

THERE WERE TWO MAJOR CHALLENGES TO BE accomplished in the 2008 Fall Quarter: 1) To complete a transition between old and new presidents; and 2) To fill the position of AAI Secretary.

That transition is now complete. I hired a new administrative assistant and established a new mailing address for AAI. I also conducted a review of all AAI operations and structures, and conducted a survey of our AAI affiliates and individual members (subscribers to *Secular Nation*). I reviewed the administrative processes and forms, redrafted them as necessary, and turned these processes over to my administrative assistant. We have completed the 2009 affiliate and membership surveys and compiled the results. The results of the AAI 2009 Affiliate Survey have been published in the AAI 2009 "State of the Community" document. You can see and download this document from the AAI website. I am also pleased to announce the appointment of Heather McIntosh as AAI's new Secretary. As this is an elected position, Heather will be serving as Acting Secretary until the AAI BOD conducts a special election for the position.

AAI First quarter report

~Stuart Beckman
President, AAI International



To receive a more comprehensive report on the Atheist Alliance,

go to:
President@atheistalliance.org

New AAI Website

We are moving towards releasing a new, more dynamic version of the AAI Website. The new site will include a members-only area where we will be placing information on programs, policies, etc., of interest to our affiliates. You can get to the members-only Website by going to <http://new.atheistalliance.org>, use the login form in the right-hand column with the login name "AAIAffiliate" and password

"16GreatYears." Once logged in, go down the right-hand column to "User Menu" and click on "Affiliate Information." There, you will see three documents: The 2009 AAI State of the Community report (see above), the proposed 2009 AAI Vision Statement, and an audio podcast on organizational leadership. All of these can be downloaded by clicking on them.

AAI 2009 Convention

We also began laying the groundwork for the 2009 AAI Convention. There has been good news and surprising news with that effort: The good news is that the Richard Dawkins Award committee had nominated TV talkshow host, outspoken religion critic and recent *Religulous* movie producer Bill Maher as our 2009 RDA recipient, and he has agreed to attend our convention. The surprising news is that, due to the scheduling demands of his television show, he will not have been able to participate unless he didn't need to leave Los Angeles. So in order to accommodate that requirement, the Convention committee agreed to move the 2009 convention back to Los Angeles. While our affiliate groups in Colorado had already agreed to host the 2009 convention and had done a fair amount of work in scouting venues and making some plans, they were most gracious in understanding our predicament and agreeing with the move to L.A. I want to extend a thanks to Marvin Straus, the Boulder Atheists, and the other Colorado volunteers that expended time and effort in preparation.

Our new convention website, www.atheistconvention.org and www.aaiconvention.org, should be up by now with current information. Be sure to bookmark them in your browser or subscribe to the RSS feed to keep apprised of developments!

Atheist Alliance International • 1777 T Street NW • Washington • DC • 20009

Atheists of Florida

CHAPTER MEETINGS

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified ads are published free for all active members of Atheists of Florida. Send your ad information to:

AthAIFLE@aol.com
Subject line: "CLASSIFIEDS."

Fine American-made, Hand-crafted jewelry (great gifts for any occasion—Secular, Pagan or otherwise): if you're looking for that special one-of-a-kind piece for yourself or that special someone, take a look at the Swarovski crystal, pearl, amethyst, turquoise, jade and other gorgeous gemstone bracelets, necklaces, and earrings available from TRACYS TRES CHIC. Tracy Thomas, Jewelry Artisan, 727-235-3220, mschacha@tampabay.rr.com.

Godless in America: conversations with an atheist by George A. Ricker is now available at most book retailers and online

TAMPA BAY: Pinellas Park Public Library—Second Sunday of each odd-numbered month (Jan., Mar., etc.), 1:30—4:30, 78th Ave North & 52nd Street.

Tampa—Second Sunday of each even-numbered month, 1:30-4:30, Atheists of Florida office, 3614 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa. Social dinners follow all meetings at nearby cafeterias. FMI: Ed Golly, 813/835-1500, AthAIFLE@aol.com.

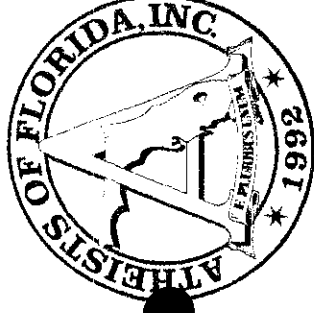
book sellers. For more information about the book and its author, go to www.godlessinamerica.com.

Photography by Brent Michael [Yaciw] specializes in digital capture of weddings and other events, preserving memories in a unique fashion while maintaining traditional quality. www.aimzoom.com. Brent@aimzoom.com, or 813-785-0699



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Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

A Founding Member Society of the Atheist Alliance International
(The Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies)

Volume XIV No. 5 February 2009

A of F Board Meets for 2009 Executive Director named

TAMPA—THE ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA BOARD OF DIRECTORS HELD ITS annual meeting at the A of F office on January 18.

The organization had strayed somewhat from agenda items passed the previous year due to the significant amount of time required to build out our new office during the summer of 2008. With the space for the most part completed, and with more volunteers stepping forward primarily from the board, we can now resume directing our attention to more issues.

The two most significant decisions of the board were to establish an executive director for A of F and to resume production of the *Atheist Forum*.

The executive director position has been defined in our bylaws for many years, but we have always lacked the funds to pay someone to assume the job. President Ed Golly offered to accept the job without compensation for at least the first year and the board accepted the offer. He may continue to serve as treasurer under these conditions.

When the Hillsborough County Commission decided to discontinue funding for Public Access TV, the channels were moved from 19 and 20 to 949 and 950. Viewership immediately plunged. Tampa Bay Community Network (TBCN) also was forced to limit membership to residents of the City of Tampa. Although we could grandfather our members in, we were operating on a skeleton crew. The effort to produce the *Forum* seemed to exceed any results it could generate.

Yet the show still generated viewers who did contact us as a result of the show. That all ended when we cancelled production last summer. So the board decided that if we could produce the program in our own facilities, we would not have any crew issues and could record the programs at our convenience.

The board voted to resume production of the *Atheist Forum* and allow up to \$5,000 to procure the necessary equipment to do so. We could probably record two one-hour programs, or four half-hour shows in one set-up. The shows will no longer be live, which will eliminate our ability to take phone calls from viewers, but otherwise it will remain the same quality production.

The same facility will be used to produce our Web cast, and we will have the capability to use the audio from the TV show for our Web cast.

Any members interested in assisting with the production should contact producer Golly at AthAIFLE@aol.com or leave a phone message at (813) 839-1500.

John Kieffer reported that he has signed up the 151st member of the USF Atheist Student Alliance. All e-mails regarding A of F meetings and events are forwarded to the ASA members. Kieffer would like to send two ASA members to the Atheist Alliance convention in Los Angeles this year (see page 8).

The board decided to create a gallery of well-known atheists who have contributed to the advancement of atheism to be installed on the walls of the office. We plan to produce framed portraits of atheists or freethinkers including a brief biography. When ready, we will be asking members to adopt a favored atheist. For a minimum donation of \$100, sponsors will be recognized on the frame of their atheist.

The 2009 budget is expected to exceed our income for the year since, predictably, income is decreasing in our struggling economy. We will therefore create earmarked funds for a Building Fund and the Atheist Student Alliance.

Atheists of Florida has been a supporter of the original Camp Atheist since its inception. Last year A of F sponsored a child of one of our members who, this year, has an opportunity to go to Greece instead of camp. Therefore the board voted to sponsor eligible children from among our membership to attend CQ. For more information about the camp, see their Web site at: camp-quest.org and if you have an interested child or relative, let us know.



ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA, INC.
Ed Golly, Jackie Jordan, Steve Miles, Jack Basart (barely visible), Steve Brown, Gloria Julius, Julia Scott, Rob Curry, John Kieffer, and Joe Reinhardt.

Officers

The elected officers for 2009 are:

President	Robert Curry
Vice-president	Nan Owens
Secretary	Julia Scott
Treasurer	Ed Golly
Chairman	John Kieffer
Executive Director	Ed Golly

Additional positions were renewed or created, and can be seen on the masthead on page 2.

"We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus—and non-believers."

—President B. Obama
January 20, 2009

Ed Golly moves from President to Executive Director. Here is his 2009 President's Report to the Board of Directors:

NEARLY THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT for Atheists of Florida this year was the realization of our office which was an opportunity we had not anticipated during our 2008 board meeting. But when space became available during the summer, the board

Message from the President

~Ed Golly

we agreed we should capitalize on the opportunity. This rejected the time our staff would have otherwise utilized to accomplish some of the items we had laid out for A of F last year in favor of directing their attention to completing the tasks necessary to construct the space.

The office now holds our entire library and all our merchandise as well as office space. We have constructed a studio from which we will broadcast our Webcast. Having thought ahead when laying out the space, we can also

Jim Strayer's The Solution is Evolution is scheduled to appear in our next issue. He can be reached at BIOJIMS@aol.com.

create a studio to produce the *Atheist Forum* as a video program in the same

Judge doesn't ban 'God' in oath

He also declines to prevent ministers from praying at the celebration

WASHINGTON—A federal judge on Thursday, January 15 refused to order the words "so help me God" taken out of President-elect Obama's oath of office or to prevent ministers from praying at the inauguration celebration.

U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton turned down a request from a group of atheists and agnostics, including Atheists of Florida, to prevent Chief Justice John Roberts from adding those words to the 35-word inaugural oath outlined in the Constitution.

Led by California atheist Michael Newdow, the suit also sought to prohibit Obama's chosen inaugural ministers, the Revs. Joseph Lowery and Rick Warren, from offering prayers at the inauguration (see *previous newsletter*).

space, which the board decided to do at the 2009 meeting.

Time diverted to construction of the space precluded production of the newsletter last year, but now we are back on a six-week publication schedule and expect to have much to report in the coming year.

Perhaps the best news delivered at the board meeting this year is the fact that all of the funds in our rather substantial endowment fund remain completely intact.

When the board voted to invest the endowment in a portfolio of mutual funds in pursuit of growth and return on investment, it neglected to set a specific deadline for such equities to be purchased. The entire fund was placed in a Certificate of Deposit at our bank and sat there while we haggled over when and how to make the investments. Procrastination and post-meeting haggling proved to be a (you should pardon the expression) "blessing in disguise," for at the end of the day, the entire endowment remains intact drawing interest for us to utilize for operating expenses.

One item postponed from the 2008 board meeting was the production of an annual report for A of F. We are setting up the report as a work in progress to be produced during the year, covering all the events in which we partake during the year as well as our annual financial reports.

Walton said he lacked the authority to order Obama not to say the words, saying the president-elect had a right to free speech. The judge also questioned whether he had the authority to give the chief justice an order not to say "so help me God" after the oath.

Newdow argued that the inclusion of those words was an unconstitutional intrusion of religion into government. Roberts is acting in his capacity as a constitutional officer in giving the oath, he argued, so it didn't matter that Obama has asked him to alter it to include the offensive wording. "He has no right to do what the president-elect has asked him to do when it violates the Constitution," Newdow said.

Walton complained about the lateness of the filing, saying that there was not enough time to get the case litigated and appealed before the inauguration. He did not throw the case out, however, instead only refusing to stop the inauguration.

Couple 50.00 yr
 Individual 40.00 yr
 Student (under 25 yrs) 10.00 yr
 Limited Income (over 65) 10.00 yr
 Newsletter (out of state) 10.00 yr

Officers
 Chairman: John Kieffer
 President: Robert Curry
 Vice President: Nan Owens
 Secretary: Julia Scott
 Treasurer: Ed Golly
 Executive Director: Ed Golly

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 Jack Basart Stephen Brown
 Jacqueline Jordan Gloria Julius
 Steven Miles James Peterson
 Joe Reinhardt

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 Editor: Julia Scott
 Contributing Staff: Julia Scott
 Web Masters: Jim Peterson

Robert Curry
 Atheist Forum Producer: Ed Golly
 Legal Affairs Coordinator: Christos Tzanetakos
 Publications Coordinator: James Peterson
 Marketing Coordinator: John Kieffer
 Office Manager: Jacqueline Jordan

North Dakota member

When we sent new member Calvin Newnam his membership card, we wondered why someone so far away would join our group. He responded...

Dear Friends at Atheist of Florida,

I just received my 1st issue of the Atheists of Florida newsletter December 2008. I'm impressed.

You asked why me, a prison inmate from North Dakota, would join A of F. I'm surrounded by religion day and night. Almost everyone here is very religious I believe the three states that set the agenda in this country are California (I'm

LETTERS



truly are California (I'm actually a member of Atheists United and Atheists and other Freethinkers), New York

"Prison inmates are the most religious people on earth"

(I'm a member of New York City Atheists and The Council for Secular Humanism—Amburst), and Florida (you). Prison inmates are the most religious people on earth. I'm not the typical inmate. I've been in prison over 20 years. I don't blame the devil or any other person, real or otherwise, for my being here. I fucked up and was involved in a stupid thing and I don't complain to anybody about taking my well deserved punishment. I do hope to live long enough to get out in 2019. I'm a kidney dialysis patient. I believe in church state separation 110%! I'm enclosing a check for \$40 and my membership card. Please update my membership for another year.

Thank you.
 —Calvin A. Newnam
 Bismarck, ND

very factual concerning the Bible content.

I'd really like to know, even though it's so unpopular, why don't they tax churches? And it would get us right out of our deficit. I've noticed there have been a couple of burglaries of churches lately, and they found \$75,000—\$80,000 in their safe, and it's sort of bizarre. On Little Road for example, the Greek Orthodox—they own so much land on Little Road, it should all be taxable. Maybe not the building—maybe they should be taxed at a lower percent—but I believe they should be taxed. There should be no difference from separation of government and church, because the church is sticking their nose into government all the time, so it's about time we stuck our nose in what's going on with them.

I'm behind you. Maybe you could pass that on. It probably wouldn't be popular, but I think it would be realistic.

Thank you Mr. Golly. I appreciate your letter to the editor.

Another response came from Clearwater member Jack Wilhite:

Yo Ed,

About a year ago I wrote in response to a piece which quoted Romney as saying (roughly): "There is no freedom without

Invocation irony

Published in the St. Petersburg Times Jan. 28, 2009

Atheists of Florida was one of many co-litigants in the suit filed by Michael Newdow to stop the invocation at President Barack Obama's inauguration. The irony of the prayer is likely lost on most outside the community of reason.

Rick Warren's contention that we owe our democracy and freedom to a Christian god is remarkable in the sheerness of its audacity, considering that the words "democracy," "liberty," "civil rights," and "republic" appear nowhere in the Bible. The exclusive form of government advanced by the Christian religion is the kingdom. Were this truly a Christian nation living by its tenets, slavery would still be with us since it is the only social condition endorsed by Christianity for which we can find no contradiction in the Bible.

As Obama alluded to in his inaugural speech, our government serves citizens of all faiths and those of us with none at all. This will only be accomplished when the government and all its ceremonies function free of practices that endorse any religion.

—Ed Golly
 Executive Director, Atheists of Florida, Inc.
 Tampa

The day of publication, we received a telephone response from a Times reader:

Mr. Golly,

I read your letter to the editor today which I consider

religion; no religion with out freedom." I simply pointed out that I had lived nearly ¾ of a century in freedom, while being totally irreligious; ANID that the lack of freedom in Cuba and Iran has not quashed religious fervor.

The slavery angle reminds me of my Christian folk using the scriptures about Ham being sent to the "south land," presumably not Miami, to justify racism. Oh, well.

Keep on keeping' on!

—Jack Wilhite
 Clearwater

Prayer is indeed powerful

Prayer is one of the primary ways in which people debate themselves into believing obvious falsehoods, into thinking hurting or killing others is righteous, into avoiding reality.

Yes, prayer is indeed a powerful thing, but not because it intrinsically works or because any god exists. Prayer is powerful because human beings can be manipulated with it. I only hope that Obama's manipulation is more benevolent than his predecessor.

—Brent Yaciv
 Wesley Chapel



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 Life Member \$ 500.00
 Sustaining 60.00 yr

From an article in The Nation
http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090202/wiener

THE CALIFORNIA MEGACHURCH MINISTER and opponent of gay marriage who delivered the invocation at Barack Obama's inauguration had his income tax returns audited in 1996. When the IRS tried to collect the taxes it claimed he owed, Warren went to court. Congress then passed a law granting Warren's tax deduction, preempting the US Court of Appeals from even taking up the case against him. The votes in the House and Senate were unanimous.

The IRS permits members of the clergy to claim exemptions for their housing. At the time of Warren's audit the amount claimed had to be "reasonable"—it shouldn't exceed the fair market value for the rental of the home. That 1996 audit concluded that Warren was deducting more than that—the IRS said he owed \$55,300 in taxes. Warren challenged the IRS in tax court, arguing that his housing exemption should be unlimited.

The facts were simple: in 1993 Warren deducted \$77,663, his entire Saddleback Church salary that year, as a housing expense—



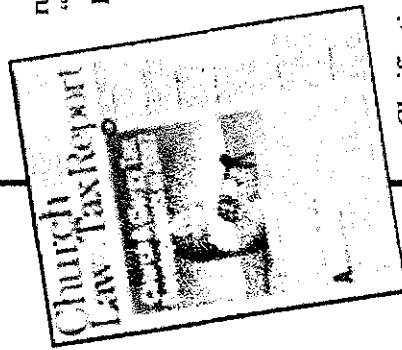
Rick Warren

How much clout does Rick Warren have?

discrimination against certain ministers of the gospel who are carrying on such a courageous fight against this foe." Chemerinsky concluded that the exemption represented an intentional government subsidy of religion, and thus it violated the First Amendment's establishment clause.

But before the three-judge panel could rule, Congress stepped in—and acted with "almost miraculous" speed, as Richard Hammar, editor of the *Church Law & Tax Report* newsletter, explained to the *New York Times*. The new law granted Warren his deductions (along with any other clergy who had done the same—although Warren was the only one to end up in court). Congress also put into law, from that time forward, the IRS's "fair rental value" rule.

The Clergy Housing Allowance Clarification Act of 2002 was approved unanimously by Congress, then signed into law by George W. Bush on May 20, 2002, rendering the IRS case against Warren moot. "I have filed hundreds of briefs in federal courts," said Chemerinsky, "and this is the only time that Congress passed a law to make a specific pending case moot. It is very rare for Congress to pass a law to make a pending case moot before there was a decision."



and paid no taxes at all on that salary. In addition, he claimed a deduction for his mortgage expenses—even though they had been covered by the salary. He made similar claims in subsequent tax returns.

Warren spent four years defending his housing deduction in tax court; in May 2000 he won. The court struck down the IRS's "reasonable" clergy-housing cap and accepted Warren's argument that his housing claim could be unlimited. The IRS appealed, and since Warren lives in California, the case went to the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, known for its liberal judges. That court declared that it wanted to consider not only whether the IRS had been right in trying to limit Warren's tax deduction for housing but also whether the tax break for clergy housing violated the establishment clause in the Bill of Rights, which requires separation of church and state.

Seeking arguments on the constitutionality of the "parsonage exemption," as it was called, the Ninth Circuit panel appointed Erwin Chemerinsky as a friend of the court. At the time, Chemerinsky was teaching law at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles; today he is dean of the law school at the University of California, Irvine. Chemerinsky observed that the housing tax exemption applied only to "ministers of the gospel"—not to leaders of secular nonprofits engaged in humanitarian work. He noted that the rule was established in 1954, at the height of the cold war, after a Congressman argued that "in these times when we are being threatened by a godless and antireligious world movement we should correct this

Warren prevailed in part because of his prominence as the author of a book that has sold more than 25 million copies and as the founder of his 22,000-member church in Orange County. He prevailed also because he saw how his tax deduction could be turned into an example of what his defenders called "judicial activism at its worst." Right-wing talk-radio host Hugh Hewitt called it an example of "the implacable hostility of the political left to the role of God in the world and the country."

Religious denominations from Reform Jews to Southern Baptists expressed their support for the exemption. But their goal was preserving their own exemptions in the future, not defending Warren's past tax returns. The bill could have established the "reasonable" standard the IRS sought for the exemption without letting Warren off the hook. Or Congress could have waited to see what the courts would decide about the constitutionality of the exemption before acting on it.

Instead, Rick Warren posed as a defender of clergy of all faiths against a godless left-wing court. Not even the most progressive members of Congress were willing to stand up to him—not Ted Kennedy, Paul Wellstone, Russ Feingold, Bernie Sanders or Barney Frank. Obama's invitation to Warren was dismaying, but this history may make it more comprehensible.

We'll see.

WELL, I GUESS I SHOULD BEGIN WITH HOW I grew up. I was reared in the UK, where religion is not a big deal to anyone. Few people go to church or discuss religion. The country as a whole is largely agnostic with few strong views either way on the subject of religion.

The only real contact I had with religion growing up was the odd wedding or funeral or the occasional midnight mass at Christmas (which we attended to get into the spirit of Christmas, not for the religion). Religion was not mentioned in the house and there was certainly no night time prayers or grace said. However, due to outdated laws, schools are still required to provide 1 hour of religious education a week, something many schools struggle to do and most lack. My religious education at school was mainly taken from a morning assembly. However in High school I did study religion.

In 2003 I moved to Florida and was truly amazed at the level of religion I encountered. I was more shocked, however, at how the religious majority seemed to have made it their mission to convert everyone else.

Although I have nothing against an individual person's right to follow and



Julia Scott is a Gynecology Nurse at Morton Plant Hospital and the happily divorced parent of an 11-year-old son. She can be reached at julacott1971@hotmail.com

Why I'm an atheist

~Julia Scott
Secretary, Atheists of Florida

world. Their message is that we don't need God to live a healthy, happy life.

Another reason I am mad with the religious majority is the way they are attempting to hijack the political process. By this I mean they are trying to make religious doctrine law, in respect to things like stem cell research, abortion and gay marriage. These things should be left to lawmakers and voters, not the church. I guess the religious majority has forgotten that the US was founded on secular beginnings; Thomas Jefferson was himself a non-believer. In fact the first amendment actually keeps religion out of government.

Also, on the subject of Christmas, you may say that I am a hypocrite for celebrating Christmas when I don't

believe. Well, you would be right, which is why I, for the last 4 years, I have stopped celebrating Christmas.

Instead I celebrate a much older winter holiday, the pagan festival of the Winter Solstice. This festival predates Christianity and celebrates the changing seasons and the celestial movement of the earth. The winter solstice is usually celebrated on December 21st or 22nd and is commonly called the first day of winter. It is when the earth's tilt puts us (in the northern hemisphere) as far away from the sun as we can get. This festival started way back when people thought the sun was angry with them and was leaving. They held a huge party and gave thanks to the sun. The next day the sun started to return. In fact, the next day the earth's axis started to move back the other way, so the days started to get longer again.

Lastly I will just explain what Atheism means to me. I don't believe in a divine creator. I believe in nature and the Darwin theory of natural selection and evolution. I believe that life was created spontaneously by a series of natural events and that evolution over millions of years gets us to where we are now. I believe that when I die my bodily functions including my brain will cease to work and that there is no afterlife, heaven or hell. I believe that my body will rot in the ground or be cremated. Due to the fact that I believe that when I die that is it, I value my life. I live my life to the fullest as best as I can because tomorrow could be my last day and when it's over, it's over forever.

practice a religion. I do object to having it rammed down my throat or infringing on my rights to not practice a religion. Although the Bible claims religion should be a private affair, I guess the USA skipped that section!!

The second thing that angered me are these televangelists. These people scream at you from the pulpit and threaten you with damnation and hell if you do not support the ministry by sending money. I am amazed that people haven't caught onto the fact that these preachers are driving luxury cars and have mansions, while those that send money make minimum wage and struggle to feed their family.

After about a year of being bombarded by these tactics I decided I had had enough. Firstly I joined American Atheists. I got a lot of information from them but no interaction with other atheists. I then found Atheists of Florida on the Web, I joined, and it was really what I was looking for. A like-minded bunch that was as sick of the whole bible-pushing thing as I was. Since joining this group I have become an activist in the Atheist circle. I have actively gone out on a Friday night in Tampa and taken provocative signs in order to engage with people about the way religion has become a bully. Some of the signs read: "Jesus Isn't Coming," "Stop Christian Fascism," "Want freedom? Stop supporting intolerant religious nuts."

I have also sent my son to Camp Quest, a summer camp for the children of atheists and free-thinkers. They do the usual summer camp things but also learn about famous free-thinkers and the religions of the

believe. Well, you would be right, which is why I, for the last 4 years, I have stopped celebrating Christmas. Instead I celebrate a much older winter holiday, the pagan festival of the Winter Solstice. This festival predates Christianity and celebrates the changing seasons and the celestial movement of the earth. The winter solstice is usually celebrated on December 21st or 22nd and is commonly called the first day of winter. It is when the earth's tilt puts us (in the northern hemisphere) as far away from the sun as we can get. This festival started way back when people thought the sun was angry with them and was leaving. They held a huge party and gave thanks to the sun. The next day the sun started to return. In fact, the next day the earth's axis started to move back the other way, so the days started to get longer again.

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ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA BOOKSTORE
Soledad de Montalvo-Mielche deciphers the entire history of the Western world in this 3-volume set of paperback books. A well-known European cookbook author and wife of a mad globe trotter, she felt that she knew enough about women, sex and food—the bastions of history—to intertwine them into a new and different interpretation of history.

VOLUME I, II, or III \$10 EACH
THREE VOLUME SET \$25
Make check payable to Atheists of Florida

British watchdog rejects complaints about 'no God' ads

LONDON—A poster campaign proclaiming "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." does not breach advertising rules, a British watchdog ruled recently after more than 300 people complained.

The atheist campaign, organized in response to Christian adverts, has seen some 800 buses plastered with the slogan across the country. It was backed by the British Humanist Association and paid for by more than 140,000 pounds (\$200,000) in public donations.

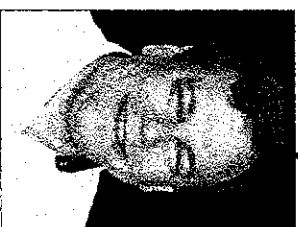
"The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Council concluded that the ad was an expression of the advertiser's opinion and that the claims in it were not capable of objective substantiation," it said in a statement.

"Although the ASA acknowledges that the content of the ad would be at odds with the beliefs of many, it concluded that it was unlikely to mislead or to cause serious or widespread offence," it added.

The campaign was the idea of comedy writer Ariane Sherine, who objected to Chris-



Sherine poses in front of a London bus with Richard Dawkins, who supported the campaign.



Rob Sherman

tian advertisements on some London buses that carried an Internet address warning that people who rejected God would spend eternity in "torment in hell."

Illinois moment of silence ruled unconstitutional

Information from AP Writer Mike Robinson

CHICAGO—A federal judge has ruled that a state law requiring a moment of silence in public schools across Illinois is unconstitutional, saying it crosses the line separating state and church.

"The statute is a subtle effort to force students at impressionable ages to contemplate religion," U.S. District Judge Robert W. Gettleman said in his ruling last month. The ruling came in a lawsuit designed to bar schools from enforcing the Illinois Silent Reflection and Student Prayer Act. It was filed by talk show host Rob Sherman, an outspoken atheist, and his daughter, Dawn, a high school student.

Gettleman's ruling was not a surprise. He had already ruled in favor of Sherman in two previous decisions.

As passed by the Illinois General Assembly, the law allows students to reflect on the day's activities rather than pray if that is their choice and defenders have said it therefore doesn't force religion on anyone.

But Gettleman backed critics such as the American Civil Liberties Union, who say the law is a thinly disguised effort to bring religion into the schools. The "teacher is required to instruct her pupils, espe-

he was convinced that the death and destruction of Katrina earlier that year was "divine retribution" for New Orleans' tolerance of homosexuals and laid-back sexual attitudes.

Compassion unfunded

WASHINGTON—On Jan. 28, the US House of Representatives passed its version of the economic stimulus package, which would provide \$819 billion dollars of funding. We applaud the drafters of the House bill for their wise prohibition on the funding of private or religious schools. However, the House economic recovery package does contain funding for the Compassion Capital Fund. The Fund lacks oversight, sends money directly to Houses of Worship, and allows recipients to hire employees based solely upon their religion for government-funded jobs. Clearly, more taxpayer dollars should not be expended on this program.

Fortunately, the Senate version of the bill does not contain unwise funding for the Compassion Capital Fund and we hope it will remain that way. You may consider thanking your Senators for eliminating this funding stream and urge them to use our tax dollars wisely in this important time. Now is not the time to continue unwise and unconstitutional practices of the catastrophic W. Administration.

Cross does not honor all deceased vets

Mt. Soledad display on public land violates Constitution, statechurch watchdog group argues

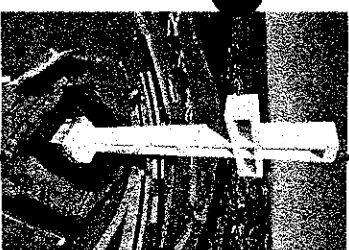
SAN DIEGO—The Christian cross is not an appropriate symbol to memorialize deceased veterans of many different faith perspectives and should not be displayed on government property, Americans United for Separation of Church and State has told a federal appeals court.

Americans United and other religious and civil liberties groups asked the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals last month to overturn a lower court's ruling holding that the Mt. Soledad cross in San Diego is a secular war memorial.

"American service personnel come from many different faiths and some follow no spiritual path at all," according to Barry Lynn, executive director of AU. "It is disrespectful to our deceased veterans to use the symbol of only one faith to memorialize them all."

Litigation over the 43-foot-tall Mt. Soledad cross has been under way for nearly 20 years. Several federal courts have ruled against its display on city property. In an effort to save the cross, the federal government acquired the land underneath the cross in 2006.

Legal action proceeded against the federal government's ownership of the towering religious symbol. In July of 2008, U.S. District Judge Larry Alan Burns delivered the convoluted ruling that the cross "communicates the primarily non-religious messages of



Mt. Soledad memorial

the era of the TV-based mega-churches is likely coming to an end

property to satisfy debt. Revenue plunged nearly \$5 million last year. In a letter to elite donors, Schuller Sr. hinted the show might end without their support. Although the Crystal Cathedral blames the recession for its woes, it is clear that the elder Schuller's carefully orchestrated leadership transition, planned over a decade, has stumbled badly. It's an issue common to personality driven ministries. Most have collapsed or been greatly diminished after their founders left the pulpit or died.

Most often, it's the pastor, not the institution, that generates the donations. Coupled with today's fragmented media landscape, the era of the TV-based megachurches modeled after the likes of Swagert, Roberts, and Schuller is likely, mercifully, coming to an end.

Dark Ages still thriving

CNN—A woman in rural Papua New Guinea was bound and gagged, tied to a log and set ablaze on a pile of fires last month, possibly because villagers suspected her of being a witch, according to police.

Her death adds to a growing list of men and women who have been accused of sorcery and then tortured or killed in the South Pacific island nation, where traditional beliefs hold sway in many regions. The victims are often scapegoats for someone else's unexplained death, and bands of tribesmen collude to mcle out jus-

military service, death and sacrifice" and can remain on public property.

In their friend-of-the-court brief filed in January, AU and other groups dispute that conclusion.

"That the cross is used in a veterans' memorial here does not make it secular," asserts the brief. "In fact, as a burial marker, the cross has been used almost exclusively for Christian burials in order to convey a sectarian message that the deceased lived and died as a member of a particular Christian community. And as a monument in a veterans' memorial, the cross conveys a similar sectarian message: that only fallen Christian soldiers are being remembered. Given the 'commanding presence' of the Mt. Soledad cross in relation to the rest of the memorial, the primary message that this cross communicates is religious, not secular."

Heartwarming news

Financial crisis has bright side as TV megachurches stumble

GARDEN GROVE, CA—Associated Press reports that the Rev. Robert Schuller, once one of the nation's most popular televangelists, is watching his life's work crumble.

His son and recent successor has abruptly resigned as senior pastor of the Crystal Cathedral. That's the huge, glass-walled mega-church home of the *Hour of Power* broadcast of over three decades.

They're in financial trouble. The church plans to sell more than \$65 million worth of its Orange County

hice to them for their supposed magical powers. The country's *Post-Courier* newspaper reported that more than 50 people were killed in two Highlands provinces last year for allegedly practicing sorcery.

In a well-publicized case last year, a pregnant woman gave birth to a baby girl while struggling to free herself from a tree. Villagers had dragged her from her house and hung her from the tree, accusing her of sorcery after her neighbor suddenly died. She and the baby survived, according to media reports.

The killing of witches, or *sangumans*, is not a new phenomenon in rural areas of the country. Emory University anthropology professor Bruce Knauft, who lived in a village in the western province of Papua New Guinea in the early 1980s, traced family histories for 42 years and found that one in three adult deaths were homicides—"the bulk of these being collective killings of suspected sorcerers," he wrote in his book, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia and Anthropology*.

In recent years, as AIDS has taken a toll in the nation of 6.7 million people, villagers have blamed suspected witches—and not the virus—for the deaths. According to the United Nations, Papua New Guinea accounts for 90 percent of the Pacific region's HIV cases and is one of four Asia-Pacific countries with an epidemic. There have been a number of cases where people were killed because they were accused of spreading HIV or AIDS.