

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

PALM BEACH: Meetings are held the **third Sunday** of each month at the Herb Watt Rec. Building, just north of Palm Beach Library at 2:30 p.m.
FMI Charles Schisler (561) 624-9359

MIAMI: **January 17,** 8th floor auditorium of the Ft. Lauderdale Mann Library, from 2:00 to 4:00pm. New chapter director Patrick Bens with his wife Celina and past A of F President Christos Tzanetakos will host. For meeting information, call the Atheist Hotline at: (305) 936-0210.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA: No scheduled meeting for January. The next meeting will be **Saturday, February 6,** at the St. Johns County Public Library.
FMI: C.W. Mitchell (904) 808-1884.

Send your greeting cards this year with a freethought message! Seasonal greeting cards are now available from Atheists of Florida.

Choose from two designs:

Mark Twain - picture of Twain with a quote.
Atheists of Florida, Inc. - picture of sea lions with a quote.

Cards are available in any quantity for \$1 each including envelope. To place your order call or write to:

Atheists of Florida Greeting Card
P.O. Box 3893
Ft. Pierce, FL 34948-3893

Patrick L. Bens

New Miami Chapter Director

MIAMI - Beginning in January, 1999, Patrick Bens will assume directorship of the Miami/Dade chapter of A of F.



P.O. Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681-0753

M3/99
EDWIN GOTTFREID
724 BLUE SEAS COURT
PONTI VIEDRA BUCH FL 3208

**ADDRESS SERVICE
REQUESTED**

TAMPA: **Saturday December 26,** (last Saturday of each month), at 1:00 p.m. (note different time) in meeting room B of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater.

Monthly Dinner - Will not be held this month. Instead, we are having a holiday party at our Saturday meeting. This will be a strictly social event held with the Humanists of the Suncoast. Bring a covered dish or snacks; all drinks and napkins/tensils will be provided.

School Voucher Forum - All atheists are invited to attend a forum on school vouchers hosted by the local chapter of Americans United, Monday evening, **January 25th, 1999** at 7pm in the St. Petersburg Mann Library, 3745 9th Avenue North.

For more information on any of the above events, contact
Ed Golly—813/839-7567
Jerry Moore—727/526-4223

A native of Belgium, Bens immigrated to the U.S. in 1973. Married to Celina in 1982, they had two daughters, Mariana and Fabiola.

Bens is a successful R.E. investor and businessman. Joining Atheists of Florida in 1992, he has had many book reviews published in the A of F newsletter.

"As a director, I will aim to make it a number 1 priority to recruit more members," says Bens. He also plans to challenge the Hispanic Society of South Florida to join and seek atheists from other minority groups. Bens plans at least one picnic a year in both counties and will have a laptop present at every meeting to enlighten all members of the latest atheist web sites. Also, Bens will continue to write book reviews for the newsletter, write and translate pamphlets in French and Spanish, and work at shows like the Miami Bookfair to reach out to prospective members, raise cash, and make the distribution of our literature available to the public.

"I will continue the tradition of emphasizing to new members that the abusive intrusion of religion in local and federal government is a threat to democracy," says Bens.

Atheists of Florida

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Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

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**Atheists of
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Mailing Address:
PO Box 3893
Ft. Pierce, FL 34948
Fax: 561/465-6402
AthAIFLC@aol.com

Chapters:

**Miami /
Ft. Lauderdale**
305/936-0210

Tampa Bay
PO Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681
813/835-1500
AthAIFLE@aol.com

Palm Beach
374 Golfview Rd.
N Palm Beach, FL
33408

561/624-9359
schisler@earthlink.net

N E Florida
PO Box 860132
St. Augustine, FL
32086
904/808-1884

That old wolf in sheep's clothing
**Airport chapel
violates guidelines**

TAMPA - October 14, 9:00 am. The official opening of the Tampa International Airport Interfaith Chapel. The small room tucked invisibly beside the exit doors of the Airside F tram landing was crowded with Hillsborough County Aviation Authority members and a few onlookers. HCAA Chairman Louis Miller hosted the event and introduced only three speakers. Although no prayers were babbled, they lauded this wonderful event as representing final completion of the 30-year-old airport.

Several weeks later, a visit to the always deserted chapel disclosed a surprising but not unexpected development. First some background.

As the chapel was being proposed, several people representing various different groups (including A of F) spoke out in opposition to construction of the structure. HCAA thus realized that it could not just ignore the legal violations they were committing carte blanche in an effort to appease all parties. Miller structured guidelines for use of the chapel.

In April a conceptual presentation on the Chapel was prepared. The Authority had approved the designation "Airport Chapel." Quoting from the document:

"In its approval, the Board determined that the Authority would finish the interior space at its sole cost and expense. This would include required seating arrangements and any amenities that might be appropriate." (see **Chapel**, page 3)

**Miami International
Bookfair**

MIAMI - For the second consecutive year, Atheists of Florida made an appearance at the bookfair.

Running three days, our stand featured our pamphlets entitled *The truth about atheism*, newsletters, our booklet *Women: Religion and Power* by Flo Morgeiroth, our black T-shirts displaying the slogan "Atheists are beyond belief," coffee mugs branding the Atheists of Florida logo and our new seasonal greeting cards.

The two books we featured were Mark Twain's *Letters from Earth* and Bertrand Russell's *If I am not a Christian*.

The expense for the stand was \$450 but we recovered almost all of that fee through book sales. More important was the contact we made with atheists in the Miami area.

By the second day, Saturday, we had exhausted our supply of newsletters. We held the last one in reserve as a display model. With none to give out, we could only offer to send one to anyone who would leave us their name and address. By the end of the fair, we had over sixty new names on our mailing list with several joining on the spot. Each person was mailed a personal letter from President Ed Golly with the promised newsletter and the list of renowned free-thinkers. This has now swelled our mailing list to over 300. After receiving three newsletters each person will receive another letter from Golly asking them to join or be dropped from the mailing list.

Attending the stand were Christos Tzanetakos, Celia Glantz, Golly, George Giannakoulis, Charles Schisler and Patrick Bens. Timing was perfect since Bens will begin conducting chapter meetings in the Miami/Ft. Lauderdale area in January (see page 8). It's the ideal environment for meeting new atheists and we will be looking for similar events in cities throughout Florida to expand our membership.

Eventually we will have to litigate the matter of the new chapel at Tampa International Airport. The following is my recent letter to L. E. Miller, Chairman of the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority:

John W. MackKay



Dear Mr. Miller:

According to your Chapel - *lamin, hunger is the least worrisome of the fates awaiting those with other religious beliefs.*

On 09 April 1998 the Authority gave its final approval for the development of an Airport Chapel / Quiet Room. In doing so it assured the citizens of this community that the "Airport Chapel would not be used as a place for fundraising, solicitations, evangelizing, or the promotion of any specific religious group."

Unfortunately those involved with the day-to-day operation of the Chapel continue to violate that directive. Earlier you had to intervene to restrain Mr. Moore from repeating his reference to "Tampa International Airport. Interfaith Chapel". Since then Mr. Moore has been stocking the Chapel with a publication called *Notes from Your Chaplain*, a copy of which is attached.

three verses, and he reduced all his teachings to one command. He made his point and went home. Preachers would do well to imitate (modern proverb) Our speaker today needs no introduction, but he could use a conclusion!

The publication evangelizes. At page 9 it promises that "Fun times and laughter cannot ease the sorrowing heart. When the laughter is finished, the heavy heart finds sadness returns again. You will find out sooner or later you cannot run away from God. When you finally and completely give God the keys to your heart then really exciting things begin to happen in your life. Proverbs 14:13-14

The publication evangelizes and promotes a particular relationship with a particular god. At the top of page 2 it states:

"Ones who are in a right relationship with God shall have enough to eat and are thankful for whatever God supplies. They who are alienated and live separated from God find that food - by itself - never satisfies their appetite. They will certainly go hungry in the midst of plenty. Proverbs 13:25"

According to your Chaplain, hunger is the least worrisome of the fates awaiting those with other religious beliefs. The most offensive portions of his publication are those that threaten and denigrate

"The wise woman takes pride in her house and keeps it in a like-new condition, the careless woman lets housework go and so helps tear down the usefulness and appearance of the house to the point that it is not even fit to live in. Those who keep God's rules for living also have a respect for God in their hearts; hard-headed, selfish and mean-spirited individuals show hatred for God and His people. Proverbs 14:1-2"

"Linedly persons enjoy despising the idea of repentance toward God for sinful acts in their lives, but only forgiven persons *surely* find joy and acceptance in the presence of God. Only an individual's own heart can know the depth of sorrow in his life, as well as the height of his joy, even your nearest friend or spouse cannot measure your innermost depths of feeling. Proverbs 14:9-10"

"The life of those who oppose God will not last, the dwelling place of godly ones will be well cared for in God's own hands. Human logic and reasoning leads many to choose lifestyles that seem to give them everything they want, except they leave God out and the result is actually the death of their eternal soul and eternal damnation. Proverbs 14:11-12"

"We learn briefly from Jesus. His greatest sermon can be read in eight minutes. His best known story can be read in ninety seconds. He summarized prayer in five phrases. He silenced accusers with one challenge. He rescued a soul with one sentence. He summarized the Law in

cases. Violators face discipline by the bar or, if they are elected, by the Judicial Qualifications Commission, a state agency.

In Sarasota County a Coalition guide may be illegal for giving misleading information about absentee voting. The guide was distributed to Republicans in advance of the Oct. 1 runoff election for a state House

of Representatives seat. Included was a typed request for an absentee ballot with instructions to return it to Donald Cunningham, head of the county Coalition chapter. Election officials said state law requires voters or their legal guardians to request absentee ballots

Thou shalt not be offended Ten Commandments everywhere?

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 courtrrooms, classrooms, public parks, libraries, post offices, or police stations. Virtually anywhere!

Inspired by Judge Moore, the Albama 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? Duhh....

According to an article in the *Tampa Tribune*, H. 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," he said.

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

"They don't have to read it if they don't want to," Grant said. "The legislation makes no effort to protect display of the defining tenants of minority religions, the Humanist Manifesto, or atheism."

We can't help ourselves

Awakening 2000 puts us to sleep

SEN. PETERSBURG — "Commitment cards" are the perfect name for them. Those who sign them *should* be committed.

Chiming that "People are morally asleep," former head of the then-state Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services Jim Towey is charging blindly ahead to promote Awakening 2000. The idea is that since, according to Towey, devotion to God is the *only* thing that will help the state as it goes into the new millennium, the people of Florida should pledge to pray daily. His non-profit agency, established as the

Commission on Aging with Dignity, is distributing commitment cards to churches. Those interested may sign the card and mail it to Aging with Dignity to keep on file and fill out their mailing list.

Explaining that we Floridians "don't know right from wrong," Towey has convinced Gov.-elect Jeb Bush that he is equally disoriented and convinced him to sign a card.

Gov. Lawton Chiles also ceremoniously signed one of the cards pledging to pray daily, forgive, smile and sacrifice to get ready for the next millennium. A week later, he dropped dead.

Towey served as legal counsel to Mother Teresa for several years. His non-profit agency concentrates primarily on end-of-life and aging issues. Maybe he should give some thought to common sense

Twin Scholarship Fund Raffle

The A of F official scholarship fund, The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc. has again been accepted to the Combined Federal Campaign and the Florida State Employee's Charitable Campaign.

For the past four years our scholarship, whose applications have been distributed to several universities and colleges, has been granting monetary awards to qualified students. To help fulfill our pledge for this year's grants, we are raffling a beautiful ladies ring

with matching earrings. The 14K gold ring has an opal stone surrounded by 16 diamond chips as are the earrings with opal stones and 10 diamond chips. Tickets may be purchased for \$5.00 each from Christos Zantetacos at:

Twin Scholarship Fund
P.O. Box 3893
Ft. Pierce, FL 34948-3893

This is the only fund raising event for our scholarship. Please be as generous as you can.

Purchasers of tickets to date:

Celia Glantz
Peter Castelvetchi
James Williams
John A. Steele
Mara Richardson
Robert G. Stevenson
Andrew J. Herschel
Pat & Ceina Bens
Nathaniel Wolf
Brent Yaciv
Cathy A. Preston
Gloria L. Case
James D. Moore
Ivring J. Yablon
Marthe H. Williamson
Marylin Woolman

Atheists of Florida

This is the eighth time a year by Atheists of Florida, a 100-page, edited 1998 240-page book is being published. It contains 100 articles and 100 reviews. It is available at a special price of \$19.99. For more information, contact us at: atheists@earthlink.net

Member: \$19.99
Non-Member: \$29.99
Student: \$14.99
Life: \$1999.00

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Cleaning the slate of sin

VATICAN — As the world moves into the 21st century, the Catholic church continues to demonstrate to the world just how primitive it is.

In a move that virtually eliminates the need for Catholics to be concerned about "sin," Pope John Paul II has announced that throughout the millennium celebration, penitents who do a charitable deed or give up cigarettes or alcohol for a day can earn an "indulgence" that will eliminate time in purgatory.

Indulgences are an ancient form of church-granted amnesty that releases penitents from certain forms of punishment in this life or the superstitiously accepted belief of a next life. The medieval church sold indulgences, meaning, simply, that one could buy his way out of liability for any sins committed. The practice drove Martin Luther to rebel, leading to the Reformation. By reviving such primitive practices, the church reminds us that it remains hopelessly mired in its primordial superstitions of the Dark Ages. In a papal bull (appropriately named) titled "Incarnationis Mysterium" (The Mystery of the Incarnation), John Paul formally proclaimed 2000 a Holy Year, which means absolutely nothing. But now sinners would be granted "plenary indulgences," a full pardon for sins as opposed to a shortening of the time spent in purgatory. Therefore, give up the booze for a day and you have a clean slate. It's akin to telling cons that one day on the highway cleaning up trash and all crimes are forgiven.

Beer for Jesus

Drink any Coors beer lately? You've made a contribution to the Promise Creepers! Supposedly a non-political men-only evangelical movement, received \$50,000 in 1997 from the Castle Rock Foundation which is controlled by the Coors brewing empire. Tax-exempt Castle Rock poured more than \$400,000 into various right-wing groups last year, most of them working to bring down President Clinton. The foundation's biggest grant last year (\$150,000) went to the Free Congress Foundation, headed by Paul Weyrich.

Founded in 1993, Castle Rock now has assets of \$6.3 million. It was so named to specifically distance itself from the Coors beer empire, although its totally controlled by Coors family members. The Coors family has long been active in right-wing politics and has recently turned its attention to a variety of anti-Clinton efforts.

Law to ban abortion overturned

In November, a federal judge ruled that a Florida law banning so-called "partial-birth abortions" cannot be

enforced.

According to the judge, the law was so vaguely written that the state placed the interest in fetal life above all other to the extent that it could threaten the health or life of a woman during the course of her pregnancy. It would also have the broader and unconstitutional effect of prohibiting many types of otherwise legal abortions.

The term "partial-birth abortion" has no medically accepted definition, but the law was written to ban abortions in which a doctor "partially vaginally delivers a living fetus before killing the fetus and completing the delivery."

The measure had been adopted during the 1997 legislative session by Sen. Anna Cowin. The Leesburg Republican claimed she will simply start over again. But it's not yet clear how political leaders intend to react, if at all.

Governor Chiles had vetoed the legislation in 1997, but his veto was overridden decisively this year by the Republican Legislature. Gov.-elect Jeb Bush is supportive of the partial-birth abortion ban.

The New York-based Center for Reproductive Law and Policy challenged the ban's constitutionality in a lawsuit April 7 on behalf of four doctors and several clinics. It argued the measure too broadly defined "partial-birth abortions" because no specific months of pregnancy were indicated in its language.

About 80,000 abortions a year are performed in Florida, all but a tiny fraction in the first two trimesters of pregnancy.

Similar laws have been blocked or limited in 19 of the 20 states where challenged. Judges in nine other states previously have struck down similar statutes as unconstitutional.

The Florida legislation said doctors performing the procedure could be sentenced to five years in prison and could be sued by the father of the fetus or parents of the woman if she were a minor. The woman could not be prosecuted.

Voter guides

SOUTH FLORIDA — Officials with the Florida Bar Association raised concerns that Christian Coalition voter guides in two Florida counties have possibly violated state ethics laws.

Two attorneys seeking judicial slots in Brevard and Seminole answered questionnaires mailed by the CC and indicated their views on legal abortion, state/church separation and other issues. Candidates for judgeships are not supposed to disclose how they would rule on controversial issues that may come before them.

Both candidates agree with the Christian Coalition politically and insist they have done nothing wrong. But Canon 7 is a bar regulation designed to prevent judges from indicating how they would rule in certain

Those given to wisdom know the God of loving kindness and obey his teachings, yet the know-it-all refuses godly advice and plunges straight ahead in his hard-headedness. Proverbs 14:15.

Mr. Moore is not to blame. Your predecessors chose to open not just a "quiet room" but a "Chapel," which dictionaries define as "a place of Christian worship." Mr. Moore has been appointed the Chaplain of your Chapel. He is doing exactly what Chaplains are supposed to do: **solicit, evangelize, and promote** religion. Not surprisingly he has chosen to **evangelize and promote** only his own religion.

Article I, Section 3 of Florida's Declaration of Rights assures us all that "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."

It appears that the Authority has expended funds to create and maintain a Chapel to aid a particular religious denomination. My client and I ask that you correct this constitutional violation by stripping the Chapel of all religious materials, beginning with the referenced publication, and by instructing Mr. Moore as to the proper exercise of his duties. We further request that you fully and finally correct this problem by changing the name of the Chapel to "Quiet Room."

Additionally, in accordance with Chapter 119, Florida Statutes, I ask

Chapel from page 1

The Airport Chapel would be developed as a quiet and private space for users of the Airport to go for self-prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, quiet reflection or to meet with a religious representative. The Airport Chapel would not be used as a place for fundraising, solicitations, evangelizing, or the promotion of any specific religious group."

Meanwhile, local chaplain Shields Moore fancied the pending chapel as his own personal chapel and a plum employment opportunity. Listing his occupation as *passenger expediter*, apparently some sort of shuttle van driver, he simply began to identify himself as "Chaplain, Tampa International Airport Chapel." An HCAA memo to Moore on July 15 read as follows:

Today Mr. Miller met with Chaplain Shields Moore to discuss attached "Notes from your Chapel", which were distributed last Thursday, July 10th. Mr. Miller noted to Chaplain Moore that his reference to "Tampa International Airport, Interfaith Chapel", was not suitable. Chaplain Moore agreed to return to "Chaplains in the Workplace, Inc."

—L. E. Miller

The memo referred to a publication distributed by Moore on 8 1/2" by 5 1/2" stapled sheets which contains proverbs and stories with religious connotation.

No tables were included in the chapel design to restrict the display of bibles or specific religious propaganda. The only furniture — 12 straight-backed chairs.

that you provide me copies of all documents (including but not limited to correspondence, reports, memos, phone message slips, e-mail, b-mail, audiotapes, videotapes, copy logs, postage logs, and phone logs);

- that identify or refer to the use of any HCAA equipment, supplies, material, or personnel by or on behalf of Chaplain Moore.

- that identify or refer to the use of any HCAA equipment, supplies, material, or personnel to produce, copy, mail, distribute, or safeguard the publication entitled *Notes From Your Chapel*.

I require these documents as quickly as possible (certainly within the next 10 days). I agree to pay your reasonable copying expenses.

Sincerely,

John W. MacKay

John W. MacKay is a Board Certified Civil Trial Lawyer with offices in Tampa, Florida. Please direct your comments and criticisms to Mr. MacKay in care of this publication.

Back to the present. The chairs were arranged to form several rows facing the back of the room with an aisle formed down the middle. On the back inside left chair was a guest book the size of a photo album containing about a dozen folded, unbound pages. The first two pages had been signed at the dedication. First name on the book: *Shields Moore, Chaplain. Pager # 922-1356 Leave message or prayer request!* This was followed by members of the HCAA including, in the middle of the page, Louis Miller. It is therefore obvious that Miller is aware that Moore has self-assumed the title of TIA Chaplain.

Also on the chair were copies of *Notes from your Chapel* which referred to Moore as the airport chaplain.

A visit a week later found the chair set against the wall separated from all the others literally converted into a table. New updated copies of the *Notes* shared space with the guest book.

The airport Authority has violated every guideline it set regarding use of the Chapel.

Our attorney, John MacKay, was immediately informed of the situation and received copies of the literature. The chair/table was photographed. His response can be found on page 2 of this newsletter (MacKay's *News from the Front* column).

Every other state/church separation organization in the Tampa Bay area has completely dropped the ball on the chapel issue and accepted the Airport Authority's violation of our Florida State constitution. Only Atheists of Florida continues to monitor the chapel, expose the violations of the authority and react to them.

Our Constitution with its Bill of Rights grants all citizens freedom of speech but unfortunately free speech is not free. It is very expensive. We can't afford the price so we are effectively shut up and shut out.

—Flo Morgenroth

Atheists in foxholes

"I'm going to die and I'm still an atheist!"

The dictionary definition of an aphorism is a concise statement of a principle or a terse formulation of a truth or sentiment. The old adage "There are no atheists in fox holes" is an old saw that hints a fire in any atheist's stomach. The idea, of course, is that in any danger of imminent death, the atheist will renounce his disbelief in God and pray for his life to the God he had disclaimed to that moment. This obvious, but wrong, observation gives aid and comfort to religious believers and sends atheists up the walls. Where did these people get their information? Who took a poll?

I would like you to meet Alton Pitman, a retired attorney from Gainesville and a member of the Atheists of Florida who is now on a crusade to discover who coined this offensive maxim and upon what evidence. It all began when Pitman read the *Gainesville Sun* newspaper December 17, 1997. According to the paper, Dr. L. Carl Spengler was the first doctor to arrive at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City when it was bombed, killing 168 and injuring 800, the morning of April 19, 1995. In an interview with the reporter, Spengler remarked that "...There is the old saying that there's no atheist in a foxhole. I learned that this is true." Pitman immediately sent a letter of protest to the *Sun* which was not published. He was not surprised. Pitman told Ed Golly, the current president of Atheists of Florida, that over a period of fifty years of writing letters to the editors of newspapers and national magazines, that he

Flo Morgenroth served for 12 years on the Board of Directors of the Miami Chapter of ACLU. She was founder and president of the Dade County Task Force on Battered Women, Inc., which gave battered women temporary shelter along with legal, emotional and financial counseling. Through involvement with the Florida State Legislature, statewide shelters were set up which helped to correct defects in the criminal justice system which had penalized women instead of helping them. She holds two masters degrees. An atheist for many years and a charter member of Atheists of Florida, she is married with one child and is retired, living in St. Petersburg.

had had phenomenal acceptance except when he wrote about atheism. Then all he heard was silence. We, too, have heard the same silence. We, too, have experienced the same anger. We, too, have had personal near death experiences and never dreamed of recanting.

Several years ago I was almost killed in an auto-mobile accident. I was hit from the rear by an oil truck which sent me spinning into the left lane where I was hit again, sending me into the guard rail. I was positive I was going to die. As I strove to straighten the car before I hit the rail I remember screaming at the stupidity of such a dumb death. The last thing I would ever have thought of was appealing to God for mercy or forgiveness. I clearly remember thinking, "...who said there are no atheists in foxholes. I'm going to die and I'm still an atheist!"

Several years ago Ed Golly was flying home from Canada in his plane and was forced to land unexpectedly in a field. As he landed, the plane turned over. Luckily, none of the passengers were hurt. It is hard to imagine the fear each person endured as the plane went down and overturned. All were atheists. None experienced a religious conversion and to this day are still non-believers.

Mr. Pitman writes to Ed from time to time. Although retired he is still deeply committed to the issues of separation of state and church. As a former lawyer he is working to remove the phrase "So help me God" from the Oath of Admission to the Florida Bar.

Pitman speaks for tens of thousands of atheists, agnostics, skeptics, Humanists, rationalists and free-thinkers who are model citizens. We work hard, love our families, hold to and live by high moral standards and pay our taxes. Yet we are neither seen nor heard in the political arena in any meaningful way. Our Constitution with its Bill of Rights grants all citizens freedom of speech but unfortunately free speech is not free. It is very expensive. We can't afford the price so we are effectively shut up and shut out. According to the organization People for the American Way, "together, right-wing organizations have a total budget between half a billion and three quarters of a billion dollars per year." That's a lot of peanuts, folks. Can any democracy survive in the face of the corruption this kind of money can buy? Whenever elections come up, do what you can to get out the vote.

Try and find out who your right-wing stealth candidates are and let others know. If you have a progressive newspaper, you might want to vote their approved candidates. The rest of the year, keep on writing letters-to-the-editor, try to recruit new members and call in on radio talk shows. We are committed, small as we are, to the separation of state and church, and where feasible, will go to court to protect this principle.

From the web... *This article was sent to us by Jo Ann Mooney, Director of Humanist Community Development. It was written by Richard Ganulin.*

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X-mas should not be a holiday

The United States has a government with spectacular individual freedoms secured by principles of law and philosophy, such as equal protection, due process, freedom of speech, and separation of church and state.

As the nation matures, it seeks to advance those freedoms. Women, minority races, small sects, free-thinkers, and others still work mightily to secure for themselves all the liberty that the federal Constitution allows. Needless to say, Christmas Day-Dec. 25, is the time when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth whom they believe to be their messiah. Christmas Day-Dec. 25 is also, in the United States, a national legal public holiday.

The establishment of a national legal holiday by Congress communicates a powerful symbolic and concrete message to the citizenry of the nation. National legal public holidays inform us, educate our children and create a national identity.

Christmas Day-Dec. 25 had its origin in a decree of the church in the fourth century. Its name means the Mass of Christ. Christmas Day has been a religious celebration for more than 1,600 years.

Today, in tens of thousands of churches, Christians still celebrate the birth of the person they believe to be their messiah. There are those who emphasize Christian cultural aspects of Christmas Day-Dec. 25 rather than Christian religious beliefs. Be that as it may, Christmas Day is still Christian.

There are benefits to both non-Christians and Christians from treating Christmas Day-Dec. 25 evenhandedly, in the eyes of the laws and eliminating its governmental preference. Eliminating preferential status does not prevent individuals from celebrating

Christmas Day-Dec. 25 and keeping it holy.

The approximately 35 million non-Christians in the nation will be better able to practice their own beliefs and teach them to their children without the sense of being political outsiders. Christians, who will prepare and arrange for their Christmas Day celebrations with the same individual commitment and conscience that non-Christians now prepare for and arrange to celebrate their holy days, will sanctify the celebration of the birth of the person believed to be their messiah.

Christmas Day-Dec. 25 was not a national legal public holiday when the United States was formed. The First Amendment to the Constitution requires that "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion..." (commonly known as the separation of state and church. It was only after one century that Christmas Day-Dec. 25 was established as a national legal public holiday. Passage of time, in any event, does not act to ratify what otherwise is a violation of the federal Constitution.

The establishment of Christmas Day-Dec. 25 as a national legal public holiday communicates a particular sectarian message. It is, in that significant respect, very different than nonsectarian religious messages that some courts have allowed the government to communicate.

The Supreme Court said that whatever else the separation of church and state means, "it certainly means at the very least that government may not demonstrate a preference for one particular sect or creed (including a preference for Christianity over other religions)."

In all four corners of the earth, even in 1998, sectarian differences inspire war, terrorism, holocaust.

We, as the government of the United States, have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that we practice what we preach. We, by example, will prove that it is possible to maintain a pluralistic civil society within which all religious and non-religious beliefs are treated equally. Christmas Day-Dec. 25, a holy Christian celebration, is not beyond the reach of that principle.

King James takes a Bible Beating

Right-wing mainstays the Family Research Council (FRC), the Christian Coalition, and the Americans for Truth About Homosexuality (ATH) have urged their members to cease the using of the King James Bible, first published in 1611 by James of England. It appears that scholars of the period are in agreement that King James might better have been named Queen Mary.

"James had a number of 'favorites,' such as the Earl of Somerset and the Duke of Buckingham, with whom he undoubtedly had sexual relationships," said biographer David Harris Willson. Here's evidence that the leaders of the Right need a serious reality check:

- ◆ Gary Bauer, the rightest stalwart who recently announced his presidential candidacy for 2000: "...Anything that has been com-

missioned by a homosexual has been tainted in some way."

- ◆ Peter Labarbera of ATH: "I would ask Christians to check who is responsible for both the translation as well as the editing of their Bibles. We all need to be vigilant."
- ◆ Christian Coalition head and televangelist Pat Robertson: "It is very important that we stand up to the homosexual wherever and whenever he appears."