins acting unmy. In which case I would be justified in asking the manager to remove them. A smoker at the next table affects me the instant he lights up, the noxious fumes entering my nostrils within seconds. The only true analogy with liquor would be if someone at the next table insisted on pouring their booze into my glass and down my throat. I would again expect the manager to remove the offender, much as smokers are appropriately removed to an area where they are no longer free to annoy other patrons.

I'll agree that public prayer is a similar issue, but Ms. Young has this one absolutely backward. I know no ordinance, nor any court ruling, that prevents someone from quietly praying, or otherwise expressing their religious beliefs, in public. For that matter, I know of none preventing them from loudly doing so, as long as they are not violating noise ordinances that would apply equally to loudly cheering for a football team, playing the tuba, or reading poetry. Even if expressing your religion means dancing naked, uh, well, I guess there are ordinances against that, because the churches put them there. If anyone is guilty of censorship, she need look no further than her local church.

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However, what undoubtedly has confused Ms. Young, as it has so many others of an evangelical nature, is that our Constitution prevents government from endorsing, or even appearing to endorse, any religion. In Florida, the government provided very specific guidelines in

our state constitution: "There shall be no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting or penalizing the free exercise thereof. Religious freedom shall not justify practices inconsistent with public morals, peace or safety. No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution." I've always thought the first and last sentences were pretty clear, but the voucher crowd seems confused by the last one, and Ms. Young is perhaps by both.

The first sentence means she's free to practice whatever her religion says she should do.

The second part is a bit unclear, because people like Ms. Young cannot understand how the perception that government is endorsing religion can interfere with public peace. Of course, the "public morals" thing is an invitation to hypocrisy and grandstanding by local politicians over things like lap dancing and rock concerts. So the second sentence isn't the greatest, but the third more than makes up for it. No cash from the public coffers to religious groups, organizations, monuments, schools, agencies, or whatever. You're free to do whatever you believe your deity wants you to, provided it hurts no one else and you do it with your own money.

Religionists like Young confuse "the right to pray in public" with "the government, or its representative, making everyone pray in public." I couldn't care less what Timothy had to say 2,000 years ago, but if she does, that's her business (though I suspect if she actually read all of Timothy, especially the non-revised I Timothy 2:9-14, she might not have much respect for the old misogynist). In either case, the government, or its representatives, including teachers, principals, jail clerks, chaplains, judges, elected officials, or dog catchers, has no business telling me anything about religion.

Now I'd AGREE that smokers should be responsible for their own health, if only the tobacco companies hadn't lied and lied and lied about tobacco's harmful effects. I've never known a chocolate company to deny that certain people might have negative reactions to their products. Yes, there are those little warning labels, forced on packs by the government, but attitudes like hers keep smokers in denial, convincing themselves it's just more government trying to take away their rights. Let's talk about really taking responsibility. Let's talk about the world's biggest group of drug pushers, targeting children with advertising, lying about the effects of their drugs, taking responsibility for murdering thousands through deception.

Of course, considering the millions who have died in religion-based conflicts, there's an even bigger group ducking responsibility, but one thing at a time.

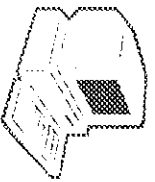
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members visits when in Peru. This person is a professor at the university and is a great reference whenever we enter in contact with new prospects. Above all, he is a leading catalyst for literature exchange. In Bogota, Colombia we have a similar contact. He is a professor and lawyer.

These people are vital: a follow up is very important. You don't want prospects to feel that you breeze into and back out of town and that their case is not important to you. Most international prospects need a lot of encouragement and assurances.

Once you have established several local contacts you must make them aware of the many books, cd's, videos and newsletters that can be advertised in local periodicals, posters at the universities or call-ins on radio and TV shows. Who better to decide where the local atheists look for than something promoted by someone who lives in their hometown? This is true in Europe as well as in the Americas.

Use the Web



Of course it is not realistic to have someone posted in every city in the world. That's where the www.ATHEISTalliance.org/Florida/ and e-mail to keep international prospects on the line. Our website has been a remarkable resource for our movement during the past year. We have attracted a good number of prospective members, all of whom were surfing the web, hopping from link to link and decided to contact our group. Obviously, these are excellent leads. I recommend that our members go on as many sites as possible, and leave a message with our website written in it. Athelists who seek to relocate to the Sunshine State from anywhere on earth can then direct their inquiries to us. E-mail allows easy, casual and forwardable communication worldwide at no significant cost and without time-zone limitations. Emailing allows you to contact prospects

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The D.C. Council voted July 11 to require health insurance providers to pay for contraceptives, rejecting a "conscience clause" favored by the Catholic Church after one council member argued passionately against "deferring to Rome" on matters of sex and contraception.

Jim Graham (D-Ward 1) was the harshest critic of any language that would exempt employers and their insurance companies from complying with the bill because of religious or moral beliefs.

Abortion rights

D.C. Contraceptives Bill Passes

homosexuality. Graham, who is gay, spoke directly to a crowd that included priests and nuns and said he worried about setting a precedent.

"My problem [is] surrendering decisions on public health matters to the church," Graham said. "I've spent years fighting church dogma."

Council members spent almost four hours the previous day on the bill, which would require all insurers that offer prescription drug plans to cover prescribed contraceptives, including birth control pills, implants and shots. Catholic employers such as Georgetown University and the Archdiocese of Washington object to contraception on doctrinal grounds, and the

spontaneously, relaxed and freely.

Be the Resource

Roll out the welcome mat to international atheists when they come into your area. Most of them don't know anyone in the United States. With our Atheist Alliance Network, we can help them locate contacts in many states. As their trusted atheist link, you are able to provide them with the speedy help they are looking for. It will be useful to keep handy the names and numbers of professionals the international atheist (prospective member and potential voter) will need. These could include everyone from attorneys to real-estate brokers. Remember, all of these prospects are intellectuals. They may have employment or a college curriculum waiting for them, but they'll want someone they can trust to ease their relocation. They are expectantly upscale and want to settle in quickly so you have to have all the answers at your fingertips. Understandably, you cannot know all about immigration laws or college requirements, for example, so when the issues come up, produce a pro who specializes in these fields.

The goal is to make the relocation process as smooth as possible for the international atheist. After all, he will be an asset to our movement, and I repeat once more: ultimately a voter! If you use these tips, your inter-atheist will learn from you and the success of the experience. Your efforts will pyramid because (s)he will follow your exemplary endeavors. The next thing you know, you have a hold on global atheism, and you waltzed your name into the world-wide-web.

archdiocese had urged parishioners to lobby council members to include a conscience clause exemption.

"This is a breach in the wall between church and state," Auxiliary Bishop William E. Lori said after the vote. "I think it's a sad day for religious liberty in our city."

"We're not imposing anything—these are *our* institutions," Lori added. "It seems we ought to be allowed to be genuinely Catholic institutions."

Graham's comments represented a sudden and dramatic escalation in a debate that emerged after the archdiocese launched its last-minute campaign to change the bill, which passed with little comment in June. While some council members continued to argue that the issue was about public health, larger concerns about religious freedom and Catholic morality dominated the discussion.

When first introduced late last year, the bill included an exemption for religious institutions, but that language was removed by the council's Committee on Consumer and Regulatory Affairs after hearing objections from women's health advocates. They oppose conscience clauses, arguing that the restrictions give insurers, not individual women, control over what care is available.

"I doubt the mayor would veto a bill that passed 13-0," said Elizabeth Cavendish, legal director for the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. But noting that all District laws have to go to Capitol Hill, she added, "There's always a bit of threat from an anti-choice Congress."