



# 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. 2 February 2008

## The SECOND ANNUAL ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA DINNER BANQUET

will be held

Sunday, February 24, 2008

at the

Radisson Hotel

US 19 at Gulf-To-Bay Blvd., Clearwater, Florida

The hotel is on the US19 access road (east side) just north of Gulf-To-Bay

Reception 5:00 PM ❖ Dinner 7:00 PM

Active Members of Atheists of Florida may attend  
FREE OF CHARGE.

Guests \$40.00 which includes a one year free membership in  
Atheists of Florida!

Please send your RSVP at your earliest convenience, but no later than February 18<sup>th</sup>, including name of guest(s) and dinner selections for yourself and any guests. Payment may be made in advance by sending check payable to Atheists of Florida at:

ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA

PO BOX 130753

TAMPA FL 33681

or you may bring payment to the function.

### Dinner Selections

Please select from the following entrees:

- Filet Mignon char-broiled with roasted shallots, and Cabernet wine sauce with oven roasted potatoes.
- Grilled Salmon with balsamic and mango sauce with saffron rice.

All entrees include fresh vegetable medley.

Vegetarian entrée

- Pasta Primavera

Tossed salad with dressing, rolls & butter.

Chocolate on chocolate dessert.

Coffee or tea.

Wine or beer may be purchased from the hotel bar.

## Banquet to honor activist members

TAMPA—FOLLOWING THE ANNUAL board of directors meeting on Sunday, February 24, 2008, Atheists of Florida will host the second annual A of F Dinner Banquet.

The Banquet was created last year as a means to recognize members who have invested time and effort, not necessarily money, in the projects that forward the causes of Atheists of Florida. All active members are invited and will receive a free dinner. Members are encouraged to invite guests at \$40 apiece, and all guests receive a complimentary one-year membership in Atheists of Florida along with their dinner.

The new board of directors has been established to serve for a three-year term. New officers will be elected from the Board at the Feb. 24th meeting. Board members are: Ed Golly (current Chairman & Treasurer), Joe Reinhardt (current president), Rob Curry (current vice president), Julia Scott (current secretary), Steve Brown, Gloria Julius, Jackie Jordan, Jim Peterson, Steve Miles, Anita Garcia, John Kieffer, Jerry Moore, and A of F founder Christos Tzanetakos.

One of the significant agenda items this year will be to determine whether to continue production of our Public Access TV program, the *Atheist Forum*, or convert the show to a Web cast and broadcast to the world. A committee will present a proposal to the Board and we expect to announce the conclusion at the banquet, along with the new officers for the year and a recap of the board meeting.

We will also present a great video of A of F activities at the banquet.



"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has."

—Margaret Mead

## New format for newsletter

*We're into the electronic age*

NOW THAT MOST OF OUR NEWSLETTERS ARE distributed electronically, the editor decided to lay out the pages in a format more compatible with a computer screen.

Since a screen is wider than it is high (landscape format) and a newsletter page is a vertical configuration (portrait), readers of a newsletter on computer must scroll down the column of a typical page, then scroll back to the top to read the adjoining column.

To alleviate all this extra scrolling, the pages are now laid out "top-half," "bottom half," divided by a light horizontal bar that should obviate the linking of the text columns. We hope our readers find the change more comfortable to read.

Simon & Schuster Publishers  
388 pages. \$25

AS THE WRITER COMPILED HIS LIST OF RULES, IT grew to 72 pages with more than 700 entries and as he set out on his spiritual journey, he developed a completely religious alter ego he named Jacob. Besides vowing not to shave during this 12-month stint, for a while he wore only white garments and soon took on

## The Year of Living Biblically: one man's humble quest to follow the Bible as literally as possible

— A. J. Jacobs

the appearance of a prophet or patriarch right out of ancient Israel. His impressively thorough, intensive and nicely-balanced research included a trip to Israel, an Amish community, a snake-handler minister in Tennessee, a creationist museum in Kentucky and in New York City, attendance at an atheist meeting as well as a gay evangelical Bible study group. His frequent consultations with both Jewish and Christian theologians provide a very authentic basis to the narrative and forcefully demonstrate how large and important a role interpretation plays in deciphering the intent behind many of the Biblical exhortations.

After the runaway success of his 2005 best-seller *The Know-It-All: one man's humble quest to become the smartest person in the world* describing his experience of devoting a full year to reading and writing about all of the Eyclopaedia Britannica from A to Z,

while menstruating. The author's informal, very down-to-earth approach, a really generous sprinkling of his keen sense of humor and the format of twelve monthly chapters focusing on each segment of the year-long adventure make the work quite readable and enjoyable.

The writer began his spiritual odyssey as a secular, agnostic Jew and ended up still a nonbe-

liever. But he states unequivocally that the only metamorphosis his secular self underwent during that intense exposure living all of the Scriptural mandates was that he acquired a new and deeper insight into sacredness and transcendence. Despite its oxymoronic ring, A. J. Jacobs has now transmogrified into a reverent agnostic.

*Esquire* magazine editor A. J. Jacobs decided to undertake still another cover-to-cover project: the Holy Bible. In this instance, however, his goal was to spend a year attempting to observe all of the ritual, moral, sacrificial and agricultural precepts of the Good Book by spending eight months on the Old Testament commands and four months on the New Testament, the disparity being due to the overwhelming preponderance of thou-shalt-nots being in the Hebrew rather than the Christian portion of the Bible.

For example, since the Bible forbids wearing clothing made of mixed fibers such as linen with wool, he contacted a shatnez (mixed fabric tester) who came directly to his home to inspect all the clothing in his wardrobe to make sure none of the garments contained any forbidden combination and to decide how to evaluate cloth made from contemporary, man-made fibers which didn't exist in Biblical times. When A. J. queried Bill Berkowitz about why the composition of cloth would be of any concern to a supreme being, the tester answered that we can never know or understand the mind of God, an observation that would certainly apply to the rationale for the vast majority of the compiler's original list of regulations.

Jacob (a/k/a A. J. Jacobs) found some of the commandments much harder to follow than others. The most difficult of all was not being able to even touch his wife Julie for seven days straight during her monthly period because of her ritual uncleanness

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is mailed to our members on request. Members may place Classified advertisements at no charge. Send newsletter correspondence to Tampa Bay Chapter, address above. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Atheists of Florida, Inc. is a founding Member Society of the Atheist Alliance International.

*Jim Strayer's Solution is Evolution* column is scheduled to return next issue. For a complete book of Jim's **Solutions**, e-mail Strayer at [BIOJIMS@aol.com](mailto:BIOJIMS@aol.com).



[www.atheistalliance.org/florida](http://www.atheistalliance.org/florida)  
[www.atheistsofflorida.org](http://www.atheistsofflorida.org)  
[www.tampabayatheists.org](http://www.tampabayatheists.org)

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#### Membership dues

- Life Member \$ 500.00
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- 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

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is mailed to our members on request. Members may place Classified advertisements at no charge. Send newsletter correspondence to Tampa Bay Chapter, address above. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Atheists of Florida, Inc. is a founding Member Society of the Atheist Alliance International.

#### Officers

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#### Newsletter Production:

**Editor:** Ed Golly  
**Staff:** Jim Strayer

#### Web Masters

Jim Peterson  
Robert Curry

#### Atheist Forum Producer

Ed Golly

Sunday, January 27, 2008

I AM SITTING WITH AN ABORTIONIST IN A COUNSELING room in a central London clinic. Downstairs, on a padded surgical bed covered with blue paper, 5,000 pregnancies a year are ended. In the waiting room sit women and their male lovers. None of them is leafing through the magazines provided, but some are clutching Kleenex. All look haunted.

I'm here because it's the 35th anniversary of *Roe v Wade* in the US, a country

where a woman's right to choose is far from constitutional and remains under constant attack from the pro-life, evangelical Christian Bible Belt and the Catholic church; a country where schoolchildren are encouraged to adopt, name and pray for the souls of blastocytes destined for termination, and where a bill signed by Governor Mike Rounds, in South Dakota almost two years ago, made abortion illegal in most cases, including rape or incest.

I'm here because the pro-life lobby is also making hay in Britain. Anti-abortion lobby groups are attempting to hijack the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill currently going through the Lords, in the hope of introducing an amendment that would chop the time limit on legal abortion from the current 24 weeks down to 20 weeks. To commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Abortion Act last year, there was a rally in Westminster and a ghoulish "service of remembrance" for the estimated 6.7m fetuses destroyed since 1967.

And as for late-term abortions, there is no evidence that these are being sought for trifles such as webbed toes alone. There were 136 terminations beyond 24 weeks in 2006. All of them were for what is called a "ground E" case—meaning if the child was born, it would be seriously handicapped.

Meanwhile, about 1,100 women had an abortion between 22 and 24 weeks: teenagers who panicked and hid their pregnancy; women who had no idea they were pregnant because they were on the contraceptive pill. One wonders what on earth these girls and women would have done if safe, legal procedures weren't available for them.

Two, women choose abortion as a form of contraception. Frankly, I don't know anyone who would choose feticide as their preferred form of birth control. I do know lots of women, however, who have taken responsibility for not bringing another baby into the world when the resources—emotional, psychological and physical—sadly aren't there for it.

"I didn't go through uni and med school thinking, 'Yes! I want to be an abortionist'," says Dr Kate Worsley of Marie Stopes International, who has carried out many. "But it's a small aspect of medicine that's most needed to be done well." According to the World Health Organization, unsafe abortions kill more than 66,000 women worldwide every year. The Lancet has called it one of the most neglected public health issues of our time.

British women are lucky. The law gives us strength and legitimacy to decide what is best for us and our families, and control over our reproductive destinies. Any changes to return that power to MPs or lords (few of whom will face the experience of abortion themselves) will erode trust in women to take responsible decisions about their own pregnancies. As the American feminist Florynce Kennedy said: "If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament."

I came away from the clinic with nothing but respect for the doctors—trained, after all, not to take away life but preserve it—sympathy for their patients and more than ever convinced that the decision to end a pregnancy, whether wanted or unwanted, is never undertaken lightly by the woman who needs the termination or the doctor who performs it.

"Every day, women leave the procedure room," says Worsley, "and they always turn and say, 'Thank you'."

I understand why.



## On the abortion front line

The London Times — Rachel Johnson

**"If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament."**

Rachel Johnson has written for among others, the Daily Telegraph, the Spectator, the Evening Standard and Easy Living, and is author of The Mummy Diaries. She is married with three children and lives in London. Her column appears weekly in The Sunday Times.

### In US, abortion foes want 'personhood' for fertilized eggs

Anti-abortion activists in several states are promoting constitutional amendments that would define life as beginning at conception, which could effectively outlaw all abortions and some birth-control methods. Granting "personhood" to fertilized eggs would give fetuses the same legal protections as living, breathing humans.

Ever since abortion was legalized, anti-abortion groups have pushed for a federal Human Life Amendment that would define life as beginning at conception. One of the reasons abortion was legalized was that the court determined that a fetus is legally not a person. Abortion opponents theorize that by granting human status to embryos they will destroy the legal foundation for abortions.

Last November, the Colorado Supreme Court cleared the way for advocates to begin collecting signatures to place a personhood amendment on the state's 2008 ballot. Similar efforts have failed in the past.

## Renewed push for 'Faith-Based' initiative likely to flop

*President's plan has been a colossal constitutional and public policy failure*

WASHINGTON—The Current Occupant's renewed push for his controversial "faith-based" initiative is unlikely to succeed, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

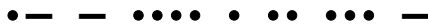
Bush, in his State of the Union address last month called on Congress to make his faith-based proposals permanent. Congress has refused to adopt key parts of the plan because it would roll back civil rights laws barring religion-based hiring discrimination and open the door to publicly funded preaching.

Bush has implemented some provisions of the faith-based initiative through executive orders that the next president may overturn.

Said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, "Bush's 'faith-based' initiative has been a colossal failure. It undercut civil rights laws and jeopardized important religious liberty safeguards. I don't believe Congress is going to adopt it at this late date in the administration's tenure.

"The faith-based initiative did nothing to help the disadvantaged," Lynn continued, "and it was often used to advance partisan politics."

Lynn noted that religiously affiliated social service agencies have received government grants and contracts for many years. However, they were expected to obey the same non-discrimination and non-proselytization rules that secular organizations observed.



## Experts: Evolution needs to be taught

*Two prestigious groups advise the government on scientific matters*

WASHINGTON—A timely report by the National Academy of Sciences and its Institute of Medicine emphasize the importance of teaching evolution in public schools. Timely because on Feb. 19 the Board of Education in Florida plans to vote to revise science standards that would add the word "evolution" to state classrooms.

The report also addresses the absurdities of creationism and other anti-evolution theories.

"Despite the lack of scientific evidence for creationist positions, some advocates continue to demand that various forms of creationism be taught together with or in place of evolution in science classes," the report says.

In Texas, the state's director of science curriculum, Chris Comer, was abruptly ousted recently due to evolution politics. Her transgression: forwarding an e-mail message about a talk by a distinguished professor who debunks "intelligent design" and creationism as legitimate alternatives to evolution in the science curriculum. The Texas Board of Education is expected to begin a review of the state science curriculum soon.

Unfortunately, we remain burdened for another year with a president who simply blacks out any science he doesn't like, while a prominent presidential candidate announces he "doesn't believe" in evolution. Help!



## Gay marriage to be on ballot

*An initiative to ban same-sex marriage in Florida is certified for the November vote*

TALLAHASSEE—A prime demonstration of the abhorrent bigotry of religion in the form of a constitutional



## Allah help us

TEHRAN—Women have been banned from wearing boots and hats on the streets of Tehran. Police chief, General Ahmad Radan, announced the ban in mid-December saying that boots could only be worn if they were covered by pants.

"If boots are not covered by pants that fall to the ankles, they show the female shape and that is therefore in contradiction with Islamic dress code," said Radan.



Iranian women can no longer leave home with their pants pushed inside their boots and they can no longer wear hats without a veil.

Feminist Rezvan Moghdaddam told Adnkronos International (AKI) that police should be concerned about drug traffickers than street fashion. "Our cities are infested by delinquents and security forces are only worried about how women dress, all this is really ridiculous."



**"Same-sex marriages subject kids to a vast, Untested social experiment."**

### Ballot language

The amendment would add a new section to Article I: "Inasmuch as marriage is the legal union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife, no other legal union that is treated as marriage or the substantial equivalent thereof shall be valid or recognized."

amendment has qualified for the November ballot. The so-called marriage protection amendment, three years in the making, would define marriage in Florida as exclusively between a man and a woman. Florida already has a law against gay marriage, but petition organizers say it should be put into the Constitution to protect against lawsuits or future whims of the state Legislature.

According to John Stemberger, a petition organizer, "The bottom line is kids need a mom and dad. Same-sex marriages subject kids to a vast, untested social experiment." Apparently, Stemberger is woefully ignorant of the staggering number of single-parent households in this state. The experiment is already in progress.

At least 60% of voters must approve for the amendment to be added to the state Constitution.

Organizers raised \$300,000 from the Republican Party of Florida and \$45,500 from the Florida Catholic Conference.

*Hope is an empty suit without any fabric. It can't feed you, warm you, pay your taxes or find you love. Hope is the sole foundation of religion.*

AS THE WORLD BEGINS ITS JOURNEY THROUGH THE Twenty-first Century on the back of the incomprehensible scientific achievements of the previous century, the institution of religion remains mired in the age of Medievalism. The delivery of pope Ratzinger's second encyclical since assuming power demonstrated that the bigotry of religion is as hostile as ever toward those of us in the community of reason. And this political season we are reminded again of the hostility

toward any candidate that would not feign superstitious belief.

Many atheists are familiar with the roots of the cultural hostility toward atheism. In the US, the modern contempt evolves from the Cold War era when the economic systems of both superpowers remained untested. Capitalism had plunged America into a catastrophic depression while communism promised a chicken in every pot. How could the robber-barons convince the populace that capitalism was the preferred system? Simple. Declare that God was on our side. Since it's always easier to believe than it is to learn, the simple-minded philosophy won the day.

The irony was that if ever there were an economic system that reflected the message of Christianity it would be communism, while capitalism with its attendant greed and hoarding of wealth was the exact oppo-

not be a just God, much less a good God."

Demonstrating his confusion about a political/economic system and a rejection of superstition, the pope wrote that history has proven wrong ideologies such as Marxism which say humans had to establish social justice because God did not exist.

"It is no accident that this idea has led to the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice," the pope said. Such a concept was grounded in "intrinsic falsity".

Overlooking the voluminous atrocities committed in the name of his own religious beliefs, the pope offered that Marxism had left behind "a trail of appalling destruction" because it failed to realize that man could not be "merely the product of economic conditions."

#### Atheism in the limelight

Atheism has been a hot topic recently thanks to bestselling books questioning the value of religion such as *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, *God is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris's *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

The pope seemed to be addressing the fresh interest in atheism in the developed world with phrases such as: "Let us put it very simply: man needs God, other-

site of the fundamental principles of the teachings of the alleged Jesus.

Yet because of the Cold War, communism remains inextricably linked to atheism. Seizing on this fallacy, Pope Ratzinger, in a new encyclical released last November, said atheism was responsible for some of the "greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice" in history. In so decrying, he exemplified the Twain quote, "It's far better to remain silent and let the world think you a fool than to open your mouth and prove it."

The 75-page "Spe Salvi", which takes its Latin title from a quote by St Paul (in hope we were saved), is an appeal to a pessimistic world to find strength in Christian hope.

In the second encyclical of his papacy, Ratzinger urges Christians to "put their hope for the future in God and not in technology, wealth or political ideologies which can often be deluding." Sadly, this advances the appalling notion that the world's pressing problems can be addressed by hope and reliance on make-believe gods instead of human hands with the intellect to understand the problems and grasp for real solutions.

Atheism could be regarded by some as a "type of moralism," particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries, to protest against the injustices of the world and world history, he said.

Regarding arguments made by atheists, he said: "A world marked by so much injustice, innocent suffering, and cynicism of power cannot be the work of a good God. A God with responsibility for such a world would

wise he remains without hope."

#### Hope in God, not man

Ratzinger urged Christians to put their hope for a better future in God.

"We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth, then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world," he said.

Christian hope also meant protecting the planet, even if people felt powerless to make any changes in their lifetimes.

"We can free our life and the world from the poisons and contaminations that could destroy the present and the future. We can uncover the sources of creation and keep them unsullied, and in this way we can make a right use of creation, which comes to us as a gift..." he said.

Ratzinger's first encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est" (God is Love) was about erotic and spiritual love in a personal relationship—no kidding.

Today, polls indicate 70% of Americans remain superstitious, and that superstition is the sole guide for a significant portion of their votes as indicated by current occupant.



## It's all our fault

—Ed Golly

*"Atheism was responsible for some of the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice in history."*



Ratzinger—a man of supreme ignorance

**W**E MUST ADMIT it is highly unusual for any preacher, priest or prayer monger to invite an atheist to offer an opposing opinion about their superstitions. But that's exactly what Bill Keller did one evening last month.

Through an e-mail contact with us, his producer asked us to send a representative to appear on one of his nightly Web cast programs. A of F president Joe Reinhardt gladly answered the request, and was joined by Ed Golly.

the show last year, leaving the internet as the program's sole exposure.

❖ ❖ ❖

The one-hour program consisted of Keller's brief introduction referencing the rising awareness of atheism in the culture boosted by sales of the books by Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens last year. He turned quickly to Reinhardt and the discussion revolved around why atheists reject belief systems and the warped "morality" advanced by Christianity. Keller was actually cordial and never interrupted or condescended. He did not adopt a debate format with him countermending the arguments and he had no other Christian in the studio.

Keller's interest in Golly revolved around his upbringing in an atheist household and his lifelong rejection of faith-based ideologies. Although normally a call-in show, Keller took no callers, instead devoting the entire hour to hearing out the atheists.

### **Atheist Forum next on the Internet?**

Liveprayer operates out of a warehouse with a crew of three, two cameras, and a large, attractive set. Atheists of Florida can easily accomplish the same. We don't even need a warehouse. Two rooms can do the job, and with advances in technology, a single person could run the entire studio while a single atheist hosts the show. Then, like Keller, the *Forum* can be Web cast on the Internet to the entire world answering live telephone calls or instant e-mails. We would no longer be encumbered by restrictions on promoting our Web site, selling merchandise or memberships, or simply asking for donations, none of which we can do on Public Access TV. In addition, all the programs we have produced for Public Access, most of which are archived on DVD, can be rerun on the site or offered for downloading and later viewing. The breaks in those programs can be replaced with ads for A of F.



## **Atheists appear on liveprayer**

Keller ended up inviting both to appear on camera.

### **Bill Keller defined**

Just who is Bill Keller? He was born in Dayton, Ohio and raised in the United Methodist Church. He attended Ohio State University for 3 years with the goal of becoming a Christian minister. While at Ohio State however, Keller began a successful computer sales business. After earning millions of dollars, Keller was convicted of insider trading and spent nearly three years in prison.

During his stay in prison, Keller decided to rededicate his life to God and attended Jerry Falwell's Liberty Baptist University upon his release.

Live Prayer began as a Web site in 1999, later expanding into a daily TV show in 2003 telecast in the Tampa Bay Area as well as on the internet. It had a short stint on national exposure in 2006 on ION Television, but the ministry was financially unable to continue purchasing time. Keller's depiction of the Muslim religion was too controversial for the local stations and they dropped

***Gents:**  
I viewed the show last night. The both of you represented the group and Atheism, in general, very well. You were lucid, on point, non-combative, matter-of-fact, personable, witty, and charming.  
Great job!*

[micrenhar@gmail.com](mailto:micrenhar@gmail.com)

## **CLASSIFIEDS**


Classified ads are published free for all active members of Atheists of Florida. Send your ad information to: [AthAIFLE@aol.com](mailto:AthAIFLE@aol.com) Subject line "CLASSIFIEDS."

**Godless in America:** *conversations with an atheist* by George A. Ricker is now available at most book retailers and online book sellers. For more information about the book and its author, go to [www.godlessinamerica.com](http://www.godlessinamerica.com).

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**Get together with other freethinkers** at the St. Pete Atheist / Freethought every third Tuesday of each month for good food, good drink, good conversation, and lotto tickets!



**St. Pete-Atheists // Free-Thought Group**

IN REASON WE TRUST

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## **Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS**

**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, Jan Platt Regional Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave. Social dinners follow all meetings at nearby cafeterias.  
FMI: Ed Golly, 813/835-1500, [AthALFLE@aol.com](mailto:AthALFLE@aol.com).