

## Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

**MIAMI:** Sunday, March 19, 2:00 - 4:00 pm, at the Broward County Main Library, 8th floor, 100 S. Andrews Ave., in beautiful downtown Fort Lauderdale. Topic for debate: *Living with Religious Wars*  
 FMI: Patrick Bens, 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441  
 e-mail [atheist1@bellsouth.net](mailto:atheist1@bellsouth.net)

**Singles Happy Hour**—each Wednesday from 4-6pm at MUCKER'S British Restaurant & Pub, 4506-08 Inverray Blvd. in Landerhill. For directions, call the restaurant at 954/749-4446.

### VETERANS FOR PEACE

Vets Working Against the Priests in Military Culture

For info call Ed Corl 727/321-6217 or  
 Geo Boone 813/782-5428

**TAMPA:** Saturday, February 26, (last Saturday of each month), 12:00 - 1:30 pm in room A of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater.

**Saturday, March 25, Noon - 1:30** at an alternate location: Pinellas Park Technical Services Bldg., 6051 78th Avenue North (NW corner of 78th Ave. N and 60th Street North) in the Public Meeting Room. The building will be closed except for our room. Plenty of free parking. We may be holding future meetings in Pinellas Park (the center of the Pinellas peninsula) and want to determine if this is convenient.

**Monthly Dinner**—Tuesday, March 28, 6pm at PoFolks Restaurant, 2001 34th St N, St. Petersburg (just south of 22nd Ave). FMI on dinners: Ed Golly—813/839-7567 or Jerry Moore—727/526-4223.

**PALM BEACH:** Meetings are held the third Sunday of each month at 1pm at the Piccadilly Cafeteria in West Palm Beach. Call Charles Schisler at 561/627-6340 or 561/624-9339 for exact details and directions.

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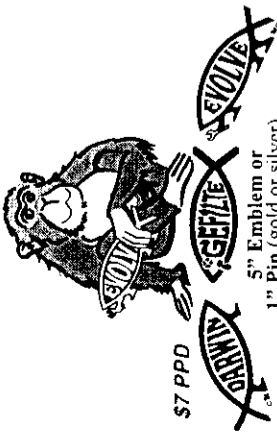
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## Atheists of Florida...where did we come from?

—Ed Golly, President, Atheists of Florida

*With so many new members in Atheists of Florida, it seems that many people are unfamiliar with the genesis of our organization. With our first issue of the millennium, we offer this review of the foundation of A of F.*

**A**THEISTS OF FLORIDA actually evolved from two chapters of American Atheists, the organization founded by Madalyn Murray O'Hair. In the early 1980's, AA maintained about 15 chapters around the country. In Miami, Christos Tzanetakos had become director. Under his leadership, the chapter had grown significantly and created a scholarship fund with assets of over \$6,000. Tampa Bay had also formed chapters with only moderate success.

The primary purpose of these chapters was to generate more membership for American Atheists. Even though the national organization did produce chapter organization manuals, most directors neglected to follow them and did not conform to the intentions of AA. Bowling leagues and highway clean-ups were not constructively fighting state/church separation. Other chapters were overtly taking matters into their own hands and causing more problems than new members for AA.

To protect the assets of American Atheists from hostile lawsuits, O'Hair formed seven corporations. Each had five board members, three of which were always the O'Hairs—Madalyn, her second son, Jon Murray, and her adopted granddaughter Robin Murray O'Hair. Control of all corporations would always be closely held by the O'Hair family.

Contrary to the state laws governing the operation of non-profit corporations, none of the officers or directors were ever elected by the membership. Rather, they were appointed by the Family. Eventually, Jon Murray was appointed President for life of American Atheists by his mother.

Tzanetakos, recognizing the completely illegal aspect of the operation of AA, complained bitterly to the O'Hairs. He was utterly ignored by them.

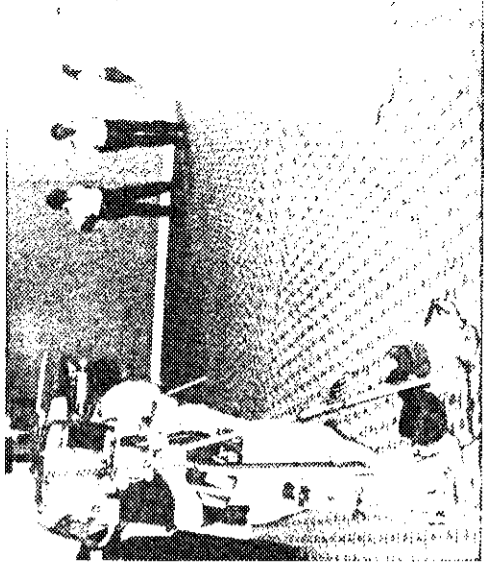
By the early nineties, under pressure by Tzanetakos to clean up their operating practices, AA decided to shut down all but two chapters, including both Florida chapters. Two which were engaged in litigation (always at their own expense with virtually no help

from AA) remained active. Since chapters operated under AA state charters, the O'Hairs were able to simply withdraw all monies from the chapter bank accounts and intercept all mail directed to their headquarters in Austin, Texas. This included over \$6,285 in the Miami chapter account.

Many of the chapters around the country were furious about the closings and the way they were conducted. Several of the largest and most successful chapters, including Miami, Minnesota, Los Angeles and San Francisco, simply re-formed under state charters as non-profit organizations and continued to operate.

In 1992, Tzanetakos founded Atheists of Florida, Inc. with the Florida Secretary of State as a non-profit organization. Aware of meetings which were continuing in the Tampa Bay area, he persuaded those persons to join Atheists of Florida and form a second chapter.

As more independent chapters formed, John Massen, of the San Francisco area, conceived the idea of forming a national alliance of atheist societies. Bringing directors of several atheist and Humanist chapters together, he chartered the Atheist Alliance in California in September, 1991. Atheists of Florida became one of those charter member societies.

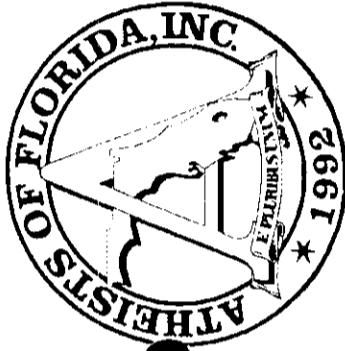


Unretouched photo of O'Hair at 1990 convention—she really did not have a soul!

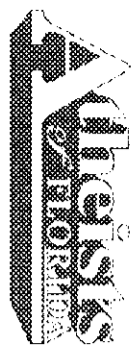
The single common thread of all Member Societies is that they are democratically operated in accordance with published bylaws. Each Member Society is allowed to have one vote at the Alliance board of directors, either through one representative or through two reps having 1/2 vote each. The Board elects the

(continued page 3)

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church  
 Sponsor of the MARK TWIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND, Incorporated  
 A Member Society of the ATHEIST ALLIANCE, the Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies



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Chapters:

Miami/Ft. Lauderdale
P. O. Box 640634
Miami, FL 33164-0634
(305) 940-0442 / (954) 929-0441
Fax: (305) 949-3826
atheist1@bellsouth.net

Tampa Bay
PO Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681
(813) 835-1500 / (813) 839-7567
ATHALFLE@aol.com

374 Golfview Rd. #306
N Palm Beach, FL 33408
(561) 624-9359 / (561) 627-6340
schlisler@gate.net

Orlando

(904) 808-1884
Mark Twain Scholarship Fund
Phone/Fax: 561-465-6402

Published eight times a year by Atheists of Florida, Inc., a non-profit, educational Corporation founded to heighten public awareness about atheism, monitor state/church separation issues, and provide intellectually stimulating contacts for the membership.

Membership dues

- Life Member \$ 500.00 Yr
Sustaining 50.00 Yr
Couple 40.00 Yr
Individual 30.00 Yr
Student (under 25 yrs.) 10.00 Yr
Newsletter (out of state) 10.00 Yr

Send newsletter correspondence to Tampa Bay Chapter, address above. The A of F newsletter is provided free to our members as a medium of exchange. Letters from our members are published on a space-available basis. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Atheists of Florida, Inc. is a Member Society of the national Atheist Alliance.

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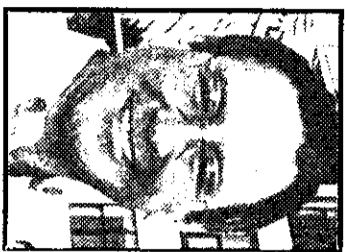
Editor: Ed Golly
Printing & mailing (same rates): Jerry Moore

I AM WRITING THIS STATEMENT in the first month of the "New Millennium" and for me, that's the problem. You see, the "Millennium" denotes the anniversary of the end of BC and the beginning of AD and we all know what AD means.

I was pondering this on New Year's Eve as I watched the pictures from the Vatican

Message from the Chairman
Misdirected celebration

—Anthony Schlefstein



beamed world wide via satellite. Yes pictures, nobody seemed to know what the Pope was saying but literally billions of people were spending billions of dollars essentially in celebration of the birthday of Jesus Christ. What a sad commentary that so much time, energy and resources were being spent to celebrate a DATE.

Just think how all of those resources could be spent by a truly enlightened society. Why, we could probably wipe out several different diseases and feed millions of starving people with the money wasted on this one celebration.

If we were really looking to celebrate something, why couldn't we start by cele-

brating the nobility of man. We could start by celebrating the anniversary of the birth of all the scientists and inventors who enhanced our knowledge of the universe over the last thousand years. People like Galileo Newton, Einstein and Madame Curie.

We could celebrate people of courage who dared to dream new dreams and think new thoughts, no matter what the consequences were. People like Darwin, Thomas Paine, Columbus and Twain.

And finally we could celebrate those you know who are not afraid to be free thinkers. You are the people who put your faith in your own intellect and in the limitless capacities of all mankind. You are the few who are not afraid to show your true convictions, who know that to be an Atheist is to be courageous.

Going forward, we must foster education and promote critical thinking to empower the next generation and those of future generations enabling them to purge mankind of all dogmatic, unscientific ideas and superstitions. Atheists of Florida has already initiated this effort with the founding in 1995 of it's official scholarship "The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc." But, most important of all, we must be vigilant against any attempt by individuals or groups to usurp the ideas and philosophy of atheism for personal gains, thus replacing the religious profiteers with Atheist profiteers. To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, Atheism should never become another revolution shifting the burden of tyranny from one shoulder to another.

WHEN SOMEONE DISCOVERS that I'm an atheist, two reactions often occur. First, the person declares that atheism is my religion. Second, they will enter into a dialogue about how the very existence of our entire civilization is totally indebted to Christianity. Especially democracy. In the contorted "logic" of the Christian mind, democracy and law are directly attributed to

Message from the President
Democracy in Traction
—Ed Golly

Christianity, and neither would exist without it. Somehow, the thinking goes, the human species could never possibly establish a ci-

One way assaults

A recent Tribune editorial, spotlighting "the bitter fruit of religious insult," fell far short of the mark when it came to making people aware of the many methods of insult Americans must endure. Yes, the painting in Brooklyn was offensive to Catholics. But Catholic bashing pales in comparison to the myriad ways Catholics and other religious fundamentalists have

LETTERS



"It is riskier to appear non-religious (even non-fundamentalist) than scientifically imbecilic."

bashed and assaulted secular society. Almost daily, the Tribune acts as a conduit for insults to gays, lesbians, abortion doctors, atheists, humanists, equal rights advocates, civil rights advocates, the ACLU or any other group the religious establishment cares to target. The recent lap dancing fiasco is a perfect example of the religious assault on secularism. Interestingly, neither the Tribune nor any other outraged Christian group cries foul. When columnist Cal Thomas heaped dung upon secularist views, his paintings are hung in the Tribune gallery of opinion without batting an eye. I cannot praise the painting in Brooklyn, yet I must empathize with the urge to slap the face of religious arrogance which assails our every human right and freedom. Religious interests would do well to reconsider their assault upon secularism before crying foul. When outraged secularists vent their frustrations on canvases, an important message is being sent to America. Like it or not, it is constitutionally protected free speech. Instead of trying to silence or vilify that voice, we should lend an ear to what it is trying to say and why. —Jim Young Lithia

As appeared in the 12/29/99 Tampa Tribune

It's a little tough for me to get all choked up about the insults those poor Catholics have to put up with. Considering that atheists and agnostics are regularly demonized by your paper (most of the churches that, coincidentally no doubt, advertise in it), I find it hard to get worked up about an artist who flings dung on a painting. Of course, let's not forget all the others you regularly bash: gays and lesbians, liberals, lap dancers, or just about anyone not fitting into your Limbaugh-esque vision of the way things oughta be. No, I'm not particularly impressed by the Dung Virgin, but then I'm less impressed by the tacky used car lots—oh, excuse me, those are homes—featured in your paper as "decorated for the season." In fact, I apologize to used car dealers, as the gaudy red and green and multicolored displays of most homes make the worst car lots seem mighty tasteful. Of course,

were I to note that I find these displays offensive, I'd just be called a "Scrooge" or a "Grinch" and ignored. Funny how easily hypocrisy is overlooked by your newspaper when you're committing it. —Brent Yaciv Tampa

Taking on the pious

As appeared in the St. Petersburg Times 12/19 Re: In the U.S. the irreligious bear the greatest intolerance.

Bravo for Robyn Blumner! She has said what badly needs saying again and again. The quarrel in Congress over the choice of the new chaplain illustrates, as she points out, that "it seems American politicians would rather suffer religious war than secular peace."

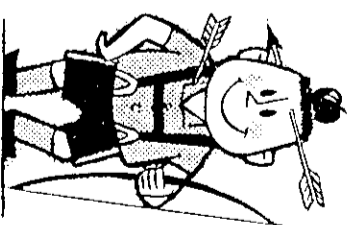
She cites another example of deep-seated respect for "belief"—the evasiveness about teaching "creationism" as a science in the public schools. Right on target are her words about those seeking public office who feel it is "riskier to appear non-religious (even non-fundamentalist) than scientifically imbecilic." She dares to stand up for Gov. Jesse Ventura's forthrightness about religion, and for Wendy Kaminer, who has written about intellectuals' "deference to belief..." Her article is a wonderfully lucid, irrefutable answer to all those bemoaning the "secularization" of our society. —Abigail Ann Martin Valrico

Restart the millennium

Dear Ed Golly: In the report by Patrick Bens of the 1999 Dade & Broward Chapter, in the last paragraph, I noticed "December 1999....our last supper of the Millennium." First of all it should be spelled "Millennium". The second millennium, and also the 20th Century, did not end on December 31st, 1999. The correct ending date is December 31st, 2000 with the third millennium and the 21st Century beginning on January 1st, 2001. Patrick Bens has twelve more chances to "Meet & Eat" in this century and millennium.

I feel that we should ensure as much accuracy as possible in Atheist literature so our detractors can't point out errors on our part.

One final point. Did you ever wonder why in the title of his classic novel 2001: A Space Odyssey Arthur Charles Clarke chose "2001" and not "2000"? Thank you sincerely, all the best in 2000.—Colin F. Servais Mansfield, TX



Haue Jf atifi!

Technically true, Colin, but then the rest of the world missed it, too. —Ed

# Freethought Across No More Gods! the Millennium Serve Humanity!

Once Again, While the Community of Faith  
Gathers to Celebrate a Resurrection Fantasy,  
the Community of Reason Gathers to  
Celebrate the Wonderful World of Reality.

EASTER WEEKEND, APRIL 21-23, 2000  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

Your Hosts  
ATHEISTS & OTHER FREETHINKERS

Join atheists, freethinkers, humanists, rationalists, secular humanists, skeptics and all religion-free friends for an unforgettable experience.

Check the Alliance web site for convention updates.  
[www.AtheistAlliance.org](http://www.AtheistAlliance.org)

CONVENTION CONTACTS  
AOF voice mail 916-920-7834  
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[www.rthoughtsfree.org](http://www.rthoughtsfree.org)

## CONVENTION HOTEL REGISTRATION INFORMATION

The convention site is the Hilton Hotel, 2200 Harvard St., Sacramento, CA 95815. Special convention room rates are \$72 per night, single or double, available for Thursday through Sunday nights, April 20 through 23. You must request Rate Code "SAA" to receive the convention rate. Make room reservations directly with the hotel.

Call by March 31st to get these rates. Call toll-free 800-344-4321 or 800-HILTONS, or locally 916-922-4700.

CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM (Please enclose with payment)

NAME(S) (Print clearly so name tags can be made)

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Registration(s), incl. debate @ \$85 ea. \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Debate tickets for Non-Registrants @ \$8 ea. \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
(After Mar. 20, add \$10 to each registration)

Friday night dinner(s) @ \$35 each  \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Camp Quest kids (ages 4-12) @ \$50 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Fee covers Thurs. 3 - 8 p.m., Fri. 8 a.m. - 8 p.m., Sat. 8:30 a.m. - 10 p.m., Sun. 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., materials, lunches, field trips.

Saturday lunch(es) @ \$25 each  \$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL enclosed for all registrations, meals, \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday banquet(s) @ \$35 each  \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Camp Quest kids, extra debate tickets \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Note in box how many vegetarian meals, if any.

Write check to "Freethought Across the Millennium" or "FAM." Mail to FAM, P.O. Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851.

## Cover story from page 1

officers.

Atheist Alliance quickly drew in member societies disenchanted with American Atheists along with independent groups and grew large enough to begin holding national conventions. Meanwhile, American Atheists had announced they would hold no more conventions which had always been conducted during Easter weekend. Consequently, the Alliance decided to adopt it as their convention weekend (see insert in this newsletter)

In September, 1995, the O'Hairs mysteriously disappeared from their home one morning. By now all three are presumed dead in a swindling scheme directed by their former office manager, a convicted murderer named Daid Waters. Although not yet charged with any of their murders he is presumed responsible for the conversion of the American Atheists Sustaining Trust Fund, which had grown through membership donations to \$650,000, into gold coins before the murders. The whereabouts of the coins is likely known only to Waters. It seems the authorities lack the evidence to try Waters for the murders and if acquitted, he could not be re-tried in the future if the bodies or coins ever did turn up.

With the vanishing of the O'Hairs, the remaining directors of American Atheists appointed new officers (again, no membership elections) and moved the headquarters to New Jersey. None of the original Miami chapter monies have ever been returned.

**Now grown to 28** Member Societies, the Alliance operates a Cable TV outreach program (AVTOP), holds its annual conventions, and assists start-up societies. The Alliance Web page lists all active societies and connects inquiries to us.

ballots, which are counted by three cardinals and then burned. They vote until a candidate (usually a cardinal) has two-thirds of the votes plus one.

After 30 ballots, one just needs a simple majority. The cardinals consider their choice to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. (If that's the case, why don't they vote a majority on the first ballot?)

No other members of the Catholic church are allowed to vote for pope. Nor do they elect the cardinals who supposedly represent them. In fact, the closest elective process I can compare this to is the former Soviet Politburo, communist China, or Cuba.

To my knowledge, the concept of democracy appears nowhere in the Bible. It came to us from Greece, long before Christianity. The alleged Christ came as a king, not a representative. Christianity and other major religions are based on commandments, which are really primarily prohibitions (Thou shalt not...etc.).

By contrast, our nation's constitution was not ratified until the first ten amendments, which became the Bill of Rights, were incorporated into it. Rights, or protections from those to whom we give power over us, are far

Soon after the formation of Atheists of Florida, Tzanetos recreated the scholarship fund. Named in honor of Mark Twain, the Fund sponsors an essay competition each year open to college level students. For 1999, we received 24 entries, mostly from Florida institutions. The five trustees of the Fund select each year's topic, then read and evaluate each essay submitted rating them on a numerical basis. First and second place winners will receive \$500 each, third and fourth place winners pick up \$300 each, all applied to students' tuitions. The first and second place essays are published each year in our newsletter (see page 4) and in the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund annual report.

For five years, Atheists of Florida produced a series of 60 30-minute cable TV videos. In 1994, A of F co-sponsored the Alliance national convention in Orlando with the Humanists of Florida. We have grown to four chapters in the state and a membership of over 225. A of F produces eight newsletters per year and an annual report for both A of F and the Scholarship Fund. Our annual participation in the Miami Book Fair International, which is essentially a street fair for book vendors, and at Circus McGerks in south Pinellas County, are outstanding opportunities to build our membership and meet members of the public interested in our organization.

Our board of directors now consists of 18 members, all elected by the membership. That board elects the officers at the annual board meeting. The minutes of all meetings are available to any member. Our treasurer files all required tax returns with the state and federal government, and our finances are published in our newsletter and annual reports.

The need for an atheist organization seems more evident each week. Our membership can become a voice for all non-superstitious Floridians and have a national voice through the Atheist Alliance

more progressive than prohibitions dictated by those who would rule over us *without* our consent.

Atheism gives us a lifestyle free of concern over the primitive, outdated prohibitions of Christianity. Laws, rights, and concepts of right and wrong are dictated by the society in which we live and the time in which we exist. Our constitutional rights are amendable as our society evolves. Only a secular society can realistically evaluate our laws and rights based on our understanding of what we are and where we are best headed. Only secular thinking, clear of religious superstition, can best serve a progressive society.

## Mark Twain Scholarship Raffle

Great thanks to these additional purchasers of raffle tickets for our Scholarship Fund. Drawing for the beautiful ring and poster will be held at the Tampa chapter February meeting.

Name	Donation	Tickets
Jacques Musy	\$ 5.00	1
Allan Altman	100.00	20
Terese Rockefeller	25.00	5
Martha Williamson	25.00	0 *
Edwin Gottfried	20.00	4
Helene Klein	25.00	5
Anne Canarie	5.00	1
Alton Pittman	25.00	5
Norme Cossey	100.00	0 *
* Declined Tickets		

*It is not worthwhile to try to keep history from repeating itself, for man's character will always make the preventing of the repetitions impossible.*

—Mark Twain

Mark Twain Scholarship Fund

## *Breaking the Chains of the Past to Liberate the Future*

—by A. Lauren Yant

**T**WAIN, BORN SAUEL CLEMENS on November 30, 1835, recognized the inevitable implications of human nature on the future of society. He knew that ignorant religious beliefs would ultimately cause the downfall of humankind. This is evident everyday in Europe and Asia, where people kill each other in God's name; in the Middle East, where God's followers kill themselves in his name; and in other countries where men oppress women in God's name. In fact, history is doused with the "achievements" of religion: bloody crusades, culture-destroying missionaries, mass-murdering conquerors, and torturing invasions. Children today, especially in the South, are being taught a biased and Christian-based view of history that will hinder their development into rational, free-thinking individuals. They are taught to view Christianity as the dominating force in the world, and any deviance to it are blamed on opposition to Christianity. However, it is this very intolerance to opposition that drives the wars and oppression of religious groups around the world. Therefore, instead of exposing children to questionable, often detrimental values based on superstitious religious teachings, adults should teach them to use reason and scientific evidence to reach their own personal conclusions about life, its origins, and its meaning. Children should not be taught to live their lives in fear of an imagined hell or in hopes of an eternal afterlife. On the other hand, they should be encouraged to experience life for what we know it to be here on Earth and allow them to reach full, human potential.

A. Lauren Yant is the first place winner of the 1999 Mark Twain Scholarship Fund essay competition. Yant is a 20-year-old student at the University of Alabama studying advertising and psychology with a GPA of 3.43. The remaining three winning essays will be published in upcoming newsletters.

lightenment. Socrates was correct in saying that he "knew nothing", and his statement led Arcesilus and Carneades to formulate this version of academic skepticism based on the principle that "nothing can be known for certain." Under this scheme, if a proposition cannot be demonstrated with absolute certainty, it may be false. Therefore, the proposition does not constitute truth and is considered opinion. This would lead one to believe that humanity itself is a compilation of opinion and circumstance, and that humans, with limited perceptive abilities, cannot possibly fathom the immensity of the universe or the infinity of time. Fossil evidence suggests that the earth has been in a constant state of evolution for over 3,000 million years. Would it be reasonable, therefore, to assume that humans, who live an average of less than a century, can possibly even begin to understand the realm of possibilities within this universe? Again, probably not, because according to Socrates, humans can know nothing for certain.

The detriment of ignorant religious beliefs is evidenced daily in society. An excellent example of this hindrance is the "Jesus Video Project of Alabama," initiated by Dr. Bob Crosby. This \$5.5 million project succeeded in sending 1.7 million videos about the life of Jesus into the homes of Alabamians. The Alabama Free-Thought Association argues a simple truth: that "the purpose of the project was to convert Alabama, but the majority of Alabamians were already Christian!" Dr. Crosby should have considered the targeted groups were more likely to dismiss the video as junk mail than to turn from their opposing philosophical outlooks. It is obvious that this ignorance wasted \$5.5 million dollars—money that could have been spent to feed the hungry, house the homeless, and aid the disabled. The Alabama Free-Thought Association responded by recycling collected videos and donating the proceeds to non-evangelical charities such as public schooling and AIDS outreach programs. Clearly, those of the free-thinking persuasion accomplished the most good in this situation. Christian institutions are often praised for the good works they do here on Earth; however, the opposite is often the case. One survey showed that while 34 percent of non-Christians had given money to a homeless person in the past year, only 24 percent of "born-again Christians" had done so. The survey went on to find that 48 percent of non-believers had donated money to non-profit organizations, compared to 47 percent of Christians surveyed. According to this survey, Christians are no more generous, if not less, than non-believers. In fact, more Christians surveyed had been divorced, while more non-Christians had attended community meetings on local issues in the past year. Non-believers meet, if not surpass, the supposed goals of the Christian faith, as demonstrated by these figures.

Religious leaders today often argue that our country was founded on Christian beliefs, which should be upheld. They fail to remember that our founding fathers



# *Atheist Alliance 6th Annual National Convention*

*Easter Weekend, April 21-23  
Sacramento, California*

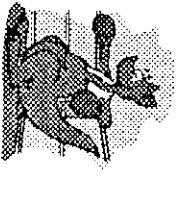
Special for Kids

Camp Quest Fun All Weekend!

Hosted by •  
*Atheists & Other Free thinkers*

Special for All

Dan Barker Debates Christians!



**Marie Castle, Alliance president**

Ms. Castle will open the convention with, "We Don't Have Time to Whine: Defining the New Millennium — Not for the Weak-Minded." She's from Minnesota and as plain-spoken as her state's notorious governor.

**Herb Silverman, "Notorious Notary"**

This is the atheist math professor from Charleston SC whose state spent 5 years and \$40,000 to keep him from becoming a notary public. No atheists allowed in public office there! Silverman is a natural comedian. You will enjoy his tale of woe as much as you are horrified by it.

**"Ace the Magnificent" aka Dr. Joe Morrow, Prof. of Psychology**

This will be fun! Morrow is a magician. "Ace the Magnificent" will show how rational thinking goes beyond the evidence of the senses.

**Charlotte Poe, founder & president of Free thinkers of Ventura County**

Ms. Poe will supply the catharsis we all need occasionally to vent our frustrations with religion. Her topic: "Crime and Immorality in the Catholic Church."

**Andrew Benson, author of The True Origins of Christianity & the Bible**

Benson attacks religion at its roots—its fictitious, forged and fraudulent "history." He is an enthusiastic, entertaining speaker, a Greek (despite his name) who loves to dance and sing and unsettle religionists. The theme of his speech is atheist proselytizing: "I will make you fishers of men," he promises, "and you will use the Bible as bait."

**CAMP QUEST FOR KIDS!**

Bring the kids! Instructors from the acclaimed freethought summer camp will provide care in a learning and fun environment for ages 4 - 12.

Pat Kelley will initiate you into the wonders of web sites and show you how to navigate the internet.

**THE MARKETPLACE**

Shop 'till you drop in the god-free shop! VENDORS! Call for space: 916-920-7834

**John Michael Patrick Murphy, radio talk show host of "Murphy's Law"**

Here's the theme of all our organizing: Murphy's topic is "The Time is Now"—for people of reason to come out of the closet! This will bring you to your feet, cheering!

**John Hill, School Board Member**

Get an insider's "View from the Board"—the school board. This veteran school board member will tell how to influence those people and even become one of them. Find out things you never knew about public schools.

**Lucia Hall, Skeptical Thinker**

Ms. Hall asks, "Can (and should!) skeptics challenge religion?" The answer is YES, and Ms. Hall gives the scientific principles that support her assertion. A "must hear" presentation for atheist activists.

**Paul Storey, host of "The Third Millennium" TV series**

If you think religion may have some value, Storey will lay out the facts to the contrary with his frightening, informative talk, "The Damaging Effect of Religion on Overpopulation and the Environment."

**Drs. Paul Geisert & Mynga Futrell, instructional materials developers**

Drs. Geisert and Futrell are the creative geniuses behind the teaching module, "Different Drummers," which introduces students in comparative religion classes to the contributions of non-conforming thinkers (like us) to human progress. They'll talk about the status of teaching about religion and freethought in public schools.

**DEMOCRACY IN ACTION!**

**Atheist Alliance open board meeting**  
Watch the only fully democratic grassroots national atheist-humanist organization in action. The board meets openly late Thursday and most of Friday. Policies are made, budgets are set, problems are resolved and elections are held, all done entirely by representatives of the Atheist Alliance member societies. Truly unique!

REGISTER TODAY! SEE OTHER SIDE

*Charitable choice, a program pushed through Congress with little fanfare last year by the Radical Religious Right majority, threatens to make serious inroads into our long established principle of state/church separation*

## 'Charitable Choice' endangers separation of state and church

—Sidney M. Goetz

**S** PONSORED BY REP. JOHNNY BYRD of Hillsborough County, HB 169 seeks to capitalize on the federal law which authorizes the federal government, and state governments that choose to do so, to furnish money raised from our taxes to finance church-run charities and assist them in providing social services to their clients.

In part, this is a reaction to government efforts to remove itself from the welfare business. But, in largest part, it represents a major move by the Religious Right to obtain long-sought financial support for their religious institutions. Leaders of the move are, of course, the same bunch that plumps for vouchers to support private and religious schools.

In summary, HB 169 authorizes state agencies or political subdivisions of the state to contract with religious organizations under certain direct assistance programs and allows religious organizations to accept certificates, warrants, or other forms of disbursement under applicable programs in the same manner as any

other nongovernmental provider. The bill provides that a religious organization that enters into a contract with a state agency or political subdivision or that accepts monetary disbursements will retain its independence from state or local government. Moreover, a state agency or political subdivision is prohibited from requiring a religious organization to change its governance practices or the display of religious symbols or scripture as a condition of contract or prior to its acceptance of any financial disbursement. According to the sponsors, the bill does not appear to have any significant fiscal impact.

We are alarmed by the lack of understanding on the part of the general public of the long-term implications of this legislation. It is true that, in the past, we've seen federal funds used to assist charitable groups affiliated with a variety of religious institutions—Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, Lutheran Social Services and Jewish Family Services are among the examples. However, these organizations are separation corporations that have been pledged to deliver their services without prejudice and without proselytizing their clients. But the new "charitable choice" legislation makes government funds available to "pervasively sectarian" faith groups and provides for no accounting as to how the money earmarked for charitable purposes is actually spent.

Unfortunately, the leading presidential candidates of both major political parties have expressed support for so-called "faith-based," government-funded social action programs such as aid to the poor and homeless, as well as to the drug and alcohol addicted. It seems these candidates are equally anxious to have government wipe its hands of any direct responsibility.

I have written two letters to Myrtle Smith-Carroll, Chair of the Juvenile Board of Pinellas County, and board member of the ACLU, regarding the pilot program described as privatizing social services formerly under the supervision and control of state which could be conducted by programs we know as "charitable choice." In all likelihood, the Juvenile Welfare Board in Pinellas County will be designated as the gatekeeper for this program eliminating involvement by religious organizations. But in Pasco, Hillsborough, Manatee and Sarasota Counties, and possibly dozens of other counties in Florida, government could utilize religious organizations to provide the services if charitable choice becomes law.

We can all express our reaction to HB 169 to our representatives. A good way to approach legislators is to ask them to look at what has worked in the past which did not include charitable choice.

But the worst thing we can do is nothing at all. Already, the state of Florida is taking your tax dollars and sending them directly to private schools indoctrinating students into their religious superstitions. Charitable choice is just another short step toward theocratizing America.

took away "our" country from its original inhabitants, the Indians. This is yet another example of the damage of religious oppression and domination. Millions of acres of land were taken from the Indians, and thousands of lives were lost in this conquest. Is this the history that Americans are so proud of? Is this the foundation on which this great country is growing?

Mark Twain once said, "It is agreed, in this country, that if a man can arrange his religion so that it perfectly satisfies his conscience, it is not incumbent on him to care whether the arrangement is satisfactory to anyone else or not." Because of our 'Christian forefathers,' thousands were killed and a centuries-old culture was almost destroyed. They did what satisfied their consciences, and to this day, their actions have been justified with Christian doctrine. It is the same ignorance and intolerance that will kill America's children—not their bodies, but their hearts and minds.

Education is the key to liberating the future for America's children. This includes the teaching of evolution by natural selection, discovered by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. The 'story of creation', on the other hand, is based on religious superstition and faith. As discussed before, 'faith' is that which cannot be proven; however, proof of evolutionary theories is evident in every living thing on earth. Another

*The American Association for the Advancement of Science responds to the Kansas State Board of Education decision on the education of students in the science of evolution and cosmology*

## AAAS responds

**T**HE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION for the Advancement of Science deplores the recent decision by the Kansas State Board of Education to remove references to evolution and cosmology from its state education standards and assessments, thereby making central principles for the scientific understanding of the universe and its history optional subjects for science education. This decision by the Board is a serious disservice to students and teachers in the State of Kansas. To become informed and responsible citizens in our increasingly technological world, students need to study and judge for themselves the empirical evidence and concepts central to current scientific understanding. The actions of the State Board of Education may place Kansas students at a competitive disadvantage in their education and work environments. By discouraging teachers from using the best available professional knowledge about the nature and history of the universe, the Board's decision will make it more difficult for Kansas to recruit capable and inspiring science teachers.

Recognizing that the State Board of Education decision is a serious setback for public education in the State of Kansas, the

**John W. MacKay, P.A.**

*Board Certified Civil Trial Lawyer  
Certified Circuit Court Mediator*

**201 South Westland Avenue**

**The Mackay Building**

**Tampa, FL 33606**

Tampa (813) 254-8835

Statewide (800) 813-RIDE

Fax (813) 254-6662

info@mackaylaw.com

step in the deliverance of children's minds from such constraints is the banning of any religious practice within the public school system. This, of course, includes school-led or public prayer. With education and the separation of the church and state-driven institutions, American society as well as the human race may begin to reclaim its individuality.

To quote Twain once more, "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination." Children must not be forced to take on handed-down beliefs and ignorance; instead, they must be encouraged to seek personal enlightenment through education and intellectual thought. Second-hand convictions are undoubtedly based on faith, that which cannot be proven, and must be ignored. Conversely, personal satisfaction and knowledge may be truly obtained through free thought and open-minded study. It is only through these means that society and its children will break the chains of the past to liberate the future.

AAAS adopts the following resolution:

Whereas, it has never been more important for American citizens to achieve a basic understanding of contemporary science and technology; and

Whereas, the concepts and evidence inextricably linked to our understanding of the nature and history of the universe are fundamental to the basic education of all Americans; and

Whereas, learning succeeds best when teachers and students can explore, investigate, and criticize the fundamental concepts and ideas in science; and

Whereas, learning and inquiry are severely inhibited if teachers are placed in a position where they may feel pressured to alter their teaching of the fundamental concepts of science in response to demands external to the scientific disciplines.

Therefore Be It Resolved, that the AAAS urges the citizens of Kansas to restore the topics of evolution and cosmology to the state curriculum. AAAS stands ready to assist all concerned citizens of Kansas in securing the repeal of this damaging ruling by the State Board of Education.

Therefore Be It Further Resolved, that the AAAS and others committed to educational excellence in science work aggressively to propose measures that could adversely affect the teaching of science, wherever they may occur.

Therefore Be It Further Resolved, that the AAAS encourages its affiliated societies to endorse this resolution and to communicate their support to the citizens and appropriate public officials in Kansas.

Adopted by the AAAS Board of Directors 15 October, 1999.

## Vouchers dumped

CLEVELAND—A federal judge in Ohio last December declared Cleveland's controversial private school voucher program unconstitutional.

U.S. District Judge Solomon Oliver Jr., ruling on a motion for summary judgment, said the plan violates state/church separation because it directs taxpayer dollars into the coffers of religious schools.

"This decision is a powerful rebuke to those who believe the government can force taxpayers to support churches or church schools," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United, one of the groups sponsoring the case. "The message from the courts is clear: It's time to quit wasting time with these unconstitutional schemes and find real ways to improve public education."

The Ohio decision marks the second time within a year that a federal court has declared vouchers unconstitutional. In addition, state supreme courts in Maine and Vermont struck down vouchers last year.

The suit was filed against the Cleveland voucher program last July, charging that it violates constitutional state/church separation. Earlier, Oliver issued a temporary restraining order placing the program on hold, but the U.S. Supreme Court later said the plan could proceed while the legal challenge continues.

Ohio's Pilot Project Scholarship Program, which was passed into law by legislators in 1995, issues vouchers of up to \$2,500 for Cleveland students to attend religious and other private schools. The lawsuit, *Simmons-Harris vs Zelman*, was filed on behalf of three parents and taxpayers by Americans United and the other organizations.

## So much for state's rights

WASHINGTON—Right now, Congress is considering the so-called Pain Relief Promotion Act. This law will essentially nullify the Death with Dignity Law, twice

passed by the people of Oregon.

HR 2260 was introduced by Henry Hyde and written by the staff of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. If it passes, doctors in Oregon—and any other state, including Florida, who write prescriptions with the intent of causing a gentle death for those with terminal diseases, run the risk of losing their prescribing license and facing prosecution—even when there is a law permitting it!

This bill is an effort by Congress to override what the people of Oregon twice voted for: Democracy in action, or Congressionally mandated theocracy?

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## Thou shalt not be offended

TAMPA—According to Tampa State Senator John Grant, there is no constitutional right to be free from religion in the United States.

In November, Grant, (R-obviously) filed legislation which would allow the Ten Commandments to be shown in any public space. That includes courtrooms, classrooms, public parks, libraries, post offices, or police stations. Virtually anywhere!

Inspired by Judge Moore, the Alabama crackpot who wallpapered his courtroom with the commandments and offered prayer before each session, Grant seeks to fend off any opposition to similar constitutional violations in advance by getting this legislation passed. The question will be taken up this spring in the state legislature. Do you think Gov.-elect Bush would sign it? Duhhh.....

According to an article in the *Tampa Tribune*, Roy Kaplan, executive director of the National Conference for Community and Justice in Tampa, said the proposed measure was unconstitutional. "It's been tested elsewhere. It does nothing but create conflict."

But Grant was unimpressed with Kaplan's observation and saw no probable conflict with those of superstitions differing from Judeo Christianity.

"They don't have to read it if they don't want to," quipped Grant.

The legislation makes no effort to protect display of the defining tenants of minority religions, the Humanist Manifesto, or atheism.

## Bible courses challenged

TALLAHASSEE—All fourteen Florida school districts that have taught high school courses in "Bible History" since 1977—20% of the state's school districts—have been violating the U.S. Constitution by teaching the Bible from a religious perspective, using the Bible as if it were a history textbook or otherwise failing to provide objective and secular instruction.

People For the American Way Foundation's investigation of "Bible History" instruction in Florida grew out of the successful lawsuit brought in 1998 by PFAWF and the Florida ACLU on behalf of parents and taxpayers in Lee County, who objected to their school board's adoption of unconstitutional

HUNDREDS OF SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESSES are being sued over access for the disabled—a tactic to win accommodation, or a ploy by lawyers to generate fees? The *Miami Daily Business Review* of Tuesday, December 21, 1999 is teaching atheist attorneys a valuable lesson on how the law firm of Fuller, Mallah and Associates of Miami Beach is getting even, without getting mad.

## Like shooting ducks in a barrel..

Original Article by Dan Christensen  
Rewritten for Atheist of Florida by Patrick Bens  
under the headline **Besieged by suits**



Florida churches, their schools and hospitals, large or small can be put under siege from our dedicated attorneys to accommodate our disabled atheists who can use a bold sue-'em-all strategy to enforce social change and collect piles of legal fees by using the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) to demand better access to public accommodations for the handicapped.

What's in it for the atheist plaintiffs? By law nothing, beyond a chance to precipitate physical change and make it easier for the disabled to get around historic churches and religious educational or medical buildings. Plaintiffs are generally barred from collecting damages in ADA cases. Still, prevailing plaintiffs are entitled to an award of attorney fees and costs. And that can open something of a gold mine for our atheist lawyers assembly line litigation featuring little advance research, boilerplate language and the public relations high ground.

It's hard to get 100% compliance with the law, even in new construction, we all know that. Attorneys getting \$275 an hour can win their cases automatically for demanding such simple changes as volume control on audio equipment. The provisions on attorney fees are that unassuming.

Let's employ this proven strategy as a legal assault

"Bible History" approach is hopelessly flawed and should be abandoned," said Neas. "Even the schools that appear to have made an effort to do it right still got it wrong."

The study detailed five common ways in which constitutional violations occur in the teaching of the "Bible History."

**\* The courses are framed and taught from Christian perspectives.** Excerpts: "Those who believe in God and the sending of His own only Son to die on the cross will be saved." And, "The first eleven chapters of Genesis tell about the beginning of the world, people, nations and languages."

**\* The Bible is used as a history textbook.** Materials from a Hillsborough County high school call the Bible "the most reliable source for history we have."

weapon against the arrogant religions. At the front lines we need non-profit companies that reflect advocacy for our disabled members. With the thousands of houses of worship in violation with President Clinton's ADA regulations, we can win one case a day. Especially the larger denominations with several branches across our great state must become targets of our attacks. If just the word gets out, that alone poses a very serious warning and may result in negotiations and settlements in state/church violations. A simple phone call would do.

Settlements can be obtained within a 6-12 month time frame. A typical settlement includes an agreement by the defendants to pay to modify their buildings of worship, schools or hospitals according to federal criteria and pay our legal fees, litigation costs and administrative expenses. Legal fees generally amount to from \$5,000 to \$20,000. Other costs cover payments to experts on ADA compliance. These experts are our disabled members themselves!

In terms of average fees, the \$1M figure is a wild guess. In the case of smaller churches, the settlement may as well result in handing over a lot of real estate, which our attorneys will acquire and pass on to the Atheists of Florida chapters as a tax deduction.

**With atheists' rights** being ignored nationwide, handicapped atheists now have a chance to fight back. Government is in bed with the churches and the ADA can be used to kick both bedfellows to the ground. Enforcing the ADA laws on behalf of our beloved handicapped members. A of F attorneys can take the religious leaders to task.

While the President, the Congress and the Courts are viciously acting like an alliance of enemies, it's up to atheist attorneys to lead the counter attack. The ADA is the lethal yet legal weaponry to curb or stop the violations against Atheists. This defence mechanism will shield Atheism from further organized religious terror. With this proven strategy, born in Florida, A of F can opportunely carry the battle flag and begin to win the war!

**\* Students are assumed to be Christian.** Two high schools, in an exam on I Corinthians, ask: "Why is it hard for a non-Christian to understand things about God?" Another lesson asks, "Who, according to Jesus, is the father of the Jews? The devil."

**\* The Bible is used to promote Christian faith formation and religious values and lessons.** In Levy County, a study guide reminds students that "[God] wants us to do what is right all the time." An exam on Genesis asks Columbia County students, "What stages in the Temptation and Fall of Man do we still find ourselves [in] today?"

**\* Sunday-school and other religious training exercises are used to indoctrinate students in Bible content.**