

## Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

**MIAMI:** Sunday, June 22, 2 p.m. in the Boardroom of the Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave., Ft. Lauderdale. Our group meeting will discuss our summer plans and the planned July picnic along with current news. FMI: Atheist Hotline (305) 936-0210.

**TAMPA:** June 21, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. at a **different location:** The St. Petersburg Main Library, 3745 9th Avenue North (893-7724) in the Auditorium, left side of entry vestibule. This will be a combined meeting of three other local freethought groups, each of which will give a short presentation about their group and current activities, followed by or speaker, John MacKay, Tampa attorney representing the Atheists of Florida suit against the Tampa International Airport Authority airport chapel. He will discuss the pending case and other issues pertaining to constitutional civil rights. Light refreshments (meaning you could grab enough to call it lunch) will be available.

A of F Investment Club meeting will follow in the conference room, same library, at 3:00. Note: This will constitute our regular monthly meeting. There will be **no meeting** on June 28. FMI: Ed Golly (813) 839-7567.

**PALM BEACH:** Sunday, June 15 at 3:30 p.m. at the Herb Watt Rec. Bldg., just north of the North Palm Beach Library. From I-95, exit 56 east on North Lake Blvd, nearly 3 miles to US#1 Federal Highway - then north one block to traffic light. Go west on Anchorage Drive one block, turning north behind the library. Turn into the parking lot north of the library near the small red building. Group discussion topic: "Why is an atheist philosophy so important?" FMI: Charles Schisler (561) 627-6340.

### Jose R. Solarzano 1915-1997

A few weeks ago, Mr. Solarzano died from cancer. Atheists of Florida president Christos Tzanetakos knew him personally and had the pleasure of visiting him at his North Miami home. He was a very gentle individual and an avowed atheist.

Coming from Venezuela where he spent 24 years as Advertising Manager for Goodyear Tire Company, Solorzano moved to Brownsville, Texas where he worked for nine years as an interpreter for the U.S. District Court.

In his 1995 membership application (when he joined our organization) in the question regarding children, he wrote, "One who is a rabid fundamentalist Xtian - but I love her dearly."

In the question: Other organizational memberships or involvement: he stated, "Looking for a way to dam the 'Mainstream Christian Majority.'"

Also, Mr. Solorzano provided his computer for the final brochure of the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund. He will be greatly missed.

### Palm Beach chapter

PALM BEACH — Atheists of Florida again has three chapters statewide with the formation of this new chapter. Director Charles Schisler has 18 paid members in the area with over a dozen other individuals who have requested information about A of F.

The chapter will be meeting on the third Sunday of each month. Watch for details on the back page of our newsletter.

8 April 1997

*Atheists of Florida*



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# Atheists of Florida

*Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church*

Volume VI Number 3

April, 1997

## Third Atheist Alliance Convention: New Directions for Atheism

The Third Annual Atheist Alliance convention in Orlando was a milestone for atheism. For the first time, atheists and humanists joined forces for a national event. This was just the beginning of unbelievers working together. Already there is talk of having a major joint convention of every freethought organization in the country, perhaps in 1999. Atheists of Florida and the Humanists of Florida combined to host an excellent convention. There is a full report in *Secular Nation* (see ad page 6).

*Secular Nation*, by the way, will now be a separate magazine, rather than a supplement to *The Freethought Observer*. It will be edited by Marie Castle. *TFO* will become an Internet publication to meet the demands of its more timely news format.

The Alliance board elected Marie Castle president and Shirley Moll treasurer. Others elected were Jim Cox (Atheists & Agnostics of Wisconsin) vice president, Richard Russell (Atheists & Agnostics of Wisconsin) secretary, and Ed Golly (Atheists of Florida) assistant secretary.

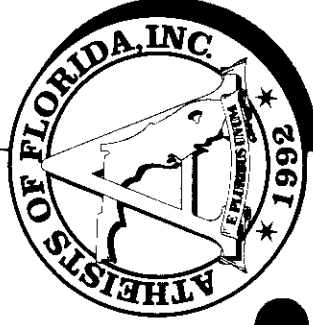
The task force that was formed last year to explore the feasibility of establishing a nationwide public access TV distribution system reported success and the effort will

now be an ongoing project. The task force consisted of Marie Castle and Jerry Kauser (Minnesota Atheists) and Lee Baker (Atheists United of Los Angeles). To continue the project, it was designated a subsidiary of the Alliance and Lee Baker was named executive director. She is developing a distribution plan that will seek the involvement of all member societies as program producers and/or videotape distributors and/or sponsors.

Television is our most effective means of reaching the public. One videotape has the potential to reach hundreds, perhaps thousands of people with the atheist message. It reaches the public because it goes to the public. The public rarely comes to us seeking our publications, reading our books or looking for our organizations, because they don't know these things exist. With TV we can reach them. Another project of the Atheist Alliance is a Web site on the Internet. Jim Cox is in charge of that and will develop the site. This will give atheists around the country and the world access to information about the Alliance and atheism.

Finally, the Alliance welcomed its newest member society, the Society Against Religion, from Commack, New York. This brings the number of member societies to 13, including the Atheist Centre in India.

The next Atheist Alliance convention will be held in St. Louis, Missouri on Easter weekend, 1998. It will be hosted by the Rationalist Society of St. Louis, which will be celebrating its 50th anniversary. Start planning now to attend!



### Alliance Members:

Atheists & Agnostics of Wisconsin  
Atheist Centre  
Vijayawada, India  
Atheist Coalition  
San Diego, CA  
Atheists of Colorado  
Atheists of Florida  
Atheists & Other Freethinkers  
Sacramento, CA  
Atheists of San Francisco Region  
Atheists United  
Los Angeles, CA  
Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia  
Metropolis Atheists  
Dallas / Ft. Worth, TX  
Minnesota Atheists  
Rationalist Society of St. Louis  
Society Against Religion  
Commack, NY

**The Trustees of the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc. are pleased to announce that the Fund is making available two scholarship awards for the 1997-1998 school year. The recipients will receive \$500.00 and \$300.00 respectively for the First and Second award. In its third year, the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund is designed to promote and assist the Post-Secondary**

## Mark Twain Scholarship Fund 1997-1998 Scholarship Program Application

education of qualified young Americans in their chosen discipline within the fields of the Arts and Humanities, Applied Arts, Education, Science, Social Sciences, Mathematics, Engineering, or Law.

### Eligibility

To be eligible, applicants must meet the

- following criteria:
1. Applicants must be of a Free-thinking persuasion, freed from all ancient or modern mythic interpretations of life and living, against all efforts to impose superstitious religious teachings and interpretations on society, and against anything that inhibits freedom for all.
  2. Applicants must be registered full-time students at a secular or public university, college or institute which awards Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degrees, or have an accepted admission as a full-time student at such a school.
  3. Along with proof of student status, applicants must submit to the scholarship committee an essay of no less than 750 words on a topic chosen yearly by the scholarship committee.
  4. All applications must be post-marked by December 31, 1997. Incomplete applications and those postmarked after the deadline will not be considered or returned.
- If you are selected as a recipient, you will be notified by February 28, 1998.

### Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc. 1997 Application Form

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 intelligently stimulating contacts for the membership.

Membership dues and general correspondence should be sent to:  
Atheists of Florida  
P.O. Box 3893  
Fl. Pierce, FL 34948-3893  
Contact phone is (305) 936-0210.

Membership dues:  
Life Member \$500.00  
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Couple 40.00 Yr.  
Individual 30.00 Yr.  
Student (under 25 yrs.) 10.00 Yr.

Send newsletter correspondence to:  
Atheists of Florida Chapter  
P.O. Box 130753  
Tampa, FL 33681-0753.  
E-mail: AthAI.FL.E@aol.com

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

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



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**ESSAY SECTION**  
1997-1998 Topic: *Imagine A World Without Religion.* In no less than 750 words, please expound your thoughts and opinion on this topic.  
Should you be selected as a Mark Twain Scholarship Fund recipient, you agree to have your name and picture used in publicity for the program and will be available to speak with media representatives, if necessary.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby, acknowledge that all of the information included in this application is true and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Upon completion of this application, please mail with essay to:  
The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc.  
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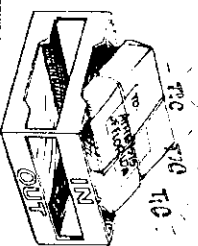
All applications must be postmarked by December 31, 1997.  
Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.

### Voucher response

This letter, published in the St. Petersburg Times, addressed the Voucher bill entitled "Public-Private Partnership Program" or, HB1177 and SB 1638

The public has rejected vouchers by over a 2 to 1 majority in opinion polls and at the

# Letters



voting booths.

Where they have been tried, there was no noticeable achievement in student performance over time, compared with public school students.

Actually, vouchers have been found to be elitist, undemocratic and harm the vast majority of students who cannot afford the other half of the tuition at religious or private schools.

Fiscally, how can the legislature justify taking one dollar of taxpayers dollars out of the system which is in dire need of new buildings, textbooks, equipment and maintenance to fund an experimental program that is notoriously lacking in guidelines, monitoring and regulations?

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**MARY BENNETT HUDSON**

On the contrary, the bill has a complete hands-off policy regarding their service providers that cannot be tolerated where public monies are involved.

And lastly, and most importantly, this bill is totally unconstitutional, flouting our precious Bill of Rights and our Florida State Constitution which states in Article 1, Section 3, "no revenue of the State... shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly, or in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination, or in aid of any sectarian institution." That is precisely where most of the money will go.

We hope your readers will write or fax their representa-

tives in Tallahassee to reject this bill that may lead to expensive litigation.

Florence Morgenroth  
St. Petersburg

### The real experts in extortion

Yaciu scores twice this month in the St. Petersburg Times

Mike Barnicle seems to think the Democrats invented the fund-raising letter that uses "all kinds of sleazy psychology to prey on these old people who have accumulated a little money but lost their powers of reason." I suggest that Barnicle might want to take a look at a few Republican fund-raising letters, ones that demonize the Democrats as the bastions of moral decay and warn that we are headed for eternal punishment if we support them.

If you think that language sounds suspiciously like a preacher's sermon, you would be — no pun intended — right on the money. The real experts in extorting cash from those who have lost their powers of reason (or in the case of children, have not yet developed them) using scare tactics are the churches. It's no coincidence that most politicians of all stripes are much more religious than the average citizen, since the weekly training session on the use of guilt and scare tactics in fund-raising has surely helped their campaigns.

I must agree with Eva Piccin's son when he says, "There's something awfully wrong when the elderly can be so easily preyed upon." Turn on your television any Sunday morning and you'll see those same tactics in use or simply drop by a few of the churches that pepper our landscape. The problem wasn't invented by the Democrats in the past couple of years; it's as old as religion itself.

Brent Yaciu  
Tampa

### Realistic picture of atheists

Printed in the Palm Beach Post

As a committed, lifelong atheist, I wish to commend *The Post* and Ron Hayes for the excellent feature on Christos Tzanetakos and Atheists of Florida ("An atheist's crusade for church, state separation"). Myth and magic are so easily internalized by the cynical and the ignorant that atheists, who are generally rationalists and educated, have been pushing uphill for centuries. Unlike mythical Sisyphus, we are, thanks to intelligent and open-minded people such as yourselves, approaching the top of the hill. We are being heard and read—coming out of the "atheist closet" isn't nearly so traumatic as it once was.

Mr. Tzanetakos, a prince of rationalists, represents the intelligent thinking that gave rise to the democracy U.S. citizens struggle to practice.

Max Weatherly  
Delray Beach

## But if you're not religious, you don't even warrant recognition

The Charleston County, S.C. Council will consider a plan to post the Ten Commandments in county buildings and courtrooms. The ACLU says it *may* sue, citing the separation clause. "I think

if you're a Jew, a gentile, a Christian or even a Muslim, the Ten Commandments are universal," said Councilman Tim Scott.

An Alabama judge recently refused to remove the Ten Commandments from his courtroom after another judge ruled that the display was unconstitutional. That display remains in place pending appeal. Recently taken to the people, the posting was overwhelmingly endorsed. But curiously, the strongest opposition came from a large segment of the clergy. We're watching.

## School board ignores law

LAKELAND — Four of Polk County's five school board members said last month they have no problem with the district's longstanding and legally questionable practice of making Gideons Bibles available to public school students.

One board member concludes that since the bibles are only being made available, denial of this practice is equated to censorship. The

general consensus is that a longstanding relationship with the Gideons should continue since they are only *providing* the bibles.

Due to public concern prompted by an article in the *Tampa Tribune*, a school district committee will decide if a clear policy should be written and if the practice should continue.

Polk county has 108 schools, 72,000 students and a half-billion dollar budget.

Typically, bibles were available in boxes in school offices during a two-week period. "Their action implies a school is endorsing one religion," said Megan Day, director of the Citizens Project, an organization that supports the separation of state and church and pluralism. "It's inappropriate. It's against the law."

The state director for Gideons International said last month that having bibles available in the schools is rare. Because of court decisions, Gideons representatives usually stand on sidewalks outside schools to give their bibles away.

Appeals courts have ruled the organization cannot distribute bibles in schools. A West Virginia case banning such distributions is pending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

In Florida, a Sept. 4, 1992 letter to the Bay County schools superintendent from Carl Zahner, the state Education Department's assistant general counsel, advised administrators it is illegal for Gideons to distribute bibles at schools. He said school board members could be held personally liable and subject to attorney fees and legal costs.

"In view of the history of cases which make bible distribution a violation of First Amendment rights," Zahner wrote, "there can be no question distribution of bibles violates the First Amendment." **A**

## NEWS FILES

Each year, the Twain Scholarship Fund receives essays for evaluation by its board. The 1996-97 topic was "Science vs. Religion." Recipient was Carlos Siso of the University of Florida. Carlos received his award at the 1997 Humanist/Atheist convention in Orlando. Following is his essay:

## 1996 Twain Scholarship Fund awarded

In the beginning there was man, and man gathered clay from the river and created god in his own image. He invented myths to explain the world that surrounded him, life, death, and life after death. In time believers forgot that the stories had been written by men and grew to accept them as divine "truths". These "truths" are the foundations of religions, which still exist only because science has not yet adequately answered two of the most basic philosophical questions—Why are we here? Where do we go afterwards?

At first, the questions were many and the answers few. As history progressed, humans began to investigate the nature of the physical world. As the earth lost its place at the center of the universe, disease causing spirits were replaced by germs, and Zeus' lightning became atmospheric ions, myths and religions slowly retreated. After Newton, the natural world could be described as the interaction of properties of matter. It became almost predictable. Mythical explanations were rendered obsolete by men such as Galileo, Copernicus, and Columbus. They questioned the generally accepted answers and used reason to prove that the world was not accurately explained by prevalent myths.

Although science has managed to make much progress in expanding our knowledge of the natural world, it has provided little knowledge regarding life, its purpose and its ultimate fate. Humans today are still asking the same questions that the first humans asked. Darwin's theory of evolution states that reproduction is the ultimate purpose of all creatures. However, as conscious creatures, humans are reluctant to accept this answer because it implies that they truly are mortal animals and that death is truly an end. People who are dissatisfied with this idea subscribe to religions

that provide them with a "higher" life purpose and with "everlasting life". They gain comfort from the idea that they won't really die and that earthly suffering is only temporary.

Science has not found "God" yet, but by using reason one can come to certain conclusions regarding the existence of a divine creator.

Assume that the universe has not existed forever.

- (1) The physical world is governed by time.
- (2) Anything governed by time has a beginning and an end.
- (3) Thus atoms (physical things) must have a beginning (of existence)
- (4) All physical things are subject to the laws of cause and effect.
- (5) Thus, all physical things must have a cause.
- (6) If atoms are physical, they must have been caused by something.
- (7) If their cause Y is physical, then Y also needs a cause (and so on).
- (8) Because all things must have a beginning (#3), there must be an original cause (#5), and it can not be a physical cause (in order to escape the chain of causality in #7).
- (9) If this cause/creator is not physical, it is not governed by time (#1) then it can be eternal.

From this argument one can reason the existence of an eternal cause/creator, but one cannot attribute to it the quality of "all good", "omnipresent", "all knowing", etc. One does not reason "God", which is defined by these terms. Yet, the argument proves nothing. If science can tell us that the universe has existed forever in a series of big bangs and big collapses, then the arguments first assumption is wrong and it fails. However, if physicists prove that the universe had a beginning, and all the steps of the argument are sound, then one can reasonably believe in an everlasting cause/creator. Maybe future scientists will be able to reason the existence (or nonexistence) of other religious concepts (souls, heaven, hell, nirvana, etc.).

For now religions continue to live off the fear of death and the lack of answers to two key questions. Their myths can be proven neither wrong nor right. It is ultimately possible that there is a creator, that future scientists will deduce its existence like archaeologists as humans remain unsatisfied with the scientific answers to questions of existence and life-purpose, people will continue to believe the mythical-world-picture that religions call "truth". **A**

...religions continue to live off the fear of death and the lack of answers to two key questions.

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*Secular Nation* is published quarterly by the Atheist Alliance, an international, democratic, nonprofit educational organization that connects autonomous atheist member societies. *Secular Nation* provides a wide variety of articles, poetry, book reviews and other material of substance reflecting a positive atheism that looks forward with hope to a tolerant, humanistic society free of divisive dogma.

Linda Chapman,  
Editor of the Torch,  
newsletter of Arizona Secular Humanists, Scottsdale, AZ, compiled this article from various other newsletters.

Every April 15th, what a nice gift the churches receive of \$925 from every American taxpaying family. That's what each American family taxpayer pays so that the church can shirk all its taxes.

The churches, in effect, reach into the pockets of all families of the nonbelievers, atheists, secular humanists, agnostics, and freethinkers. It certainly doesn't make me, as an atheist/secular humanist, feel good that I have to pay for the churches' use of community services such as the fire department, police department, etc. The churches' owning 20% of all the privately owned land in the United States is not a bad deal for them, either. But this is nothing you will ever hear a church tout. Churches would prefer the public think of them as

# Insight

oppressed, while they stealthily are the oppressors.

Tax exemption for churches was tested in the courts in 1970 in *Walz Vs. Tax Commission of the City of New York*. Walz claimed that tax exemption had the effect of a government provided subsidy. Unfortunately, Walz lost the case. Chief Justice Burger wrote, "Exemption creates only a minimal and remote involvement between church and state and far less than the taxation of churches."

## Man's gift to "God"

In a minority opinion, Justice William Douglas said, "The question in the case...is whether believers, organized in church groups, can be made exempt from real estate taxes merely because they are believers, while non-believers, whether organized or not, must pay the real estate tax." He added, "...one of the best ways to establish one or more religions is to subsidize them, which a tax exemption does."

Every tax dollar that a church or any business avoids paying, you as an individual taxpayer must make up. The churches in America, on the average, own 20% of all privately owned land in every state in the union. When that land is removed from the tax base, the indivi-

dual land or homeowner must make up the difference.

### History

President Ulysses S. Grant, in his message to Congress in 1875, said:

"...I would also call your attention to the importance of correcting an evil that, if permitted to continue, will probably lead to great trouble before the close of the nineteenth century. It is the acquisition of vast amounts of untaxed church property. In 1850, I believe the church property of the United States, which paid no tax, municipal or state, amounted to \$87,000,000. In 1860 the amount had doubled. In 1870 it was \$354, 483, 587. By 1900, without check, it is safe to say this property will reach the sum exceeding \$3 billion. So vast a sum, receiving all the protection of the benefits of government, without bearing its proportion of the burdens and expenses of same, will not be looked upon acquiescently by those who have to pay the taxes. The accumulation of so vast a property as here alluded to, without taxation, may lead to sequestration without constitutional authority, and through blood. I would suggest the taxation of all property equally."

*This article reprinted from the Humanists of the Palm Beaches (H.O.P.B.), February, 1997, page 17, newsletter of North Palm Beach, FL; editor, Marvin Engle*

## A balanced budget? Easier than you think!

You have full financial accountability to the I.R.S. They don't! You have to pay state and federal income taxes. They don't! You have to pay for police and fire protection, libraries and schools. They don't! You have to pay taxes on your investments, stocks, mutual funds and bonds, etc. They don't! You have to pay sales, gas, car, use and excise taxes, etc. They don't! You have to pay inheritance taxes. They don't! You have to pay property taxes every year. They don't! You have to pay capital gains taxes if you sell your property. They don't!

The average family in the United States pays a minimum of \$925 a year in hidden taxes to keep churches from all tax — on real estate, on income, on related businesses and their enormous wealth in stocks and bonds.

The *Wall Street Journal*, CBS Television, United Press, etc. have found that the holdings of the Roman Catholic Church alone exceed the total assets of the five largest American corporations (General Motors, Texaco, Ford, Exxon, and Mobil). The Protestants combined own nearly as much.



The Internal Revenue Service reports that the cash donations to churches annually are at least \$19 billion! This doesn't include profits from businesses, property, wills, stock holdings, bond holdings, retirement centers, or lease-back arrangements.

A church purchases a business on paper for an agreed sum like \$1.00, but leases it to someone else to run, often the original owner. Ownership passes with the sale, and the business is then exempt from property and corporate tax. The lease payments to the new owner, the church, are tax deductible by the business as a donation to the church.

Thus, the government is swindled out of the tax it would have collected on the land on which the business is located, the business income and the amount deducted by the business from the tax it would have paid as a contribution to the church. The church wins, the business wins, the government and the taxpayers lose.

How did this all get started? Originally, the Bill of Rights, including the Establishment Clause, which should have excluded tax exemption, applied only to the federal government, leaving the states free to do whatever they wanted about religions. In 1777, Virginia exempted churches from property taxes; New York did so in 1799 and Washington in 1802. Today all states exempt churches from taxation. The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, extended the Bill of Rights to the states as well as the federal government, but by then tax exemption for churches was well established.

THE SEPARATION OF STATE AND CHURCH is being threatened in Florida as never before. The new Speaker of the Florida House, Rep. Daniel Webster (R-Orlando) has close ties with the state Christian Coalition and has previously organized a state legislative group known as the "God Squad" (Insight, A of F newsletter Feb/Mar '97, p.4).

## FLORIDA STATE LEGISLATURE

The new leaders of the Florida Assembly, Senate President Toni Jennings (R-Orlando) and Speaker Webster, held a news conference with Education Commissioner Frank Brogan on Jan. 8th during which they promoted voucher legislation. Senate President Jennings prefers to call them "scholarships" but don't be fooled!

Regardless of what they are called, "Scholarships," "coupons," or "vouchers," they all result in the same process of funneling taxpayers' money to religious schools. This vio-

lates both the United States and Florida State Constitutions. Last year, six private/religious school voucher bills were introduced. This year, two voucher bills (HB 261, SB 194) were prefilled, and the session has only just begun.

### What you can do:

With the current Assembly leadership in such union on the issue, it will be a long and hard fight against any type of voucher legislation this year. Now is the time to tell your state officials to keep the separation of state and church strong and to oppose any such schemes to use your taxpayer dollars for religious education.

Please contact your state Representative and state Senator and voice your opposition to any voucher, or "Scholarship" legislation. Also, contact Governor Chiles and urge him to stand strong against any voucher legislation.

You may call Governor Lawton Chiles at (904) 488-4441 and your state Senator and Representative at (904) 488-1157 to express your opposition to vouchers, "scholarships," and public finding of religious education in any form.