

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI: No meeting for August. For future meeting dates and locations, call the Atheist Hotline: (305) 936-0210.

TAMPA: Saturday, August 31, 12:30 to 2:00 in Meeting Room B of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street. Immediately following the meeting, Atheists of Florida member Flo Morgenroth has arranged to have Henry Green, a fresh, new exciting candidate for Congress from the 10th district on the Democratic ticket, to address the Humanists of the Suncoast in adjoining Meeting Room A.

Green is firmly committed, as are we, to the separation of state and church. He personally spoke to Governor Chiles in Tallahassee last May to help convince the governor to veto the bill allowing student led religious devotions at commencement ceremonies and other school events.

The previous year Green was a leading speaker for state/church separationists when Congressman Canady came to Tampa on a nation-wide hearing for a constitutional school prayer amendment. His presentation and his delivery were so ardent that he received a standing ovation from the observers in the audience.

All our speakers that were allowed to speak were wonderful, but mostly because of Henry Green. Representative Canady cancelled the rest of his planned hearings. Be sure to come and bring your friends and family to hear this speaker.

Chiles *continued from front page*

Chiles' veto message was three pages long and outlined his thoughts on prayer and why it should never become public policy. Some excerpts:

"There are those who have urged me to allow this bill to become law, leaving to the courts the decision as to whether it is constitutional. I do not invade the province of the courts by vetoing this bill today. Instead, I exercise my authority and responsibility, as the chief executive of Florida, to give or to withhold my approval of legislation which has been presented to me. I do so not principally on the grounds of its constitutionality, but upon the appropriateness of the public policy embraced by the legislation. It is my conclusion that the school prayer provision in this legislation is not appropriate as a matter of public policy."

"...What our Founders knew is that the decision as to whether to pray, when to pray, and to whom to pray, is an intensely personal decision. It cannot be decided by majority vote.

"...Further, the school prayer provision will diminish the importance of the views and beliefs of those who are not within the majority. The public schools in our pluralistic society are grounded upon the principle of inclusion. School programs which at their best bring people together in common bonds — at sporting events, school assemblies, and commencement exercises — could be turned into events that tear people apart."

Thanks to all Atheists of Florida members who took the time to contact the governor. Every bit helps. **A**



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

ADDRESS CORRECTION
REQUESTED



School prayer legislation vetoed

IN OUR NEWSFILES section of the previous newsletter, we reported that Governor Chiles had vetoed House Bill 1041 which was an effort to introduce "voluntary" student-led prayer at non-compulsory school functions.

Many members of Atheists of Florida wrote, called, or faxed letters to the Governor's office to express opposition to the bill. Here was the official letter representing Atheists of Florida, written by President Christos Tzanetakos:

The Honorable Lawton Chiles
Governor of Florida
May 30, 1996
Re: Public school prayer legislation

Dear Governor Chiles:

For the past few months, our organization has been closely watching the desperate attempts of the religious right to introduce prayer in our public schools.

As you must know, since the 1962 landmark case, *Engel vs Vitale*, when our Supreme Court declared prescribed public school prayer unconstitutional, numerous committees have spent countless hours at taxpayer's expense debating this highly divisive issue.

Please notice that even a non-sectarian, non-denominational prayer of any kind will violate the rights of atheists and other non-believers in

our state.

Therefore, and on behalf of the more than 10% of our citizens who are atheistic, I am urging you to uphold your oath to our constitution and veto this legislation. Most sincerely,

Christos Tzanetakos
President, Atheists of Florida, Inc.

Chiles wrote back as follows:

Dear Christos:

I wanted to thank you for contacting me regarding House Bill 1041, the Prayer in School Bill. The decision to veto the bill was one of the most difficult I have had to make in my many years of public service.

I very much appreciate your comments and the remarks of many thousands of Floridians who wrote to me and called my office during the past weeks. It is an issue that evoked strong and emotional appeals, both in support of and in opposition to the bill.

My decision to veto evolved over a period of time and was only reached after great deliberation. I would like to share with you my thoughts in reaching the conclusion that organized school prayer, as it was contained in this bill, is not appropriate as a matter of public policy, so I am enclosing a copy of my veto message.

Prayer has always played an important part of my life and that of my family. It will continue to do so. Thank you again for letting me know how you feel.

With kind regards, I am
Sincerely,

Lawton Chiles

(continued back page)

Shall we join?

A self-explanatory query was proposed to the Alliance Board of Directors which we thought you'd find quite interesting...

TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS FROM MARIE CASTLE & STEVE PETERSEN:

An item appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* recently about the founding of "National Voices for an Inclusive 21st Century." The founding organizations are Anti-Defamation League, National Urban League, National Council of La Raza, and The National Conference (formerly The National Conference of Christians and Jews). It's a joint effort to combat bigotry across ethnic, racial and religious lines. They want to involve a diverse range of other organizations and leaders. They propose "six points for immediate action," which are: 1) Combat incendiary rhetoric, biased reporting and wedge politics. 2) Promote community healing and harmony. 3) Transform colleges and universities into models, as opposed to mirrors, of American society. 4) Affirm this nation's commitment

to inclusion. 5) Enact and implement hate crime laws, and cease police abuse of individuals' rights. 6) Convene a Presidential Summit on American Patriotism in the 21st Century.

We contacted the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in New York and they faxed their press release about this whole operation. We are sending the following letter. It will be interesting to see if they will accept us or if they are too bigoted (either way, the PR possibilities are stupendous). It would also be interesting, if we become members, to see what they do about the following:

The *Random House* dictionary defines atheism in part as "immorality, or wickedness." The religious right is notorious for blaming every ill they can think of on us. The Boy Scouts of America policy for admission says, "The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in

the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship." The VFW and American Legion refuse membership to atheist veterans, no matter how many battles they were in. The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* on June 6, 1995, had an article on the Catholic Church in China that included this statement from a Catholic official: "If a person has no religious beliefs, he can't be a moral person. If he's not a moral person, he cannot live in a moral society."

George Bush, in a campaign stop at O'Hare International Airport in 1988, said in response to a question: "...I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God."

Hillary Clinton, referring to the Beijing Conference in a newspaper column, wrote "...a small but vocal group of critics [are] trying to spread the notion that the U.N. gathering is really the work of radicals and atheists bent on destroying our families." (We don't know what radicals she was referring to, but we know of no atheists who have any interest in destroying families.) President Clinton has said that the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but not freedom from religion.

All of the above could be quite a challenge to "National Voices." We would love to see their response. Here's the letter we're sending:

July 24, 1996
Anti-Defamation League, 823 U. N. Plaza
New York, New York 10017
Friends:

Thank you for sending your news release about the formation of National Voices for an Inclusive 21st Century. The Atheist Alliance supports your goal of ending bigotry in all its forms. We would like information on becoming one of the organizations actively involved in National Voices so we can present it to our board of directors for approval.

The Atheist Alliance as an organization and its member societies individually are strongly committed to civil rights and civil liberties, and to freedom of conscience as guaranteed by the First Amendment. Our member societies already regularly involve themselves in one or more of National Voices' "six points for immediate action" and would welcome the added strength of being part of a national effort.

Please respond with information about joining National Voices.

I thank you.

Sincerely,
Marie Castle
Co-president, Atheist Alliance
Minneapolis, Minnesota

We'll keep you apprised of developments as they occur.



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

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Atheists of Florida members continue to sound off in the press. A sampling of their opinions:

Reed's statements are red herrings

AofF member Rowe was published July, '96 in Florida Today

Editor:

Responding to the recent black church fires in the South, Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed publicly stated that there is a conspiracy to commit violence against religion and an assault on Christianity in this country.

An astute theocrat, Reed is fully aware that many organized, violent hate groups are Christian.

The primary suspects, in most Americans' minds, who perpetrate crimes against African Americans are the devoutly born-again Christian, neo-Nazi white supremacists.

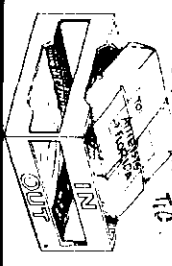
Other Christian, right-wing violent extremists include the Ku Klux Klan, the Rev. Jim "Guyana" Jones, Waco Wackos and the two Oklahoma City bombing suspects, Tim McVeigh and Terry Nichols, along with all of their comrades who belong to other Christian militias.

Because Reed is cognizant of the fact that these radicals subscribe to the same theology as he, I believe he has ulterior motives when making such an implication that religion is under attack by "secularists."

His agenda, via the GOP, is to force mandatory prayer in public schools.

A staunch anti-church/state separationist, Reed's objective to violate the First Amend-

Letters



ment ranks a close second to his ultimate goal of outlawing all legal abortions.

To be sure, most Christians are caring, law-abiding citizens who abhor violence. But, with regards to Reed's remarks, it's hypocrisy and red herrings.

Barry Rowe
Melbourne

Burnings must stop

From the St. Petersburg Times July 7, '96

As a nation, we are quick to recognize and excoriate acts of terrorism abroad and to call for vengeance. Yet when it happens routinely here at home, we ignore it and we quietly go about our business.

I'm speaking, of course, about the burning of black churches in the South, a heinous hate crime that tells us the Ku Klux Klan and the neo-Nazis and the militia groups are alive and doing God's work according to their twisted minds.

All of our enormous resources that we, as taxpayers, have bought and paid for must become available to root out these cowardly, sick vermin. The burnings must stop! We are supposed to be a civilized nation. Let's prove it. Humanism recognizes one race -- the human race!

Florence Morgenroth, president, Humanists of the Suncoast, and Jan Eisler, president, Humanists of St. Petersburg

Something Left Out

July 29, 1996

Dear Editor,
Enclosed is a capsule made of something MLJ left out of her article on Islam.

In this capsule, I am referring mainly to Burton L. Mack's book, *Who Wrote the New Testament*, published by Harper, San Francisco. The passages from the Koran are in Suras 19, 25, 43 and 72, among others. You may add the above if you wish.

RELIGIONS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

Lately, there have been published several books that prove, without question, that Christianity was a mythical fabrication of the church fathers from Old Testament passages taken out of context. That is the only link between Christianity and Judaism. But when you add to these studies the historical reality of the Koran and Islam, of which those books say nothing, then both the Jewish god and the Christian one are left shaken. The Koran and Islam accept only some of the Old Testament passages and although they regard Jesus as a great man, the last prophet before Mohammed, they emphatically state that Jesus was a mortal, not divine, and that he is not the son of God. The way history presents these three religions, the same God has said one thing to the Jews, a different one to the Christians, and a contradictory one to the Arabs.

Where, then, do God and religion stand?

Mike Perdomo
Miami

Feds sue Xian Coalition for aiding GOP candidates

Have you ever encountered a voter guide in, say, a super market? Are you aware that an organization which is exempt from federal taxes is required to abstain from any form of political endorsement? Does this make you wonder how religious groups get away with such a blatant violation of federal tax law?

For anyone who wondered how the Christian Coalition ever got away with their illegal political activities, the Federal Election Commission answered your questions by filing suit July 30th against the Coalition for using voter guides, mailings and telephone banks to press for the election of certain GOP candidates.

The Christian Coalition called the suit baseless and frivolous. "We are absolutely and totally confident that we will be fully vindicated," said Ralph Reed, the group's executive director. "And the courts will affirm that people of faith have every right to be involved as citizens and voters."

NEWS FILES

But the fact that the Federal Election Commission is chaired by a Republican and that there was a majority vote to sue the Coalition is not a good sign for Robertson, Reed and their sheep. The chairman of the Commission, Republican Lee Elliott, said, "There was a majority of the commission that felt they had gone too far. And we'll have to let the courts decide that now."

The timing of the lawsuit is critical because of the visible role of the Coalition at the Republican National Convention in August.

The lawsuit centers around the voter guides that the organization distributes before elections. The legal questions arise because the coalition coordinated the content and distribution of its voter guides in order to favor one candidate over another. Another issue raised by the FEC is the money that the Christian Coalition has funneled into its partisan activities. The FEC said that this money amounted to illegal donations because it should have been reported as independent expenditures or as in-kind contributions to the campaigns. The specific candidates named were George Bush, Newt Gingrich, Jesse Helms and Oliver North.

Separation of Church and State

by Irene Cumming Kleeberg

— book review by Patrick Bens

OF BOOKS OF THIS CALIBER, ONE

Reciprocation of State and Church?

expects more than pretty pictures and a short romanticized history lesson. I enjoyed the soapy history lesson and the photographs I'll discuss later but I decided not to lend the book to my children, although it was checked out from the Aventura Public Library's Juvenile Section.

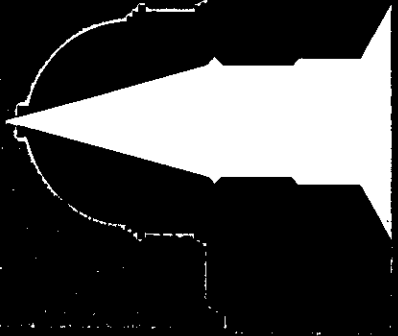
The objections I have are many. First of all I strongly resent the title. Why do they always say "Church and State"? Why not "State and Church"? After all, in a democracy the state is there for all. (Why not say the separation of making laws and making believe?)

My ruling would be to get this title to read: Separation of Government and Religion. Isn't the word "Church" too close a relative of Christianity? Kleeberg should also come out and state which side she's on. Clearly she mocks the wall of separation as being more like a wall on a theater stage that is moved back and forth and equal to one as in a mathematical reciprocation.

The photos in the book speak for themselves by glorifying religion. And the text, too, gives away a subtle undecidedness.

Moreover a young reader is bombarded by bombastic legal phrases that bore any lay reader deep into slumber. In contrast, where she simplies, she leaves out valuable arguments.

Separation of Church and State



Patrick Bens, now a resident of Miami, holds an Elementary Schoolteacher's degree from his native Belgium.

Committee Chairmen...

Remember that all committee chairmen are to present a progress report to the president every four months. The first report will be due in September.

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Therefore this book is incomplete. It deserves more objectivity if it hides under that title. The rights of Atheists, indeed, the existence of Atheists, is meticulously ignored. The word "Atheist" is not even mentioned in the glossary. The A.C.L.U. is altogether omitted!

How can one write a children's book stating that it may become necessary for every child to tolerate a so-called "student induced religious exercise" each day when the average school population includes 15% of nonbelievers and never mention that this is religious harassment and minority discrimination? It's like telling a lie by saying nothing. It's what is missing in this book that hurts the outcome. The Holocaust is never mentioned, thus it never occurred....

The author slyly takes comfort in being part of the superstitious majority and delivers the venom in the last sentence of the book: "Most of the time, over the years, over changing religious attitudes, Supreme Court decisions on separation of church and state have been ones that most people in the United States have seen as fair interpretations of the Constitution and the First Amendment."

Why is the author afraid of explaining to her young audience that gods, like supermen, are only make believe? And that it is far more ethical for all humans on our planet to unite through the sciences than to divide our world with religions.

Science unites, religion divides; these are the dogmas worth keeping a government secular and free from sectarian lunacy. Schoolchildren must be told that Separation of State and Church means that no tax money can go to religion for whatever reason.

Schoolchildren must be told that religious leaders do not pay for services rendered by the State, yet return enough of their pew profits to politicians who vote to keep it that way. This criminal behaviour hurts the public school system, its students' welfare and the future strength of our country.

Schoolchildren must be told that they can voluntarily refuse the looney indoctrinations from the schoolboard, thus practicing the first Amendment.

This book passed the censorship of the religious right because it shows no dignity for those Atheists who have sacrificed their lives trying to secure an open education for all children. Under constant attack from these conservatives who glorify ignorance, American children are lacking technical skills and cultural knowledge that holds them further and further behind Japanese and European kids who one day in the coming century will prove the American Constitution to be a paper tiger and the Separation of State and Church a red herring.

As a special feature this year, the Atheists of Florida newsletter will present a scenario of a different religion each issue.

CONFUCIANISM / TAOISM

'Confucius taught the golden rule long before Jesus' time'

CONFUCIANISM HAS for centuries been the predominant religion of China. The name *Confucius* is the Latin version of K'ung Fu Tze — which means the philosopher or master K'ung.

Confucius was renowned as a teacher and for his belief in a quiet, orderly form of government. The other major religious/philosophical system of China has been Taoism. Both Taoism and Confucianism originated in China during the "Golden Age" of Chinese thought, many centuries before the advent of Christianity. While Taoism promotes inner peace for the individual and harmony with nature, Confucianism is an ethical system that strives to teach the proper way for all people to behave in society. Confucius was born in a poor but noble

port oneself as an example to others.

His teachings were closely studied by the emperors of the later dynasties of China. He was said to have taught four things: Letters, Ethics, Devotion of soul and Truthfulness. He used the term "Heaven" rather than God in his sayings. Consequently, he did not elevate the religious worship of the Chinese people. He did promote ancestor worship and worship of spirits, which is still prevalent in China today. His attention was centered on making people better in their lifetime, and his "Analects" are wise sayings similar to the Proverbs in the Bible.

Confucius also taught that there were five public evils of man: 1. A man with a rebellious heart who is dangerous; 2. A man who joins vicious deeds with a fierce temper; 3. A man whose words are knowingly false; 4. A man who treasures noxious deeds and disseminates them; and 5. A man who follows evil and cultivates it.

Right-wing women

Women play a subordinate role in his teachings. Obedience to father, brother and husband is stressed above all else. Women are charged with the task of food & wine preparation, and little attention is given to their status otherwise. The only significant mention of women is the warnings of the five kinds of women not to be taken in marriage. They are: 1. The daughter of a rebellious house; 2. The daughter of a disorderly house; 3. The daughter of a house which produced successive generations of criminals; 4. The daughter of a leprous house; and 5. The daughter of a house that had lost a father and eldest brother.

Two of the most noteworthy elements of his teachings are the emphasis on correct conduct by those in power and the power of leading by example. There is not really any original thought in his teachings, which consist of his thoughts on the right way to live.

In this sense, Confucianism is more of a philosophy than a religion. He always said of himself that he was a "transmitter, not a maker." He collected and edited the poetry, music and historical writings of what he considered the golden age.

One of his teachings was actually the earliest form of the Golden Rule which is credited to Jesus Christ. Confucius taught the "Golden Rule" long before Jesus' time with this passage: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

Confucius was regarded with alternate periods of reverence and neglect in the ensuing ages following his death. He is now known in China as Kung, meaning ancient teacher or perfect sage. Temples were erected

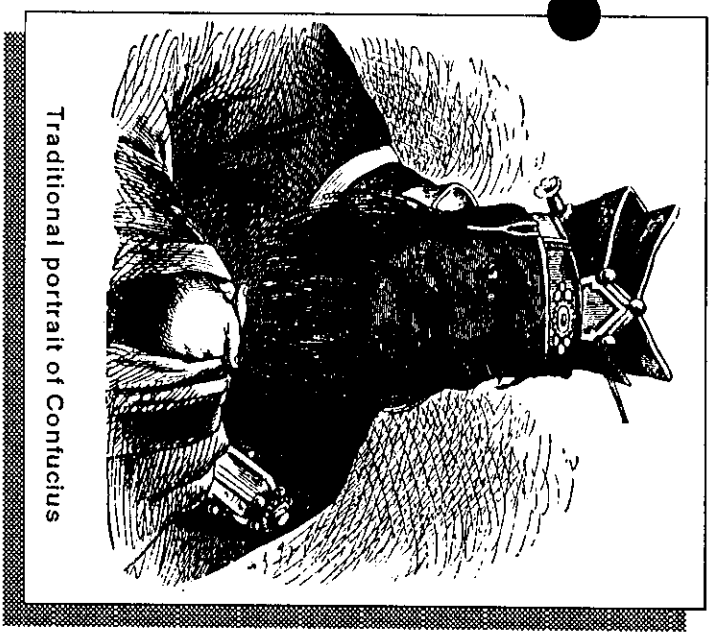
in his honor in every city of China. His grave at Kufow, in what is now called the Shandong Province, became a place of pilgrimage.

Lao Tze/Taoism

'There is not really any original thought in his teachings, which consist of his thoughts on the right way to live'

Lao Tze is not the founder of a religion in the strictest sense, yet he is regarded as the founder of Taoism. Taoism, as stated previously, is very different from the other major religion in China, Confucianism.

The Way, according to Lao Tze, consists neither in excess arguing or too much talk of any kind. In this regard, Confucianism would never be consistent with this philosophy. Lao Tze saw Confucius as a formal and conventional teacher who was too conservative. He disliked Confucius' act of professing that he was practicing humanity and then calling it humanity. Confucius would practice reverence towards parents and then talk about the act of practicing filial piety. For Taoists, to profess a thing was to lack it. The profession of the act signifies the absence of belief. The Generous need not profess generosity, nor need the Virtuous profess virtue.



Traditional portrait of Confucius

'Confucianism is more of a philosophy than a religion'

It has been said that China's elite, the scholar-officials, tended to follow Confucius' precepts during their careers, and then in retirement they sought seclusion to contemplate the mystical writings of Lao-Tze.

In one of his writings, Lao Tze proclaims: "The highest good is like water. Water benefits all things generously and is without strife. It dwells in the lowly places that men disdain. Thus it comes near to the Tao. The highest

good loves the (lowly) earth for its dwelling. It loves the profound in its heart, it loves humanity in friendship, sincerity in speech, order in government, effectiveness in deeds, timeliness in action. Since it is without strife, it is without reproach."

Religion in Modern China

One of the most important elements to remember in learning of religious beliefs in twentieth-century China is the perpetuation of ancestor worship. The Chinese cannot comprehend the concept of having no heirs to provide sacrifices for them. Animal sacrifice is still a part of their rituals in some parts of China. Also, there are so many gods to worship in China, they even have a god of the kitchen!

The emperor played a great role in worship, as he was seen as having the divine right to rule. To worship heaven, the emperor wore blue robes, to worship earth, he wore yellow, to worship the sun, he wore red robes, and white robes to worship the moon.

Prior to 1949, the practice of "folk religion", which involved sacrifices and ancestor worship, was common throughout China. Although elements of mainly Taoism were incorporated in these rituals, they were usually based on local gods. A noted historian and authority regarding Chinese history, Dr. J. Edkins, writes that western people have no conception of the strength of the entrenched notions the Chinese have surrounding religion. He adds that the whole power of the State combined with religion worked to maintain the divine authority and representative character of the emperor. This has been impressed on Chinese minds for thousands of years, and is about as deep-seated in them as the feeling "I must eat" is in the body.

Since coming to power in 1949, the Communists have discouraged religious practices, as they consider them to be anti-socialist. Many temples and churches have been closed and their property taken.

Shin - toism

The Japanese are not considered to be as religious as the Chinese. Their system of beliefs involve Shin-to, literally, the way of Gods or genii. It could also be called animism. Their beliefs developed out of ancestor worship, although they are much more casual in their beliefs. Their priests are not celibate, and they may take up other occupations. Their temples are much simpler than the elaborate ones found in China.

—MLJ