

# Atheists of Florida

## CHAPTER MEETINGS:

**MIAMI:** Sunday, February 22, 2 pm in the 8th floor boardroom of the Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale. Rebeca Porto has been named acting chapter director. FMI: Atheist Hotline - (305) 936-0210.

**TAMPA:** Saturday, February 28 (last Saturday of each month) 12:30 - 2:00 pm in meeting room B of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater. FMI: Ed Golly (813) 839-7567.

**PALM BEACH:** Sunday, February 15 (third Sunday of each month) 3:30 pm at the Herb Watt Rec. Building, just north of the North Palm Beach Library. FMI: Charles Schisler (407) 627-6340.

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Attorney at Law

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MARY BENNETT HUDSON

8 January 1998



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

ADDRESS CORRECTION  
REQUESTED

### President from page 7

Wishing the best for 1998, I close with a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche's book *The Genealogy of Morals*:

*"The advent of the Christian god, the 'highest potency' god yet conceived by man, has been accompanied by the widest dissemination of the sense of indebtedness, guilt. If we are right in assuming that we have now entered upon the inverse development, it stands to reason that the steady decline of belief in a Christian god should entail a commensurate decline in man's guilt consciousness. It also stands to reason--doesn't it, that a complete and definitive victory of atheism might deliver mankind altogether its feeling of being indebted to its beginnings, its causa prima. Atheism and a kind of "second innocence" go together."*

— Christos Iznatatos  
Founder/President

### About renewals —

This year, members will be notified by mail of their membership renewals. Your label indicates the month in which your membership expires. Example: M6/98 means your membership runs through June, 1998.

Volume VII Number 1

January, 1998

### TIA Chapel update

chapel (chap-el): a place of worship used by a Christian group other than an established church

TAMPA — George Bean opposed it for twenty years.

As Executive Director of the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority, Bean knew that a chapel in Tampa International Airport would cause more problems than it would be worth. But his primary concerns were with security.

Since his retirement and subsequent replacement by Louis Miller, the Interfaith Chapel Committee has pushed relentlessly for the construction of a chapel at the airport. Following Bean's retirement and accolades for such exemplary service, practically the first order of business for the board was to reverse Bean and approve the expenditure of \$20,000 for an airport "non-denominational" chapel (read Christian chapel pretending to be suitable for any religion).

This will bring not only Bean's anticipated problems of security, but also legal problems just to get it built.

The chapel committee, an organization independent of the Aviation Authority, has taken it upon itself to appoint Shields Moore as the current Airport Chaplain. *That's right, there's no chapel yet!* And the Aviation Authority decided not to establish any such salaried position on its staff.

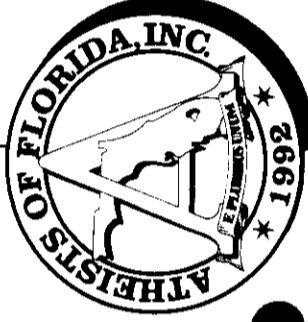
The transfer level of the airport is currently being completely renovated.

The chapel is slated for a small, obscure corner of that level. But no construction has yet begun in that area. In fact, design work for the chapel is not yet complete. An airport chaplain would like to eventually become a salaried chaplain. According to his resume, on file in the public records of the Aviation Authority, Moore is currently a driver and "passenger expeditor." In real words, he drives people to and from the airport.

In a letter of December 15, 1997 to Louis Miller, Hillsborough County Commissioner Joe Chillura, an avid backer of the chapel, requested an opportunity to meet with the architect who is designing the chapel to offer his input. He also notes that his term as County Commissioner expires November 1998 and asked that construction of the project be started prior to that date. He apparently views the 20-year effort to build the chapel to be a feather in his political cap.

In response, Miller pointed out that the current schedule calls for completion of the Airport Chapel in December of 1998 and offered to make an effort to expedite the completion. He also advised that he will schedule a meeting during January or February to obtain the input of Chillura. He also was considering the inclusion of nondenominational art to "create an appropriate atmosphere in the Airport Chapel."

Upon reviewing the memos and correspondence obtained by Ed Golly in a public records search of the chapel our attorney, John MacKay, has sent a re-*(see Chapel, next page)*



#### Alliance Members:

- Arizona Secular Humanists
- Atheist Outreach (at large)
- Atheists & Agnostics of Wisconsin
- Atheist Centre Vijayawada, India
- Atheist Coalition San Diego, CA
- Atheist Community of Austin, TX
- Atheists of Colorado
- Atheists of Florida
- Atheists & Other Freethinkers Sacramento, CA
- Atheists of San Francisco Region
- Atheists United Sherman Oaks, CA
- Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia
- Metroplex Atheists Dallas Ft. Worth, TX
- Minnesota Atheists
- Rationalist Society of St. Louis
- Society Against Religion Commack, NY

...while we live, while we are among human beings, let us cultivate our humanity.

## Seneca, On Anger

— by Dr. John Xanthopoulos  
*Chairman, Atheists of Florida*

When Martha C. NUSSBAUM talks about creating a community of critical thinkers in her excellent book titled *Cultivating Humanity*, published by the Harvard University Press, she asks about the relationship of a liberal education to citizenship, a question with a long history in the Western philosophical tradition. We are drawing on Aristotle's notions of an education that is liberal in that it liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world. This is what Seneca means by the cultivation of humanity. The idea of the well-educated person as a citizen of the world has had a formative influence on Western thought about education: on David Hume and Adam Smith in the Scottish/English tradition, on Im-

manuel Kant in the continental Enlightenment tradition, on Thomas Paine and other Founding Fathers in the American tradition. Understanding the classical roots of these ideas helps us to recover powerful arguments that have exercised a formative influence on our own democracy.

The classical ideal of the world citizen can be understood in two ways, and cultivation of humanity along with it. The sterner, more exigent version is the ideal of a citizen whose primary loyalty is to human beings the world over, and whose national, local, and varied group loyalties are considered distinctly secondary. His more relaxed version allows a variety of different views about what our priorities should be but says that, however we order our varied loyalties, we should still be sure that we recognize the worth of human life wherever it occurs and see ourselves as bound by common human abilities and problems to people who lie at a great distance from us. These two different

Christos Tzanetakos is a retired marine engineer residing in Ft. Pierce with his wife, Alice. He has been president of A of F since its inception.

for a certificate of exemption for sales and use taxes. The Court, although affirming the Department's decision to deny us the certificate, provided us with the opportunity to challenge the constitutionality of Statute 212.08(7) by stating:

**IN AFFIRMING THE ORDER, WE DO NOT FORECLOSE THE POSSIBILITY OF MAKING A DETERMINATION ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION ON A PROPERLY DEVELOPED RECORD WHEREIN BOTH SIDES HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT COMPETING EVIDENCE BEFORE AN IMPARTIAL TRIBUNAL.**

The decision was a partial victory and our hopes were high for repealing the F1 Statute 212.08(7) whose wording is suited in favor of the church.

In order to continue this most important case, we applied for a \$50,000 grant to the James Hervey Johnson Charitable Educational Trust, providing them with a copy of the F1 Statute 212.08(7) and the 260 page transcript which has been generated since the filing of our complaint. Unfortunately, the trustees failed to see the importance of this case and its implications for removing the tax exemption of the church not only on the State level but on the Federal level as well.

Without funds, we attempted to appeal our plight to billionaires Ted Turner and William Gates. The office of Ted Turner (which donated one billion dollars to the United Nations) stated: As you might imagine, we receive a great number of requests from organizations and individuals whose needs we wish we could fulfill. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, we are unable to support your request at this time.

William Gates, as yet, has not replied. Therefore, lacking funds, this case will at present remain closed.

**Another state-church separation violation** attracted the attention of our Tampa chapter. The Hillsborough County Aviation Authority is planning to spend \$20,000 of public money to build a chapel in the transfer level renovation of their airport. Our Director, Ed Golly, and other members of the chapter have already voiced their opposition and should the Authority continue with this plan, they are prepared to bring legal action.

For the third consecutive year our organization was listed with the Combined Federal Campaign in Dade County and through the year we received a total of \$183,81. Although this is rather an insignificant amount, being the only ATHEIST organization on the roster was quite gratifying.

In April, 1997, our organization in cooperation with the Humanists of Florida hosted the

Third Atheist Alliance convention. This was the first time atheists and humanists joined forces for a national event and the outcome was a huge success. Over 250 atheists and humanists from all over the nation gathered in Orlando for the three day event. The media was present and several reports were published in all the major newspapers of Florida.

During the Orlando convention, our official scholarship, The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc., honored student Carlos Siso of the University of Florida (first place recipient of the 1996-97 essay contest) with a certificate of award and a check in the amount of \$500.00 for tuition expenses.

The second prize of \$300.00 was awarded to student Elizabeth Sanford Witt of the University of Fort Lauderdale.

**1997 was again** a banner year for our Atheists of Florida TV Forum series. For the second consecutive year our programs received awards from the Alliance for Community Media.

At the Atlanta 1997 Sweetheart Video Festival, we were First and Second place winners in the Educational category. And, at the 1997 Southern Sunshine Video Festival, of the nine southeastern participating states held at Greensboro, NC, we were honored with a trophy for **OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING**.

This was also the first year of television production for our Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc. The series of twelve half-hour programs were taped at the WLRN studios in Miami, and were aired during the months of September, October and November from the public access channel 32 in Dade county. The series will also be aired in St. Augustine and Tampa.

Another achievement of our organization was the sponsoring of two children at Camp Quest. Three of our board members, Jan Eisler, Ed Golly and James Strayer volunteered their services as counselors. The participating children had an extra thrill taking rides on Golly's private airplane.

In November, our organization, after an absence of some years, participated again in the Miami Book Fair International. During the three day street fair event, hundreds of Miamians and other visitors from other states, the Caribbean islands and South and Central Americas, browsed through our booth which was decorated with a large banner with our name and logo. The \$400 participating fee was well worth it.

With your support, 1998 should be even better.  
*(continued next page)*



Xanthopoulos



Published eight times a year by Atheists of Florida, Inc., a non-profit, educational organization designed to heighten public awareness about atheism and to provide intellectually stimulating contacts for the membership.

Membership dues and general correspondence should be sent to:

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

### Membership dues

- Life Member \$ 500.00
- Sustaining 50.00 Yr.
- Couple 40.00 Yr.
- Individual 30.00 Yr.
- 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. Letters from members are published 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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Ed Golly

## If you have not contacted your Congressional Representative:

Please do not fail to do so at once to ask him or her to vote against H.J. Res. 78, the so-called "Religious Freedom Amendment" to the United States Constitution, the Istook Amendment.

## Chapel *from page 1*

quest to Miller that Golly and he be present at that meeting. Any art, after all, is a "graven image" and should not be considered. Neither should chairs be included...have you ever seen a chair in a mosque? If it is truly to be a non-denominational chapel, which, by definition, is an oxymoron, adherents of all major religions should feel welcome.

They should have listened to Bean.



This proposed amendment has strong backing in the House of Representatives, and will very likely be brought up for a vote this month or next. It is tremendously important that it be stopped in the House, because if it passes there, the religious extremists will taste blood, and it will be very much harder to kill it from then on. The onslaught of hostility and viciousness that would emerge would be like nothing ever seen in America since the hostilities of Civil War. The fight to kill it would be tragically nasty, and the consequences of its passage would be beyond imagining.

### Talking Point to Emphasize:

H.J. Res. 78 is not a "religious freedom amendment", it is a blueprint for religious tyranny. Separation of church and state has served America well for more

be, some of which they may never have shared (and perhaps don't care to share) with anyone. New forms of legal liability for negligent "spiritual" care by physicians.

These are exceedingly important issues and our concerns are very serious. As unbelievers, we are acutely aware of the pernicious effects of religious tyranny. Where political matters are concerned, the First Amendment's Wall of Separation is already badly eroded and under attack. The medical professional ethic should not also be destroyed by the onslaught of religious delusions, unreason, and bigotry. We ask that your medical school join us and all sensible people in the position that "progress in religion," the Templeton Foundation's reason for being, can be accomplished only when all the popes and bishops, priests and priestesses, prelates, ministers, reverends, rabbis, mullahs, monks, nuns, and the entire motley collection of those who claim to speak for various gods and or other supernatural powers agree among themselves as to what it is they are claiming about the nature of human beings and the universe and provide credible and persuasive evidence for it. In the meantime, the disagreeable and divisive contentions of religion, an enduring source of strife and hostility since the dawn of history, should be left out of the practice of medicine.

Thank you for considering these issues. We would appreciate your response to our concerns.

**Ethical, Legal and Constitutional Dilemmas are Inevitable**

In more, practical terms, how much respect will it show Christians who fervently believe that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" than that of Jesus if their Muslim or Jewish doctor prays with them? And how much confidence in such a doctor's honesty and integrity ought anyone to have? Even if a Christian doctor prays with a Christian patient, how will this affect the patient's and the doctor's relationship with a spouse or other family member who is not a Christian? Numerous difficulties of this variety will be the logical consequence of ill-considered efforts to incorporate "Faith and Medicine" into the humanistic traditions of modern medical science. Moreover, to the extent that such efforts succeed in establishing new standards of professional behavior, the

versions have existed at least since ancient Rome, when statesman and philosopher Cicero softened the stern demands of Greek Stoicism for a Roman audience.

Three capacities, above all, are essential to the cultivation of humanity in today's world:

1. First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions—for living what, following Socrates, we may call the examined life. This means a life that accepts no belief as authoritative simply because it has been handed down by tradition or become familiar through habit, a life that questions all beliefs and accepts only those that survive reason's demand for consistency and for justification. Training this capacity requires developing the capacity to reason logically, to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy of judgment.

2. Citizens who cultivate their humanity need, further, an ability to see themselves not simply as citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern. The world around us is inescapably international.

3. But citizens cannot think well on the basis of factual knowledge alone. The third ability of the citizen, closely related to the first two, can be called the narrative imagination. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story.

and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have.

**Intelligent citizenship** needs more than these three abilities. Scientific understanding is also of the first importance. It is therefore very urgent right now to support curricular efforts aimed at producing citizens who can take charge of their own reasoning, who can see the different and foreign not as a threat to be resisted, but as an invitation to explore and understand, expanding their own minds and their capacity for citizenship.

"Soon we shall breathe our last," wrote Seneca at the end of his treatise on the destructive effects of anger and hatred. "Meanwhile, while we live, while we are among human beings, let us cultivate our humanity." Across the United States, colleges and universities are working to develop curricula that will meet the challenge contained in those words. Let us support them.

*John Xanthopoulos, Ph.D. is Adjunct Professor of Education and Social Science for Palm Beach Community College. E-mail: jxanthop@acc.fau.edu*

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new forms of legal liability will open up for negligent "spiritual" care by physicians.

inevitable adverse medical, psychological, and emotional effects that will follow will open up new forms of legal liability for negligent "spiritual" care by physicians.

These are exceedingly important issues and our concerns are very serious. As unbelievers, we are acutely aware of the pernicious effects of religious tyranny. Where political matters are concerned, the First Amendment's Wall of Separation is already badly eroded and under attack. The medical professional ethic should not also be destroyed by the onslaught of religious delusions, unreason, and bigotry. We ask that your medical school join us and all sensible people in the position that "progress in religion," the Templeton Foundation's reason for being, can be accomplished only when all the popes and bishops, priests and priestesses, prelates, ministers, reverends, rabbis, mullahs, monks, nuns, and the entire motley collection of those who claim to speak for various gods and or other supernatural powers agree among themselves as to what it is they are claiming about the nature of human beings and the universe and provide credible and persuasive evidence for it. In the meantime, the disagreeable and divisive contentions of religion, an enduring source of strife and hostility since the dawn of history, should be left out of the practice of medicine.

Thank you for considering these issues. We would appreciate your response to our concerns.

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January 28, 1997, marked the fifth year of our incorporation.



— Christos Tramatikos

# Report from the President

On May 1, having complied with all the rules and requirements of the Internal Revenue Service, we received from the Department of

than 200 years, bringing interfaith harmony, astounding religious vitality and by far the highest rate of religious observance in the developed world.

No new amendment is needed to guarantee a student's right to pray in public schools. H.J. 78 is specifically designed to permit coercive programs of group prayer in public schools, and children who do not want to participate would be forced to single themselves out by leaving the room, a horrendous burden on a young child. Provisions barring government officials from compelling participation in prayer are insufficient, and "student volunteers" could impose religious worship on their peers by reciting prayers in class, over the loud speaker, and at every school event.

The provision allowing "the people" to "recognize their religious beliefs, heritage, and traditions on public property" is dangerously vague.

## Religious Freedom Amendment

To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: neither the United States nor any state shall establish any official religion, but the people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools shall not be infringed. Neither the United States nor any state shall require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, prescribe school prayers, discriminate against religion or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion.

H.R. Res. 78 would force taxpayers to contribute to houses of worship. The provision that government shall not "deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion" forces government to give tax aid to religions to which a taxpayer does not subscribe.

Every religious group that wants public funding would have a constitutional right to receive it. With nearly 2,000 religious denominations, America does not have the money to fund religion on this scale.

This is a huge step toward governmental control of religion, as giving religious groups the right to public funding would inevitably guarantee government would regulate them. Getting the religious freedom protections of the First Amendment is a radical step which has never been done in the 206 year history of the Bill of Rights. It would surely lead to religious strife and hatreds which the First Amendment has protected America from for 206 years.

You will be far more effective if you come across as concerned with religious freedom and harmony, not as opposed to religion.

Write:

The Honorable (Your Representative's name)  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

— Rebecca Porto

The following news advisory has been faxed to media nationwide:

January 7, 1998  
 Contact: Marie Alena Castle  
 612-588-1597  
 President, Atheist Alliance  
 5146 Newton Ave. No.  
 Minneapolis MN 55430

**CART Wheels Turn:  
 Atheist/Humanist Coalition  
 Formed To Promote New  
 Age of Reason**

## **Atheist Alliance Coalition for the Advancement of Rational Thinking**

**the whole thrust of faith/**

**medicine in medical care appears to be an attempt to validate religious superstition**

A new kind of coalition holds promise of uniting the atheists and humanists of the United States in an effort to counter attempts by religious institutions to use the resources of government to promote and even legislatively mandate sectarian agendas regarding school prayer, school vouchers, creationism, sex education, reproductive freedom and sexual orientation.

The Coalition for the Advancement of Rational Thinking (CART) provides a way for groups of unbelievers to collaborate while preserving each organization's autonomy and opportunity for leadership. Coalition projects can be initiated and implemented by any organization and supported on an ad hoc basis by any number of other willing organizations. There are no coalition rules or dues. The only requirement is that projects support the civil rights of unbelievers and oppose religious incursions into public, tax-supported venues.

In the first such initiative, the Atheist Alliance (a national umbrella organization of independent atheist member societies) proposed a joint letter of protest to eight medical schools (Brown Univ. School of Medicine, Georgetown Univ. Medical Center, Loyola Univ. of Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, Morehouse School of Medicine, Oregon Health Sciences Univ. School of Medicine, Pritzker School of Medicine, Univ. of Kentucky School of Medicine, and Univ. of Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry) for their acceptance of a John Templeton Foundation grant for courses "that explore the

connection between spirituality and health and religious issues in patient care." (A copy of the letter accompanies this news advisory.)

CART's concern is that the whole thrust of faith/medicine in medical care appears to be an attempt to validate religious superstition and supernaturalism. This approach can only worsen the situation for unbelievers, who already endure unwanted visits from clerics and members of religious groups while they are sick in a hospital and their ability to resist or object to such proselytization is compromised.

Two national groups signed on with the Atheist Alliance to this initial effort: American Atheists (founded by Madalyn Murray O'Hair) and the Rationalist Association (now celebrating its 50th anniversary). A number of local groups also signed on. For the future, the national American Humanist Association and additional local groups have expressed enthusiasm for the CART idea and a willingness to collaborate.

CART is on the way to becoming a strong voice for a revival of rational thinking in public life and the rights of this country's last oppressed minority—the 10 percent or so who are religion-free and want to stay that way.

**Coalition for the Advancement of Rational Thinking National Organizations:**

- Atheist Alliance, Inc.
- The Rationalist Association
- American Atheists
- Local Organizations:
- Arizona Secular Humanists, Atheists & Agnostics of Wisconsin, Atheist Coalition (San Diego), Atheist Community of Austin, Atheists of Colorado, Atheists of Florida, Atheists & Other Freethinkers (Sacramento), Atheist Outreach (Wisconsin), Atheists of San Francisco Region, Atheists United (Los Angeles), Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, Metroplex Atheists (Dallas/Ft. Worth), Minnesota Atheists, North Texas Church of Freethought, Rationalist Society of St. Louis, Secular Humanists of the Low Country (So. Carolina), Society Against Religion (New York State).

Copy of CART letter to medical schools December 15, 1997  
 (Medical school director)  
 (Medical school)  
 (Address)  
 Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

The John Templeton Foundation announced on August 26th that your medical school was one of eight that received \$25,000 grants to implement courses beginning in the 1997-98 school year "that explore the connection between spirituality and health and religious issues in patient care." In published news reports that have appeared since, it has been stated that student physicians at your medical

school will now be taught to include a "spiritual history" in their evaluation of patients. In other accounts it has been stated that "praying with patients" will be a part of these new "Faith and Medicine" courses of instruction.

We Support the Proven Value of Medical Science Over Superstition.

We represent many of the approximately 10% of individuals in the United States who reject superstition and maintain a view of the world and of human beings based on facts, reason, and the scientific method. We consider it unarguable that it is precisely this approach that has been the basis of human progress.

The ignorance and fear engendered by superstition and supernaturalism, almost always in the guise of religion, have historically been and continue to be obstructions to medical innovation. Careful reasoning and attention to evidence are responsible for the transformation of heavy medical traditions into progressive modern medical science. Human action, not prayer, led to vaccinations, anesthesia, penicillin, organ transplantation, and in-vitro fertilization—advances that were met with unreasoning resistance by most supernaturalist religions.

We do not doubt that religious beliefs and practices can have an impact on human health and disease, but entirely too much emphasis has been given to suggestive evidence for the beneficial health effects of religion. To the extent that church attendance may be associated with better health, for example, it is clear that the association is not with any particular religious tradition or denomination. Rather, it appears that supportive social surroundings are important to people and enhance their health and well-being, which is scarcely surprising.

Meanwhile, there continues to be a steady stream of reports of individuals injured or killed during religious rituals involving the handling of snakes, use of bacteriologically contaminated "holy water," and "demon exorcisms." Other individuals, including children, are harmed because of religiously-motivated avoidance or discontinuation of indicated medical care. Even some patients who are admitted as inpatients to accredited health care facilities are unable to receive the appropriate medical care they need—and their doctors want to provide—because of dogma-based strictures imposed by the religious orders that control those facilities.

Medicine has, along with its scientific foundations, a long tradition of humanistic recognition and respect for the sick that includes an appropriate acknowledgment and understanding of patients' religious beliefs and practices. But this humanistic tradition also includes an abiding respect for the rights of conscience of unbelievers.

These considerations logically demand that medical professionals maintain a certain distance from religious issues that arise in the context of their duties. They certainly prohibit physicians from either encouraging and endorsing or hindering and undermining their patients' conscientious beliefs on religious questions, whether or not their patients wish it otherwise.

We Strongly Object to Compromising Medical Science.  
 We strongly object to your medical school's planned inclusion of a "Faith and Medicine" course of instruction in its curriculum.

We strongly object to the implicit notion that the only valid point of view on religious questions is one of the many mutually exclusive systems that go by the term of "faith," which is to say belief in the absence of evidence—or even in the face

of controverting evidence.

We especially object to the notion that beliefs held by means of "faith" can justify the use of "faith healing" in lieu of indicated medical care, which is implicit in the "Faith and Medicine" academic paradigm.

We strongly object to obscuring the distinction between the duties of physicians and those of priests, ministers, rabbis, mullahs, and other religious counselors and support personnel.

We urge you to consider the many ways in which instructing physicians to become involved with the religious beliefs and practices of their patients are likely to lead to unintended adverse consequences:

- There are numerous religious sects in America today, many of which view each other with dislike and distrust.
- Some advocate personal and political ideals that are diametrically opposed to one another.
- Persons who may attend the very same church may nevertheless differ fundamentally on important issues, regardless of what an avatollah or a pope may proclaim.
- Many people of one or another religious persuasion are married to or have other family members who do not share their beliefs. These people, no less than patients themselves, must often be able to interact effectively with patients' physicians.

In addition, individuals often modify or change their religious beliefs, or reject them altogether, and they often experience such transitions as personal growth events. How can such religious pluralism, indeterminism, and shifting points of view possibly be addressed by even the most well-intentioned physician without the risk of serious harm to the medical profession and its sworn duty to care for the sick without fear or favor?

We are exceedingly apprehensive at the prospect of your medical school's eventual graduation of physicians who will have been explicitly instructed that there is an important nexus between "Faith and Medicine," physicians who have been taught that belief in god(s) and other supernatural powers is generally a healthy thing for people, and physicians who will be eager to start "praying with patients" as a form of medical care.

Where will this leave Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists, Freethinkers, and others who reject the alleged importance of faith for human health and happiness? What will be the eventual result of physicians taking a "spiritual history," which is nothing more than religious testing—an unavoidably discriminatory and divisive practice that has been the tool of the most horrifying and inhumane crimes and abuses? How many people, whatever their conscientious views of religious questions may