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## Non-Religious Kids Find Refuge in 'Godless' Camp

Photo: Greg DeMunnich/ABC News



A camper smiles during his one-week stay at Camp Quest, a religion-free camp. (ABCNEWS)



**July 24, 2005** — Nicole Ward grew tired of having to pray during the hot activity-filled days of her summer camp experience; especially since she comes from a family that doesn't believe in God.

"I really didn't enjoy having to say a million prayers a day at other camps," said Ward.

Thanks to Camp Quest, she no longer has to.

Camp Quest is a secular camp operated in Butler County, Ohio, by a group incorporated in Kentucky. It is for kids who come from families who are atheist or agnostic. For these kids, Camp Quest provides a refuge from a society where God feels omnipresent.

"I sometimes get pressured at my school, like why do I not believe in God?" said Molly Silverman, a camper. "But here, they never pressure me or anything

Instead, Silverman is accepted without criticism for not bowing her head before each meal.

### A Godless Curriculum

Lawyer and author Edwin Kagin, an atheist, founded the camp 10 years ago, and chooses to focus on subjects that steer clear of religion.

"We also have critical thinking," said Kagin. "We teach science. We teach evolution. We have a strong emphasis on scientific method."

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Kagin also refers back to American history to nurture his Godless environment.

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Each camper is given a Godless one-dollar bill, without the phrase "In God We Trust" printed on the back, because the "God" one-dollar bills didn't emerge until the 1950s.

**American Atheists and Agnostics**

An estimated 6 million Americans are atheists or agnostics who either do not believe in God or question the existence of God.

Hostility toward atheists and agnostics in the United States prompts some non-religious people to refer to their admission of Godlessness as "coming out of the closet." Polls have shown Americans would choose a president who is gay, female or Muslim over a non-God-fearing person.

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"Americans tend to view religious faith as the basis for morality, so when someone says they don't have a religious faith or they're an atheist, to many people that's admitting they don't have a moral values," said John Green of The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

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**DISCUSSION**

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Kagin's Camp Quest is a response to the current debate over the role of religion in public life.

Phil Burress of the Citizens for Community Values said Kagin's camp sends the wrong message.

"What offends me more about this camp is the fact that they're teaching the myth of separation between church and state," said Burress.

Kagin says his campers are perfectly normal, that instead the problem lies with other peoples' religious tunnel vision.

"There's nothing wrong with the children of Camp Quest, the problem is the bigotry of people who do not understand or are afraid that they threaten them because of their very existence," said Kagin.

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