

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI: Sunday, March 29, 2 p.m. in the 8th floor Boardroom of the Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale. This will be a joint meeting with the Secular Humanists featuring speaker **Bill Baird**, a pioneer in the reproductive rights movement. FMI: Atheist Hotline: (305) 936-0210.

TAMPA: Saturday, March 29, 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. in meeting room B of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater. **Jan Eisler** will present a video of Camp Quest 1997.

PALM BEACH: Sunday, April 19, (third Sunday of each month) 2:30 p.m. at the Herb Watt Rec. Building, just north of the North Palm Beach Library. FMI: Charles Schisler (407) 627-6340.

Camp Quest *continued*

So my premonition was off five degrees, it was the kids and not me.

You are probably going to think this is very curious, but I sent the kids because I felt God had arranged for this to happen. It was only after I was sure of this that I discovered your whole ideology and I was really thrown for a loop. You see, I am a mystic, writing a scientific proof of God. And I had envisioned that my "prepaid" study holiday would be about just that - the scientific proof of God. Instead, a strange inverse was portrayed.

I really wrestled with that one, I'll tell you. Anyway, I finally decided that your philosophy and mine have much, much more in common than either of us might think. I sincerely believe that people "should" believe what they experience - not what we are "told" to think. And I use the word "God" in writing about the structure of the Universe because it fits in with what I experience as real. I don't "believe" in God so much as live an enhanced reality.

But the things is, my kids don't. And I've recently realized that it makes little sense for me to speak to them of my experience of "God" or of effective prayer. Since they don't

For camp fee information or to register as a camper, counselor or sponsor contact Camp Registrar Helen Kagin at:
Camp Quest
P.O. Box 264
Union, KY 41091
Phone: (606) 384-2324
Fax: (606) 384-7324
e-mail: campquest2@aol.com

— K Williams **A**

experience it, it is like I am applying labels on absolutely thin air.

So I ended up agreeing more with you than with me! I'd rather my children were educated in your system than in any Christian system I have ever seen. Because there is always so much mysterious stuff like superstition, and much of it is absolutely toxic. I know little children - a friend of my daughter's once told me she was rock bottom certain her daddy would burn in hell because he drinks, smokes and swears.

Anyway, we can spend decades deploring the horrific lies told in the name of God. I don't want to.

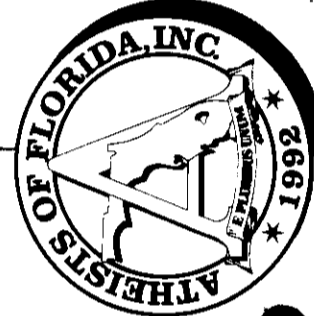
Just to add this strange note: I benefited greatly from being exposed to your material, and I hope, if all rests well with you, that Chloe and Roue may go back again next year. On the other hand, I really, really want to be involved in a summer camp myself, where one of the threads of the curriculum is about empowerment of individuals by way of human rights. I want to be involved with a summer camp where the children learn self government, using the US Bill of Rights as their guide. Revolutionary America, in microcosm. I'd develop a system of community teamwork that I call "Applied Human Rights". What I am hoping this system does is create a social/logistic environment that whole families immerse themselves in, to create a sort of "immunity" for all members from abuse and neglect. Kind of a family therapy thing. Well, thanks again.

Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

Volume VII Number 2

February/March, 1998



Hillsborough County Commission to give land to church

TAMPA — In a March meeting, the Hillsborough County Commission was requested to give a 1.5 acre parcel of land to a church on the east side of Tampa. The tract had been purchased by the county in 1972 for a road extension right-of-way but the project had never materialized. The strip of land now divides the property of the church and they want to have it to build a community center.

But it's just another immaculate deception.

The first motion which came immediately from Commissioner Chillura was to lease the land to the church for \$1 per year in perpetuity. But another commissioner was concerned that the dollar would present a bookkeeping nightmare for the county. She proposed simply giving the land to the church.

Commissioner Ed Turanchik recognized that the county is bound by state/church separation restrictions. If the land is decided or leased to the church, it may be used only for secular purposes which the county attorney, present at the meeting, verified.

Out came the plans for the community center proposed by the church. The building was shown to house a learning center, a gym with showers and lockers, classrooms for kindergarten which they eventually hope to expand into a complete school with grades K-12, and a "secular" sanctuary which they had the audacity to claim would be non-denominational and open to anyone.

The land is valued at \$18,000. The building shown would cost at least \$200,000. Yet the church claimed they are too poor to purchase the land—an issue unchallenged by the commission. They were all too anxious to deed the land to the church, but only if certain state/church restrictions were placed on the land use. They couldn't keep track of a \$1-a-year lease with all their computers, but inexplicably will be able to monitor all activities of the church at all hours of the day and night in perpetuity to insure they are not violating the restrictions!

New A of F chapter

St. Augustine — The Northeast chapter of Atheists of Florida has become a reality.

Headquartered in St. Augustine, our fourth is receiving mail at: P.O. Box 860132 / St. Augustine, FL 32086.

The hotline number is on line at (904) 808-1884 with an answering machine, purchased by Atheists of Florida, installed at the property of C. W. Mitchell.

8 February/March 1998

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

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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Pamela Kothari of the University of Miami wrote this winning essay in the 1997-98 Mark Twain Scholarship Fund essay contest. She was awarded the \$500 prize to be applied toward her tuition. The second place prize of \$300 went to An T. Nguyen Le of the University of Florida.

Mark Twain Scholarship Fund Imagine a World Without Religion

ALTHOUGH most religions begin by advocating noble and righteous causes, they quickly disintegrate into isolation mechanisms which breed divisiveness and subsequent violence. In the twentieth century alone where mass education is rampant, two thirds of all major conflicts are caused by religious disputes. The bombing of the World Trade Center, the blood-drenched conflicts in the Balkans, the continuous warfare in the Middle East, and even the murdering of medical personnel because of fundamentalist belief that a woman does not have a right to choose are clear examples of violence not only propagated but condoned by various "religions". These same religions purport to be the pinnacle of righteousness and the savior of mankind from the inherent evils that plague humanity, yet they encourage this devastation, destruction, and even reward the perpetrators with martyrdom and sainthood.

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Membership dues and general correspondence should be sent to:

Atheists of Florida
P.O. Box 3493
Ft. Pierce, FL 34948-3893
E-mail: AthAI FL C@aol.com
Contact Phone: (305) 936-0210

Membership dues

<input type="checkbox"/> Life Member	\$ 500.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	50.00 yr.
<input type="checkbox"/> Couple	40.00 yr.
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	30.00 yr.
<input type="checkbox"/> Student (under 25 yrs)	10.00 yr.

Send newsletter correspondence to:

Tampa Bay Chapter
P.O. Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681
E-mail: AthAI FL E@aol.com

The A of F newsletter is provided free to our members as a medium of exchange on a space-available basis. Articles may be edited for clarity or length.

Atheists of Florida, Inc. is affiliated with the national Atheist Alliance for purposes of information exchange.

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Atheists of Florida

coming on strong a gain this year

UNION, Ky — Edwin Kagin had had enough. As an Eagle Scout himself, Kagin was fed up with the discrimination against atheists practiced by the Boy Scouts. So he simply decided to start his own camp.

The Camp Quest story

Named Camp Quest, it's not a "scoutcraft" oriented camp. Rather, as its name implies, it's a camp in "quest" of critical thinking. Kids from ages 8 to 13 are exposed to concepts in perceptual evaluation of the "norms" of society in a fun, conventional campground environment.

Kagin, a Union, Kentucky attorney, is a member of the Free Inquiry Group, Inc. of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. Assisted by his wife Helen, a herculean effort by the two and a staff of volunteers will provide a third year of opportunity for freethinking children. This year's site will be near Lebanon, Ohio. Activities will include horseback riding, a ropes challenge course, canoeing, swimming in an Olympic size pool, an opportunity to perform on stage, interaction with live birds, snakes and such at a nature center, and one

outdoor campout. Atheists of Florida sponsored two children at the camp last year. Three of our board members were on the staff. Retired biology teacher Jim Strayer of Ormond-by-the-Sea arrived with enough microscopes to actually locate the logic cornered in a Christian's brain! He made a big hit with his spider slide lecture and conducted a biology workshop.

Jan Eisler was the Florence Nightingale of the camp but likely worked a little harder. Ed Golly showed up with a real live airplane. Each day a handful of campers and counselors were schlepped out to the international airport for what was, in most cases, a first ride ever in a plane! On each flight, the moment the wheels left the ground, a chorus of screaming broke out not from fright, but from the sheer excitement of viewing the world from under the wing of a Cessna. The camp, only a few miles west of the airport, was easily recognizable by all campers.

Thanks to a grant from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, campers enjoyed a photography program. Each child received a re-usable camera with a matching bag and a daily issue of film. "Take odd pictures! Whatever they tell you are the rules, break the rules," instructed Peter Lloyd, a Newport creativity consultant.

Magician Artie Kidwell appeared one evening and you know how kids love magic.

And one entire day was devoted to a field trip to a working farm. Everyone was a treated to a hay ride, a walking tour, and lots of animals to touch and feed.

But testimonials always reveal the greatest insight. This one arrived from the mother of the two children, Roue and Chloe Williams, sponsored by Atheists of Florida. See for yourself.

From: kwilliams@kih.net (K Williams)
To: CampQuest2@aol.com
Dear Helen and Edwin,

The kids are just great. I know they both went through a lot of mental-personal-psychological growth from being at camp. I want to tell you that when I first inquired about the camp I didn't catch on that it was a secular humanist camp. Like I said, I got the notice out of a Unitarian newsletter, and didn't think past that. I thought it was a "human rights" camp, as free inquiry seemed like "free speech" or something.

So when you called to offer us the scholarships I still didn't understand exactly what you are about. Before you called, I had a strong premonition that I would be offered a grant to study abroad with a special group, it the pre-vision was so strong I was just sure it would happen. I had already psychologically packed my bags, so to speak. And then boom you called with the offer.

(turn page)

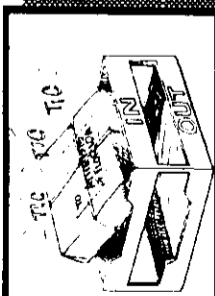


Campers Roue and Chloe Williams with counselors (l to r) Jim Strayer, Jan Eisler, and Ed Golly

Atheist expresses thanks

Atheists of Florida member Ed McDougall had this letter published in The Tampa Tribune just after the holidays

Well, at long last I've witnessed a miracle right here on the editorial pages of *The Tampa Tribune*. And during a "holy week",



Letters

too. I can't tell you how pleased and surprised I was when I threw open my paper on Dec. 24, and what to my wondrous eyes did appear but the true story of the solstice tree.

I have grown tired of the full page feature spreads by Michelle Bearden every day glorifying the Judeo-Christian society of the Tampa Bay area. I have accepted the fact that, as an atheist, I am a member of a minority that is ruled by a mighty theocracy. I wish to thank you for printing the true story of how modern-day religion got its start by scheduling its "holy days" to coincide with our already ancient pagan festivals.

In our household, we still observe these festivals of solstice. We erect our solstice tree each year as our forefathers have done for many more than 2,000 years. We are happy to share this most special time of our year with the more recent cults that base their beliefs on mythical gods and ghosts. Thank you for letting the religious of Tampa Bay know that the solstice is the true reason for the season.

Ed McDougall
Spring Hill

Facts about atheism

McDougall's letter (above) drew a response from a clueless Xian. This was a response to that letter and published in the Jan. 27th issue of The Tampa Tribune

The letter of Jan. 18 criticizing atheism for its illogic and hypocrisy shows a complete misunderstanding of this rational way of thinking.

Atheists reject the supernatural and the superstitious. They rely on reason, critical thinking and one's conscience in dealing with ethical and moral questions.

Had a letter published lately?
Or do you have comments on any of our articles?
Send it to us at:

P O Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681
or e-mail us at:
ATHAL.FL@aol.com

In this letter, the writer asks where the original building blocks of matter arose if there is no God or higher power. Albert Einstein, an avowed atheist, when asked this question invoked the first law of thermodynamics: Matter has always existed, cannot be created, cannot be destroyed. When the true believer is asked this same question, he cites the first cause: God created himself. Whom you choose to believe depends on faith or reason.

The writer states further that atheism has no way to judge right or wrong, morality or immorality, because it rejects an anthropomorphic, personal God. But he erroneously believes that God is the only possible source of morality. Philosophers such as Plato, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and John Rawls have demonstrated quite convincingly that it is possible to have a universal morality without God.

The claim is made that atheists are truly humanists or pagans. Humanists I will accept, but pagans? As stated previously, atheists reject *all* forms of the supernatural. To compare atheists with pagans, who worship the spirits in trees, stars, animals and plants, is ludicrous and shows a complete lack of understanding of atheism.

Finally, atheism is a philosophy that is vitally concerned about human behavior that affects all of mankind: it differs from most major religions since it believes that humans have the ability to make intelligent choices regarding ethical and moral questions without guidance from a higher source.

Jerry Morgenroth
Saint Petersburg

A more logical explanation

Yaciw was at work before the holidays by responding to a column by Diana Butler Bass which had appeared in the Dec. 6 Tribune titled We can mistake our will for God's. His letter appeared in the Dec. 14 Trib.

In Bass' twisted attempts to rationalize away the most logical of the two conclusions to be drawn from recent tragedies — that God which selectively allows death and suffering of innocents must surely be a monster — she ignores a third, and far more logical conclusion.

The simple fact is that there is no god, which surely is more easily comprehended than the insane actions of a deity for whom excuses are currently being made for by the major religions. Of course, with so much money relying on the faith of believers, no one whose livelihood depends on belief — as does religion columnist and professor Bass — is likely to admit the obvious truth.

Brent Yaciw
Tampa

necessitates strict following by its members. How is this obedience destructive? It is destructive because it mandates action without thought or reason. Religions do not encourage individual thought or evaluation of its principles, but rather demand faith and belief without proof to validate their claims. If the individual's input in making a decision is not substantiated through such methods as skepticism and criticism, then personal responsibility for actions necessitated through obedience does not exist. This escape from personal responsibility in favor of a higher or nobler cause allows individuals to disregard acts of violence towards society. In a world without religion, individuals will not be freed of personal responsibility. They will be forced to evaluate circumstances and situations for themselves without using the skirts of religious dogma as a refuge.

The problems with religion on a global scale are all too obvious. The media constantly bombards us with information of violence and mass destruction caused by religious predicaments. However, these problems originate in the minds of individuals where the religious dogma and belief system replace reason and thought. With a predetermined sense of morality and humanity in a submissive position where obedience is obligatory, it is not surprising that religion has had such a depraved history. **A**

MARK ANDREW TROP Attorney at Law

Shoreview Bldg., Ste. 201
9999 N.E. 2nd Avenue
Miami Shores, FL 33138
(305) 759-5727

Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc.

P O Box 39561
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33339-9561
800/849-9349
954/563-7386

MARY BENNETT HUDSON

A Trilogy of Linking Errors

—Mike Perdomo

THREE OF THE MOST COMMON errors religious people incur are: 1) to link God with religion, 2) to link God with goodness, 3) to link this life with *something* concerning the supernatural that we *must* believe. Let me explain.

First, there can only be two theories regarding "God" and the formation of the world: a) the world was made by a being, who religiousists call God, and b) the world was made by some physical cause or causes. We have no convincing proof of either one whatsoever.

If we take the first hypothesis, that is, that a being called by tradition God made the world, the fact that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of different, contradictory religions is proof that this God has nothing serious to do with them. Whether that God has inspired all religions, one of them, some of them, or none of them, which we do not know, would the result not be, in any event, a double standard being that says some things to some people, some contradictory ones to others and some different ones yet to others? Would that not be playing with the most sacred feelings of human beings, even when His only role would be to tolerate those things to happen?

This leads us to the second hypothesis: can that God be possibly a good being? Add to the above conclusion all the catastrophes and disasters, called "acts of God," like the floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanoes and other similar occurrences that happen almost every day on earth: can we say that behind those harmful acts of nature there is a good god that loves us while allowing those things to happen? A god who allegedly is omnipotent and omniscient, that is, a god who could, if he or she wished, stop those things from happening? The most we may say is that this god is as much goodness as evilness, in an unpredictable way.

Going now to the third of our themes, let us emphasize that this is involved with the realm of the supernatural also, where nothing has ever been proved neither by religion nor by science. Why then the urge for the supernatural? Those who commit this error say that we have to believe in something. Why do we have to believe in something of which we have never had any proof at all? Are not here on earth enough things to take care of which deserve our dedication and best efforts? **A**



Atheists of Florida member Vince Valva discusses atheism at the Elm Street Flea Market at the University of South Florida. Valva, Ed Corl and Britt Girard occupy the stand every Wednesday

Atheist intolerance

This story shows how much anti-atheist bigotry exists in the USA

VALLEY HEAD, Ala.—Students wearing their Christian bracelets don't have much to say to assistant principal Michael Chandler anymore. Once-friendly adults turn away when he passes or mutter his name in disgust. And he has quit driving his Corvette to school.

"I'm afraid somebody will put keys down the side of it," said Chandler.

The 47-year-old educator has become a target of scorn for filing the lawsuit that resulted in a federal court order restricting prayer in Alabama's public schools, where many youngsters wear cloth bracelets with the letters "WJJD" — for

believe in God. But let's say for the sake of argument he did not. Does this woman actually hate atheists so much she cannot even let them be near their children?

Chandler—who lives with his Methodist wife and 14-year-old son in Fayette, about 30 miles away—denies he is an atheist. He was raised Baptist and occasionally goes to church.

It was his belief in the separation of church and state that led him to file the suit in 1996 after years of complaining about coercive Christian practices in DeKalb County's public schools.

Chandler sought an end to the pre-game prayer at athletic events and wanted Gideon International barred from distributing Bibles at school.

The American Civil Liberties Union backed him, as did Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which presented him with its religious freedom award last year in Washington.

U.S. District Judge Ira DeMent sided with Chandler, too, and threatened to hold school officials in contempt if they allow the distribution of Bibles or permit any organized religious practices such as morning prayers over the intercom or pre-game benedictions.

Gov. Fob James and Attorney General Bill Pryor, both conservative Republicans gearing up for the 1998 election, said they will appeal, with James declaring that DeMent's order "cuts at the heart of all that is good in America and brings shame on our nation."

Some would say the same thing about Fob James's initiatives.

The governor even offered to defy DeMent's order by leading prayers at any public school that invited him.

DeKalb County school officials plan an appeal also, a decision made as hundreds of students walked out of classes one week in northeastern Alabama schools to protest the judge's decision. More than 60 were suspended at two schools.

In Valley Head, there was quiet complaining when members of the girls' basketball team were told they could no longer hold their traditional pre-game prayers.

"I don't like the thing about not being able to pray with my coach. I'm a senior, and it just breaks my heart," said Teri Campbell, 17.

Nobody is saying that students can't pray. The point is that the government and its representatives can't support religion over non-religion.

The Supreme Court ruled against state-sanctioned prayer in public schools three decades ago, but Christianity is still openly promoted in some Alabama schools.

"People around here don't understand that

this has been settled long ago in many courts," Chandler said. Cindy Grider said her two elementary school-age children like Chandler, whom she described as an able administrator. She just can't understand why anyone would oppose Christianity in school.

But this isn't opposing Christianity. This is opposing state-sanctioned Christianity. Does she not understand the difference? We would all be just as opposed to schools forcing students to recite the atheist chant "There is no God. When I die, I cease to exist. Amen." That would be just as unconstitutional. When separatists oppose government-led prayer, it is not because they hate people who pray or prayer itself. It is because we think the Constitution forbids state-sanctioned religion. "The same way he doesn't want us to force our beliefs on him, it seems like he's forcing his on us," Ms. Grider said.

This is just confused. The issue is whether the schools were creating a First Amendment-prohibited government establishment of religion. Removing government-sponsored prayers from school does not mean the school is suddenly teaching that the Christian god does not exist or that Jesus's teachings about Hell were immoral. Yet Cindy Grider assumes that because the courts have stopped the majority from infringing upon the minority's rights, that somehow the rights of the "majority" have been violated? In other words, I can't use the government any longer to ram my beliefs down other people's throats, therefore their beliefs are being rammed-down my throat.

Promise Creepers broke

Apparently God doesn't have credit

ST. PETERSBURG — "We just ran out of money," sighed founder Bill McCartney.

After raking in \$87-million in 1996, PK claims to be in such financial straits that effective March 31, all 345 full-time employees nationwide, including the only one in Florida, will be given their walking papers.



To counter, PK decided last October to waive the charge and let attendees in tree. But stadiums cost serious money, and to make up the shortfall, McCartney asked 3,000 pastors and clergy attending a PK meeting in St. Petersburg in February to kick

in \$1,000 per church!

Last year's budget was nearly \$90-million, with salaries ranging from minimum wage to \$100,000. But 1997 saw the beginning of the downturn of attendance at many of the rallies. Perhaps the \$60 admission fees were thought to be better spent sitting in sports arenas watching sports events rather than hearing the Creeper's redundant message.

The Tampa Tribune's Dan Ruth may have found the key, suggesting that as the agenda of the Promise Creepers became more widely publicized, this sort of conversation may have transpired in homes across the country.

"Honey, I'm going to the Promise Keepers rally this week because I am king and you are nothing."

"Listen, Bub, you go to that cockamamie rally when I need the gutters cleaned and you'll be sleeping on the couch for the rest of your life and dining on Spam."

"OK. You win my little water lily. How about

if I re-tile the kitchen, too?"

"That's better, your highness."

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Shore up the dam

We're still swimming in a sea of superstitionists

WASHINGTON—Most of us realize that the results of a poll may depend largely on how the questions are asked. A group called the Pew Research Center (as in church pew?) released the results of a survey just before last Xmas claiming 71 percent of Americans claim they never doubt the existence of God. In 1987, the figure was 60 percent.

Likely the poll neglected to ask how they define God, in which case they probably would have received as many different responses as there were respondents.

Also, 61% claimed they believe miracles come from the power of God—an increase of 14% from a decade ago.

And 53% said prayer is important to daily life. In 1987, it was 41%.

A few question we'd like to include in the survey:

- Do California believers hold god responsible for El Niño?
- If god gives you cancer, is he a good god or a creep?
- Why is god always referred to as a "he"? Does this mean he has a...well, you know. And does he...well, never mind. Maybe we really wouldn't want to know that.

Will we ever see a survey composed of realistic questions about religion? Probably only if we conduct it ourselves.

Insight

"What Would Jesus Do?"

According to the New Testament, he wouldn't have hated atheists. Some of the Christians quoted in this article aren't even following the teachings of their Lord and Savior!

Chandler, who has worked for the DeKalb County school system for 25 years, said he has received support privately from many county educators and some parents. And the town's Baptist preacher, Charles Jenkins, has said the ruling may help by spelling out what is and isn't allowed.

But Chandler has virtually no public backing, and newspapers all over the state have been filled with letters from readers who quote the Bible in criticizing him.

"I have been demonized," he said.

Rhonda Weathers said the ruling "stinks," and she doesn't even like Chandler being around her first-grade daughter Jessica at Valley Head School.

So because he supports separation of church and state, he cannot be trusted around young children? Do they think he is a child molester or something?

"He doesn't believe there's a God," she said, echoing the feelings of many of the 629 people of this mountain town in Alabama's northeastern corner.

Here's where she really goes off the rails. Just because a person supports separation of church and state has nothing to do with whether they believe in a god. Indeed, he does