

# The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action<sup>SM</sup>

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November-December 2008

## Thanksgiving Issue

November meeting

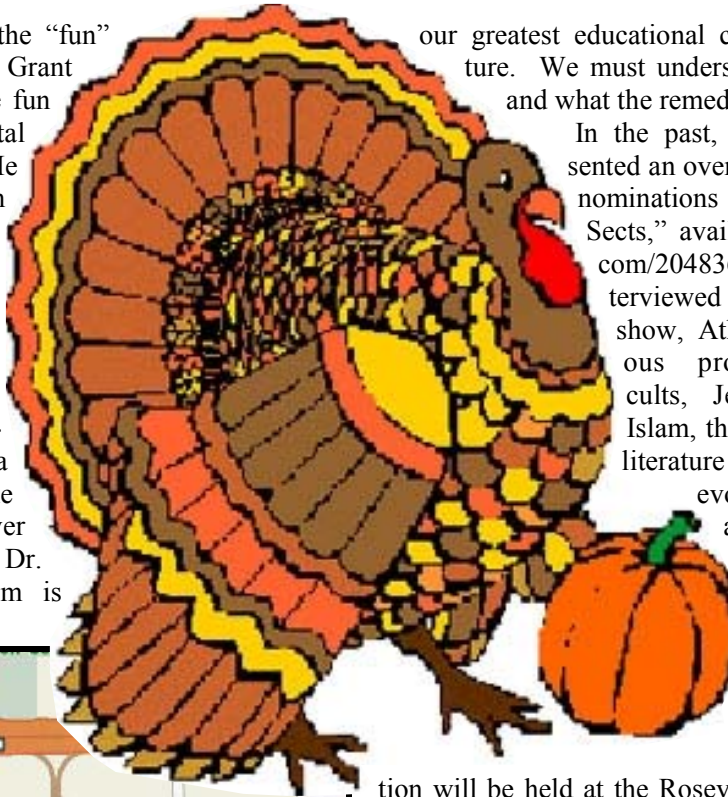
### Taking the "Fun" Out of Fundamentalism

What happens when we take the "fun" out of fundamentalism? Dr. Grant Steves will have fun taking the fun out while he refocuses our mental efforts on fundamentalism. He will discuss fundamentalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as religious, political, and social movements. The intent of his presentation is to look beyond Christian and Islamic fundamentalism. Dr. Steves plans to discuss the characteristics of the fundamentalist's mind. He believes it is a mind set that seeks safety in the past, promotes certainty over doubt, and dogma over science. Dr. Steves believes fundamentalism is

our greatest educational challenge for our future. We must understand how it operates and what the remedy is.

In the past, Dr. Steves has presented an overview of cults and denominations (view "The Joy of Sects," available at [www.vimeo.com/2048369](http://www.vimeo.com/2048369)). He has been interviewed on our cable TV show, *Atheists Talk*, on various programs, including: cults, Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, the Koran, the Bible as literature in public schools, the evolution of morality, and how reason may replace faith. He has also conducted several interviews on the cable show and on *Atheists Talk* radio programs.

Dr. Steves presentation will be held at the Roseville Public Library at 2:00 on Sunday, November 16<sup>th</sup>.



#### MNA Meeting on Sunday November 16, Roseville Library Hamline Ave. and County Road B

- 1:00-1:15 p.m. – Social time.
- 1:15-1:45 p.m. – Business Meeting.
- 1:45-2:00 p.m. – Break.
- 2:00-3:00 p.m. – Presentation.
- 3:00-3:30 p.m. – Social Time.
- 4:00 p.m. -- Panda Garden Buffet

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**MNA Meetup members: 332**  
**Life memberships: 31**

## The Minnesota Atheist

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Submit material for the newsletter to edi-  
tor@mnatheists.org. Submissions may be  
edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

### Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

**Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive  
atheist community that actively promotes secular val-  
ues through educational programs, social activities,  
and participation in public affairs.**

**Minnesota Atheists practices  
positive, inclusive, active, friendly  
neighborhood atheism in order to:**

- **Provide a community for  
atheists;**
- **Educate the public about  
atheism; and**
- **Promote separation of  
state and church.**

## President's Column by August Berkshire



Meetups are on-line web communities established to facilitate get-togethers among people who have a common interest and who live in a specified geographic area. They are used to announce meetings and solicit responses so event organizers can spread the word and get an idea of how many people will show up. Meetup.com charges \$72 for 6 months for their services.

There are basically two types of Meetups. The first type is an informal get-together, usually at a restaurant, and is not associated with established groups. The second type is a Meetup sponsored by established groups to advertise their events (which are generally open to the public). The Minnesota Atheists Meetup falls into this latter category.

The **Minnesota Atheists Meetup** ([atheists.meetup.com/493](http://atheists.meetup.com/493)) was started on July 6, 2006. We currently have 332 people signed up. Our Meetup is part of a larger **Atheist Alliance International Meetup Alliance** ([meetupalliance.com/atheist](http://meetupalliance.com/atheist)) that en-

compasses 48 groups. Agnostics at Minnesota State University in Mankato. Nevertheless, there are many atheists who live in that area. For that reason, on October 25<sup>th</sup> we started a **Southern Minnesota Atheists Meetup** ([meetup.com/Southern-Minnesota-Atheists-Meetup-Group](http://meetup.com/Southern-Minnesota-Atheists-Meetup-Group)) to help these atheists meet each other without having to drive into the Twin Cities.

We use our **Minnesota Atheists Meetup** to promote our monthly meetings, picnics, Meal and a Reels, blood drives, pub crawls, etc. It is a nice supplement to our newsletter, website, and Atheists Weekly E-mail. It draws many younger, tech-savvy people to our group and has proven to be the most cost-effective form of advertising we have ever tried.

The **Humanists of Minnesota** ([humanism.meetup.com/166](http://humanism.meetup.com/166)), the **Rochester Area Freethinkers** ([meetup.com/raftmn](http://meetup.com/raftmn)), and the **Minneapolis Skeptics** ([meetup.com/Minneapolis-Skeptics](http://meetup.com/Minneapolis-Skeptics)) are other like-minded groups in Minnesota that also have Meetups.

Southern Minnesota (the Mankato and New Ulm area) does not have an organized atheist group apart from the student group Campus Atheists and

If you live in Southern Minnesota, or would be willing to commute there for gatherings, we encourage you to sign up for the **Southern Minnesota Atheists Meetup**. You may also be interested in signing up for other Meetups mentioned above.

Finally, we have organized a **Minnesota Atheist Humanist Free-thought Meetup Alliance** ([meetupalliance.com/MNAHFMA](http://meetupalliance.com/MNAHFMA)) to bring together all such like-minded Meetup groups in Minnesota. We are happy to support and promote all Minnesota groups that share our goal of positive, friendly neighborhood atheism.

## An Atheist Gives Thanks

By Tom Riddering

Does Thanksgiving hold any meaning for atheists? As a friend of mine once commented, "What a shame to be thankful and have no one to thank."

Well I have a lot of people to thank, starting with my parents who, while probably simply enjoying themselves, enabled me to win the gazillion-to-one cosmic lottery of existence. They also gave me genes refined over eons, a humanistic ethic and the intellectual tools with which to enrich my life, which I have tried to pay forward to my own kids. I'd also like to thank the hundreds of people I have known who loved, amused, appalled, challenged, or educated me, first among whom would be my wife Jean.

Thanks, Kiddo! You're the best!

I'm also thankful, to no one in particular, that I have my health, that I live in a prosperous democracy, that I live in an age where I have instant global communication, the internet to inform me, and vast choices to entertain me, much of it brought into my warm, cozy home by all the clever naked apes who refused to be restricted by the dead, stultifying teachings of pious fools. Thanks Shakespeare! Thanks Vermeer! Thanks Da Vinci, Darwin and Galileo! You're the best!

I'm particularly grateful that I've managed to avoid the ravages of war and hunger which plague much of the world, most of it fostered by religious or geographic chauvinism. A pox on all those who would murder or abuse others for their benefit! Can't we all

just get along?

And I ponder my exquisite good fortune to live in an age where scientists have exposed, for the first time in the cosmos so far as we know, the basic operation and history of the universe and life itself for all who care to learn of it. I find myself sitting here at my computer, looking at pictures of galaxies billions of light years away, contemplating quarks and black holes, listening to some of the finest musicians in existence on my iPod, and feeling privileged and grateful beyond words.

And most astonishing is the realization that all of this developed naturally, through billions of years of trial, error and reality testing, without a magical humanoid in sight. And we are the fortunate beneficiaries. Life is good!

## Member Bios on the Web

Are you proud of being an atheist? Are you proud of being a member of the Minnesota Atheists? Do you wish there were something you could do to dispel the mythological villain-image that many Americans associate with the word "atheist"? Minnesota Atheists now have member profiles available on the website, [MinnesotaAtheists.org](http://MinnesotaAtheists.org), for members to tell a little bit about themselves and their journey of faith and reason, their history with the Minnesota Atheists, or whatever they like. This is your chance to show anyone who might have misconceptions about what atheists are really like: positive, intelligent, moral, or just as regular and average as everyone else. Tell us who your heroes are, what books you read (or don't read), include a picture if you want. Send us your profile if for no other reason than to be Google-able. Please be brief and use discretion. Send your profile to [web@mnatheists.org](mailto:web@mnatheists.org).

## Requests for Newsletter Submissions

If you would like to be added to our list of members that receive an email for article requests every month, please email [editor@minnesotatheists.org](mailto:editor@minnesotatheists.org). You would not be expected to contribute every month, but it would simply alert you of when we need articles if you are interested in contributing. Even if you can't contribute, we are still interested in your suggestions for articles.

*Since You Can't  
Take It with You...  
Please Remember Us*

If you are making or revising your will or naming a beneficiary for your insurance policy, bank account, or IRA, please remember us. Our legal name is "Minnesota Atheists." Property or money may be bequeathed to Minnesota Atheists by means of a legally executed will, or Minnesota Atheists may be named as a beneficiary of a trust agreement. A trust benefiting a non-profit organization may provide certain tax advantages. Working together we can secure the future of atheism in Minnesota.

## AAI Seeks Volunteers

Atheist Alliance International (AAI) is looking for a few volunteers to help with secretarial tasks. These roles are small but critical in keeping AAI functioning properly. These tasks are:

- Track/Record on-line AAI Board votes each month
- Keep AAI Policies/Operations Manual updated as needed
- Maintain database of AAI Directors, Officers, and Advisory Board
- Maintain database of Affiliate organization contact information
- Compile annual AAI Affiliate Survey
- Serve as official correspondent with AAI affiliates
- Maintain archives of AAI affiliate member applications & bylaws
- Maintain AAI database archives
- Maintain/Publish AAI Freethought Directory
- Oversee archives of all AAI external communications

Furthermore, the office of AAI secretary is currently vacant. If you are interested in being appointed, or in helping with any of the secretarial tasks listed above, please contact AAI president Stuart Bechman at [president@atheistalliance.org](mailto:president@atheistalliance.org) or AAI vice president August Berkshire at [vp@atheistalliance.org](mailto:vp@atheistalliance.org) or (612) 338-4548.



**Atheist Alliance International**  
Making a world of difference with a positive voice for atheism!

## Review of Dr. Hector Avalos' Presentation on ID

by Grant Steves

Intelligent Design (ID) arrived on the campus of Iowa State University in 2001 with Dr. Guillermo Gonzalez. A trained astronomer, Dr. Gonzalez, wrote a book with theologian Jay Richards. This book, *The Privileged Planet* (2004), presented an argument for ID. This creationist argument book is an attempt to present the teleological argument in a different form. At its base it argues: 1) "Design implies a Designer," 2) "This Designer is the Christian God."

Dr. Hector Avalos presented his position on the above material at the October MNA meeting. In a two part program, Avalos outlined: 1) How to respond to ID and 2) How ID is nothing more than creationism.

The first part presented how Avalos successfully confronted an attempt to bring ID to the campus of ISU. The Discovery Institute, according to Avalos, has helped to create a plan to teach ID at universities and public schools. The plan for this teaching was produced in the document, *The Wedge*. Gonzales then spear-headed the attempt to bring ID to the ISU curriculum.

Avalos, with colleagues, composed and circulated a "Statement on ID." 130 faculty members supported this statement. The statement was successful in unmasking the presumed intentions of Dr. Gonzalez. When Gonzalez came up for tenure at ISU, he was denied, and he is no longer at the university.

In the process of fighting this

movement, Avalos was subject to *ad hominem* attacks from the Discovery Institute and the blogosphere. His successes in this fight were largely due to his ability to organize, responded quickly to blogosphere smears, and have others come to his defense (some of these did not agree with his arguments but supported his academic freedom).

The fight goes on against ID, but they fight back by creating a wedge between an ID badge and science.

In the second part of his presenta-

We repeat and believe the mistakes of history when we are ignorant of these mistakes. Avalos has the knowledge of history, theology, and science to know when mistakes are being repeated in the arguments about creation or design arguments. For example, ID claims a new argument about the axis of rotation. However, William Paley presented the same argument in his 18<sup>th</sup> century book, *Natural Theology*.

Gonzalez's book argued that habitability is dependent upon: 1) not

being too close to the sun, 2) not being too far from the sun, 3) the tilt of earth's axis, and 4) the weather pattern. One of Gonzalez's key arguments is that this planet has been designed for "intelligent life to emerge that could then pro-

duce astronomers to observe the universe and discover the Designer's intentions."

Avalos then outlined specific flaws: 1) that of habitability and measurability as key factors, 2) that there is intrinsic value in a habitable universe, 3) the use of an arbitrary causal system, 4) an unexplained time gap, 5) theologically explained and not science based, 6) it is not falsifiable, 7) uses arbitrary statistics, and 8) the flaw of irreducible complexity.

It was this confrontation that was necessary to defeat what was trying to replace science with theology. There should be no compromise with those who would elevate myth as fact over science as method.



Dr. Hector Avalos spoke on intelligent design.

tion, Dr. Avalos presented his argument why ID is not science but a worked-over creationist story. This part of his lecture is available at: [www.talkreason.org](http://www.talkreason.org) The Power-Point is not available at this site, but his complete written text is presented there.

Taking excerpts from *The Privilege Planet*, Avalos carefully stripped away the rhetoric and examined the argument presented.

First, the book presents arguments that theologians (not scientists) have presented for the last 2,000 years. Even Cicero, the Roman Senator and rhetorician in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, developed the ID argument in his *De Natura Deorum*.

## "Atheists Talk" Radio Report

by **August Berkshire**

In the past month we aired programs 39-42 of "Atheists Talk." Mike Haubrich hosted the programs on Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> and Bjorn Watland hosted the program on Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>. Those programs were:

**Oct. 5** – "Defending Theistic Evolution" with Stephen Matheson, interviewed by Mike Haubrich.

**Oct. 5** – "The Islamic Threat to Secular Government" with Fred Whitehead, interviewed by George Kane.

**Oct. 12** – "How to Fight Intelligent Design and Win" with Hector Avalos, interviewed by Cynthia Egli.

**Oct. 12** – "Humanists of Minnesota" with Scott Lohman, interviewed by Steve Petersen.

**Oct. 19** – "The Origins Initiative and the Science & Technology

Conference at the U. of M." with Lawrence Krauss, interviewed by Lynn Fellman.

**Oct. 26** – Halloween Special: "Ghosts of Minnesota" with John Funk, interviewed by Mike Haubrich.

**Oct. 26** – "American Atheists" with Ed Buckner, interviewed by Steve Petersen.

We have two months left in our six-month contract. Next month our board of directors will be faced with the question of whether or not we can afford to continue. Our radio program costs us **\$18,200 annually**. If you believe, as the board does, that our radio program is a valuable service to the community, please consider making a special donation to help keep us going. You can send a check (with "Radio Fund" in the memo line) to Minne-

sota Atheists, P.O. Box 6261, Minneapolis, MN 55406, or make a dedicated donation with PayPal or a credit card on our website (MinnesotaAtheists.org).

Also, don't forget to support our sponsors who support our radio show with their advertising: the **American Humanist Association** (americanhumanist.org), the **Humanists of Minnesota** (humanistsofminn.org), the **Secular Coalition for America** (secular.org), and **Q.Cumbers** restaurant in Edina (qcumbers.com).

After almost every radio show our crew heads over to Q.Cumbers restaurant (7465 France Ave. S., Edina, MN 55435) at 11:00 a.m. We'd love to have you join us. Don't forget to print out an Atheists Weekly E-mail or show your Minnesota Atheists newsletter to get a \$2.00 discount!

## Cable Report

by **Steve Petersen**

This past September, Dr. Grant Steves recorded two programs on atheism titled "Atheism: A Clarification." On the panel were George Kane, Jeannette Watland, and James Zimmerman. The discussion centered on the public's perception of the word "atheism," as well as on the meaning of related words and reasons why people may or may not choose to self-describe themselves using the word "atheist."

If you have an idea for a program please contact Grant Steves at: achair@mnatheists.org. If you would like to help on the cable program or sponsor the program on your cable access station please contact me at chair@mnatheists.org.

**Cable Crew:** Art Anderson, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, George Kane and Grant Hermanson.

**Podcasts:** MinnesotaAtheists.org. Podcasts are made possible by Grant Hermanson.

### Cable schedule

**Burnsville/Eagan Community Television:** Channel 14. Check their web site (www.bect.tv) for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

**Bloomington:** Channel 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. Tuesday 5:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

**Minneapolis:** Channel 17. Saturday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**Rochester:** Channel 10. Tuesday,

Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

**Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View, New Brighton:** Channel 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**St. Cloud:** Channel 12. Thursday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jack Richter.

**Stillwater:** Channel 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

**South Washington County:** Channel 14. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Raleigh Nelson.

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights:** Channel 15. Friday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

## Adopt-A-Highway Clean-Up



Twelve members of Minnesota Atheists and the Friends Free of Theism joined together to clean our section of Adopt-A-Highway in Rice, Minnesota on Oct. 5, 2008.

(From left) Grant Hermanson, Rachel Wilson, Steve Petersen, D.J. Lommel, Stephanie Lommel, Rob Taylor, Deb Doucette (project leader), Tom Stavros, Shirley Moll, and Art Anderson. Not pictured: Jerry Lenz and August Berkshire (photographer).

## November 30 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Spaghetti Dinner – Only \$6.66!

On Sunday, Nov. 30, 2008, 4:00-7:00 p.m.,  
we will hold a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Radio Fundraising Spaghetti Dinner.



You can arrive any time between 4:00 and 7:00 p.m.  
The food will be served until at least 7:30 p.m.  
The price is **\$6.66 for all you can eat!**



There will be spaghetti, a selection of sauces with and without meat, meatballs, garlic bread, salad, dessert, and a variety of things to drink.

This is a fun, informal, family-friendly social event with an opportunity for lots of interesting conversation and camaraderie.

The event will take place in the **Party Room** at the apartment complex at **1276 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul, MN 55113. (See map on page 18)**  
(Park directly in back and follow the walkway between the two buildings to the Party Room.)  
For more information, contact George Kane at [nup@minn.net](mailto:nup@minn.net) or (651) 488-8225.

# Knick Knack Paddy Whack, Throw the Priest a Bone

by Vic Tanner



Vic Tanner

My fiancée and I recently attended the Nobel Conference at Gustavus Adolphus University in Saint Peter. The title of the conference this year was “Who Where the First Humans?” and the presentations focused on recent findings in paleo-anthropology.

After two days of intriguing scientific talks by the likes of Curtis Marean and Robin Dunbar, the conference was closed out with a speech by J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, who holds a D.Th. in Philosophical Theology. After scratching my head for a bit, wondering what a theologian was doing speaking at a scientific conference, I remembered that some of the findings in anthropology do tend to challenge people’s faith just a bit. Dr. van Huyssteen was speaking on the “challenge” of theology in accepting the findings of the study of human origins.

It is true that as our society’s database of knowledge increases, the findings of science, particularly ones concerning the origins of the universe and life, do come into conflict with the world views of many religions. There becomes increasingly less and less room left for any sort of “fundamentalist” religious thought and the faithful are often met with the decision to either alter their theology or, as we have been seeing more and more of in America, reject the science. This outright refusal to accept or even tolerate science, has lead many people to retreat further and further into a stone age mentality that is detrimental to them and to society.

That’s why I (very surprisingly) found myself looking forward to hearing what a man of faith had to

say during a science conference. He wasn’t, after all, speaking to me. He was speaking to the faithful: those in the audience that may have found themselves offended at some of the other speeches given over that last two days. I was eager to see what sort of consolation he would offer them. Would he be able to reach out and raise them to a level of at least tolerance, if not full acceptance, of science? Well, I honestly don’t know what any of them could have thought of his speech. I was very disappointed. I think I’ve heard deeper theological arguments in an infomercial.

**This outright refusal to accept or even tolerate science, has lead many people to retreat further and further into a stone age mentality that is detrimental to them and to society.**

In broaching the subject, he needed to walk a very fine line. If he came on too strong for the case of science, he would have been viewed a heretic and immediately dismissed. If he leaned the other way, his days of speaking at scientific conferences would be over with very quickly. But there is a difference between being delicate and being purposefully obtuse. I had a hard time figuring out what approach he was even attempting to use. At the onset, of course, I didn’t know whether his stance was going to be more secular and accepting of scientific findings or overtly fundamentalist and hostile. Halfway through his hour long speech I still didn’t know, and it only became murkier as he spoke. In one sentence he mentioned the “Abrahamic Myths” only to then follow up with references to humans being literally made in the “image of God.”

The proposal he did make relatively clear, as he reiterated for the full hour, was that science should involve religion by inviting it into the discussion. But he never explained why or elaborated on what it is he thinks he or other theologians have to offer. What sort of expertise, after all, would he have to give? He himself admitted his lack of knowledge in this field of research. It seemed as if he was begging to be included, like a young child running after his older brothers.

Human beings do, as he pointed out, have a predisposition to religion; it is undeniable. But that does not infer that it is beneficial to us or that the tenets of any particular faith hold any merit. It could, after all, just be an artifact of the pattern matching algorithm of our brains. Would a theologian propose such an explanation?

The religion of early man does, of course, need to be studied. But, should it be studied by clergy? I suppose it depends on your thoughts on religion. Being atheist, I can’t see any reason for it. The study of religion should be conducted by anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers; not theologians. Being an expert on any one particular religion does not make one qualified to speak on the religious propensity in early humans. In fact, I think that it would specifically make a researcher biased and unable to think outside the box of their dogmas. Why would having religion make one qualified to study religion? Does having the flu make you qualified to study the spread of contagious diseases?



## Resident Warns People About Religious Fraud

by Dennis Dalman

When Jack Richter went to sleep when he was 11 years old, he would dream frequently about boys—affectionate dreams about boys. He didn't know why. He knew it wasn't a choice—erotic dreams about males. But one day he realized he must be gay; he was attracted to members of his own sex.

As years went by, Richter said he felt he had to hide his sexual persuasion. As a student at St. Cloud Technical High School, he knew if he told people of his orientation he would be ridiculed or hated. So he kept it to himself.

Richter, now 40, who lives in Saratoga Springs, has come full circle. After years of struggling with his sexuality, he is eager to share his journey with other people—gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and straights. What he most wants to share is what, in his opinion, is the folly of religious groups who try to change gay or lesbian people into straight people.

"They are," he said, "cruel hypocrites."

Richter is a topnotch karaoke singer, who has won many singing awards throughout the past 20 years. He studied voice at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y. and at the American Musical and Dra-

matic Academy in New York City. He is an expert singer of songs by Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, and Josh Groban.

Recently, he won a trip to Las Vegas after topping 28 singers in a local karaoke contest. He also works as a furniture salesman at Hoyer Home Furniture and Appliance in St. Cloud.

But Richter's most fervent cause nowadays is to get people—especially gays, lesbians, and their families—not to fall for religious-based "aversion therapy" programs. Such programs, Richter said, are based on the theory gays and lesbians are sinful, according to the Bible, but they can be

*(Continued on page 14)*

## The Pope Walks into a Bar...

by Vic Tanner

Okay, it's official: The Vatican has lost its sense of humor. And they used to be so much fun.

Recently, in her standup act, Italian comic Sabrina Guzzanti quipped that Pope Benedict XVI would go to Hell and be tormented by homosexual demons. Sounds pretty funny to me; I wish I would have said it. But, as it turns out, by invoking this imaginary image, she broke a very real Italian law by "offending the honor of the sacred and inviolable person" of Benedict XVI. And for it, she may be facing up to 5 years in jail.

Also recently, comedian and talk show host Bill Maher was the proud recipient of his own page on the Catholic League's website, proud defender of all things Catholic. The page obstinately reads "Bill Maher is America's Biggest Bigot" at the top in bold letters. The page contains comment taken from Maher's comedy monologues that concern the Catholic Church, almost all of them concerning child abuse cases.

What Maher and Guzzanti said may be jokes, but they are also very serious comments on the church's stance on homosexuality, birth control, and behavior toward its own scandalous involvement with child molestation accusations. Both comics concerned have focused their attention on these specific issues. Neither one of them has segued off into Bigot Country and accused the Catholic Church of running the banks or being the cause of the downfall of society. Neither have they insulted private individuals for being members of the church.

The church is just trying to detract from the issues being raised by claiming persecution. If someone insults you, ignore the accusation and just call him a bigot. It's far easier than being accountable for your actions. It may seem like a typical knee-jerk reaction to being insulted, but there is a huge problem with this mode of action: it's passive aggressive. Instead of answering, or even ignoring the accusations, they are making accusations themselves. Accusations that may promote hatred and intolerance toward anyone the dares have a dissenting opinion.

Misplacing blame isn't going to solve any problems. As Maher stated in his monologue: "If the Pope was, instead of a religious figure, merely the CEO of a nationwide chain of daycare centers where thousands of employees had been caught molesting kids and then covering it up, he'd be arrested faster than you can say, 'Who wants to touch Mister Wiggle?'"

Is it anti-Catholic to disagree with the Pope? Well, is it anti-American to disagree with the President? I hope not. Otherwise, with a 20% approval rating of our current President, we would have an awful lot of anti-American citizens. All organizations should be able to question their leadership. Why this special case for the Pope? It's the age-old taboo of discussing religion in general.

The moral of the story? I guess it's "Don't comment on the Pope or the Roman Catholic Church no matter what they do, legal or not." Anyway, scientists have recently confirmed the virgin birth of an Atlantic Blacktip Shark. So, I smell the start of a new religion. And this one will actually have a scientific basis.

*The Sunny Skeptic***Crystal Dervetski****Atheist Dating and Relating:****Thank Mr. Gore for Inventing the Internet**

Utilizing technology is one of the best ways to meet someone who shares similar beliefs with you. Luckily, meeting on the internet does not still harbor the same nerdy reputation it did years ago. Don't be afraid to utilize the "world-wide interwebs" to connect with people. Often times, the internet allows you to learn about a person much faster than you would if you were meeting them in conventional settings. Here are some tips and sites to get started on your 'net adventure.

(Please be aware, as with all internet dating sites, fees may apply to memberships.)

**Dating/Networking Websites:**

**Match.com** is a large, reliable dating website. There is a fee, but they have discounts, such as pay for 6 months, get 6 months free. This is one of the more active dating websites, which is good. Obviously, more people = better chances of meeting someone!

**Eharmony.com** is the site that, supposedly, decides that atheists wouldn't be good matches for other people. Beware of this site. You may be able to sign up, but you will not be given matches! A former customer service rep. there even stated that she was told she may be required to pray over the phone with customers who were distraught over not having found a mate. *Be wary of sites that cater only to the religious.* When you're making your profile, if

there is no option for Atheist, look for a different dating site!

**OkCupid.com:** In making a profile, declaring Atheism is presented in an awkward way: "Would you date an atheist, yes or no?" Even though it's strange, it's on there and you can answer "yes" and rank it as an important quality. This site also allows you to sign up for networking only if you are already attached but are searching for friends. (FYI: Not really a good idea. I would really question my significant other if they were on a site like this looking for "friends.")

**CasualKiss.com:** Items you can search for on this site include Straight, Gay, Bi, Atheist, and even Jedi Knight. At last, all Leias can search for their long lost lover/brother!

**AtheistPassions.com:** A site that, as stated in its URL, caters to atheists. It states that it is a free service, but may have strings attached, so be careful!

**FreeThinkerMatch.com:** A 1 year membership is \$14.00. This site also includes freethinkers such as witches, so be aware of this if you are truly secular in your beliefs.

For my money, I say [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com) is the place to be. MySpace is completely free, it allows you to display your personal identity in a way no other networking site will, and it is very easy to search for other users based on their location and their beliefs. MySpace's search engine will have you turning up atheists in a matter of seconds, and you can learn a lot about someone by viewing their page.

MySpace is also a very safe website for networking. Re-connecting with former friends and finding new

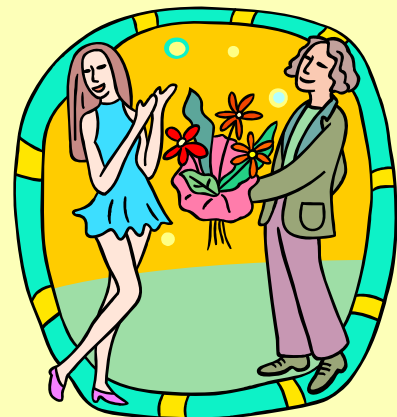
ones has never been so fun, and, if you're attached, this is the place you can do that without making your significant other feel uneasy. Also, MySpace, unlike FaceBook, has a reputation for having more members who are older. It is easier to feel comfortable in an environment where there are more people closer to your generation.

Don't forget places like the Minnesota Atheists website, **mnatheists.org**. The forum there is getting lively, fun, and is always improving. It is, of course, a real possibility that you could meet someone on an atheist forum!

Before you go out to meet someone in person that you've met on an internet site, make sure to be safe. Next, we'll discuss safety in meeting people on the web, and also places to meet people the old fashioned way: in person!

To read my personal MySpace dating and networking story, go to the forum at [www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org).

Have more dating and relating issues? Have issues with this topic? What's important to you in a relationship? Write to Crystal D. at [astrocomfy@hotmail.com](mailto:astrocomfy@hotmail.com).



## News & Notes

by George Kane

**The Minnesota contingent attending the Freedom from Religion Foundation Convention** was smaller in Chicago on October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> than it had been a year ago in Madison. Minnesota was recognized in a slide-show by a photo of their mobile “Keep Religion OUT of Politics” billboard parked in front of our Capitol.

During the slide-show review of FFRF activities during the year since the last convention, co-presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor addressed a couple items of particularly current interest. The group had just filed suit in District Court to stop the National Day of Prayer. The suit names as defendants President Bush; his press secretary, Dana Perino; Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle, who also issued a statewide prayer proclamation; and Shirley Dobson, chair of the National Day of Prayer Task Force. The suit asks that Public Law 100-307, which in 1988 President Ronald Reagan signed to proclaim the First Thursday in May the “National Day of Prayer,” be ruled to violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The suit filed by the FFRF on behalf of six Wisconsin residents is recorded as Western District of Wisconsin Case 08-CV-588.

**The National Day of Prayer** is probably the nation’s most egregious symbolic partnership of government and religion. In Washington and at statehouses across the nation, large Christian gatherings are scheduled. These confabs feature sermons insisting that our nation was founded on faith in god, that it has been uniquely blessed by god, and that we are surely doomed unless we implore god to guide our government. In 1982, government

formed the National Day of Prayer Committee to coordinate activities, specifically calling on all religions to pray together in their own way. When Public Law 100-307 was passed in 1999, however, this Committee turned over organization for the NDoP to a private group, the National Day of Prayer Task Force. This task force, headed by Shirley Dobson, wife of Focus on the Family founder Dr. James Dobson, has expressly run the national celebration as an Evangelical Christian event. State groups applying to participate must sign a pledge that all of their activities will be conducted by Christians. Non-Christian churches are asked to hold their own events at other sites.

The FFRF suit asserts that the NDoP Task Force pressures governors to issue official proclamations “in concert ... with the Judeo-Christian principles on which the Task Force is based.” Further, the proclamations “convey to nonreli-

gious Americans that they are ex-

pected to believe in God,” and that “religion is preferred over non-religion.”

any constitutional problems with the new policy, the FFRF will take the city right back to court.

the separation of church and state.

**Back to Dan and Annie Laurie** opening the FFRF Convention with a slide show of the activities of the last year. They reported that their lawsuit against the Green Bay nativity display was dismissed as moot, as they had already won the battle. The conclusion of the decision reads:

*The Defendants (Green Bay officials) have changed their offending behavior. Practically speaking, the Plaintiffs (the FFRF) have won a concrete victory that actually changes the circumstances on the ground. Having obtained a real-life victory, there is nothing to be gained from spending years and thousands of dollars to obtain a piece of paper saying that the Plaintiffs were right. The case is therefore dismissed. The Clerk is directed to enter judgment accordingly.*

Despite that unequivocal declaration of the FFRF victory, the arch-conservative Liberty Council, which provided free legal representation for the city, responded with a press release claiming victory for Green Bay, since the city was not enjoined. This spin is pure deception. The judge ruled the suit moot because the city enacted a moratorium on holiday decorations on city property, until it passes a policy in that regard. If there are any constitutional problems with the new policy, the FFRF will take the city right back to court.

**Finally, the FFRF’s mobile billboard** brings to mind a new advertising campaign in London. The British Humanist Association is buying ads on a small number of city buses. I’d love to see the ad here.



Bus ad paid for by the British Humanist Association

Minnesota Atheists has joined atheist groups in other states in holding a counter-celebration on the same day, which we call ‘The National Day of Reason.’ Our celebration in the Capitol Rotunda offers speeches on

*Comments from the whip*  
**Grant Steves**



## Moving on

### Re: Review of *Did Man Create God*

Folks,

I understand the review piece by Grant Steves (Vol. 18 Number 9), was a worthy addition to your monthly magazine, but freethinkers locally and nationally should be asking ourselves, why a book was even written.

The author, Dr. David E. Comings, found it necessary to write a 52 chapter, 694-page book chock full of information about how our brains are wired from birth. Why? Was it another brave attempt from someone who's obviously qualified to convince believers they're wrong? Or was it written to give us freethinkers another book in our arsenal against ignorance?

Shouldn't all of us do what Ken Bronstein of NYC Atheists said and "Declare victory and move on"? Isn't it obvious no amount of evidence, whether it is scientific or physical is going to change the way ignorance, unfortunately, is passed down? Why do some freethinkers continue to waste their time bickering with people who have abandoned logic and reason?

Folks, we're down here but for a very short time. Let's follow Ken's advice and move on. It'll be better for all of us, better for our blood pressure, and we'll have more time to spend together to face real issues of Church and State separation rather than wasting more of our

time presenting facts-in-hand to the blind.

Thank you,

Rick Calissi  
NYC Atheists

### Grant Steves' reply to Mr. Calissi:

Recently, I have had conversations about how some atheists still discuss and rehash the issues of religion and others say they have moved on and do not read material about why religion is wrong and atheists are right. If you are an atheist who

**Many have just arrived at an atheist conclusion. Many have left, but some still have, in varying degrees, emotional and intellectual attachments to their religious past.**

has reached the stage of certainty where reading material that presents new and old arguments is considered unnecessary, you are to be congratulated, because you have graduated.

However, many have just arrived at an atheist conclusion. They have left, but some still have, in varying degrees, emotional and intellectual attachments to their religious past.

I know that the atheist position is right for me, but on occasions I have heard the religious music of my past, and it takes me back to a time when I believed, had wonderful friends, and a family that I

agreed with on most things religious. The first time I experienced this, I went back and traced through why I could not return and believe what I had been taught from early childhood. Reviewing the stages I took to leave helped to strengthen my decision about being an atheist and joining MNA.

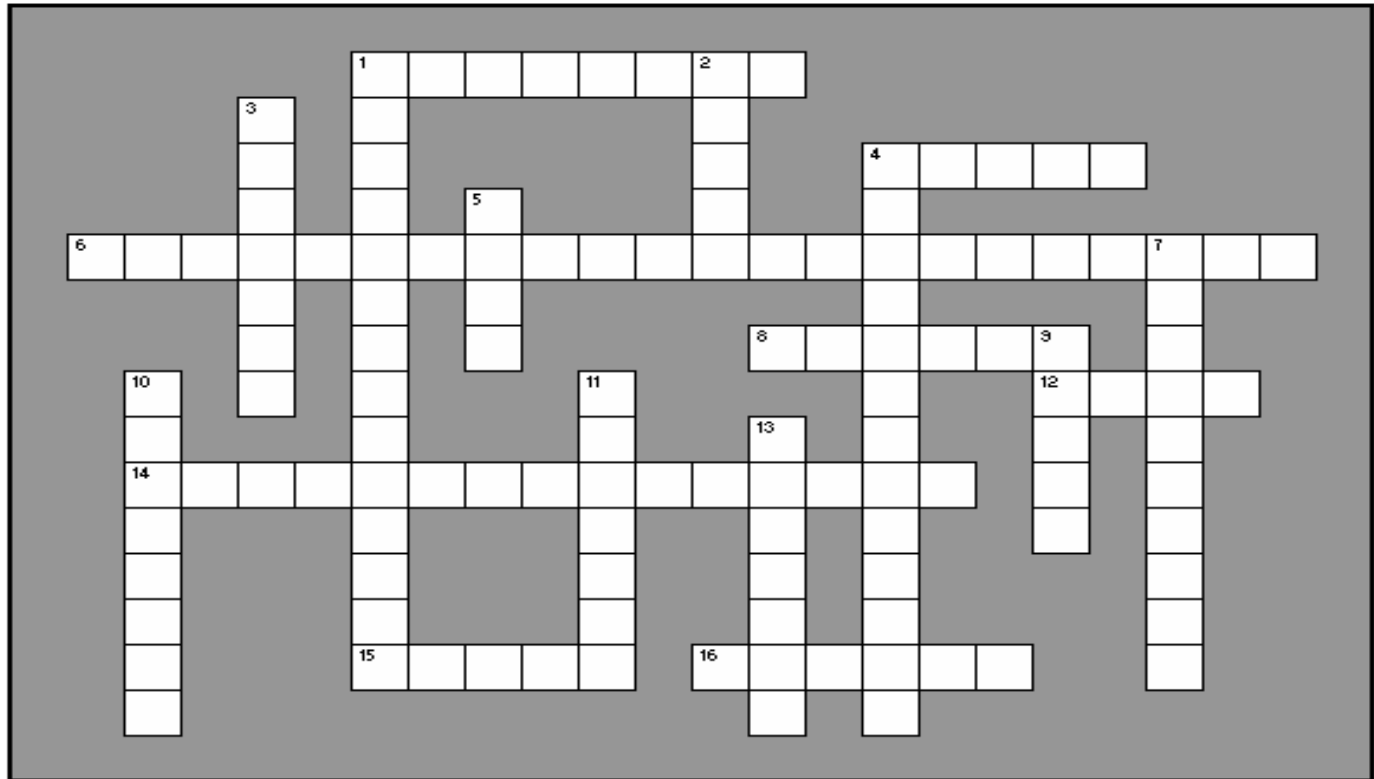
When I was a person of faith, I read a book, *On the Stages of Faith*, by John Fowler that describes how people are at different stages in their understanding of faith. People move from a need for a concrete manifestation of god (a golden calf, speaking in tongues, an internal feeling of god's presence) to a stage where people create an abstraction of faith that needs nothing concrete to manifest their faith.

My observation is that atheists go through similar stages. They move from the childhood of atheism to an adult atheism. In that move from the early stage to the final stage, they need reinforcement, guidance, and assurance from those who live with the certainty of doubt that is atheism and an understanding that his certainty of faith is no longer acceptable.

Those of us who are adults need empathy for those who have not reached atheist maturity. Empathy and compassionate understanding are not religious values, but they are human values.

# Motion Pictures Crossword Puzzle

The motion pictures forming the answers to this puzzle take on matters of reason, science, faith, or religion (for better or worse). Spaces are excluded for multiple word answers.



**Across**

- 1. 1953 Hitchcock drama in which a priest hears a murder confession (2 words)
- 4. Film telling the story of a Mexican surrealist (and atheist) painter
- 6. Mel Brooks' version of the last supper, among other events (6 words)
- 8. First (and so far only) in the His Dark Materials trilogy: The \_\_\_\_\_ Compass
- 12. Biopic of free-thinking author, played by both Winslet and Dench
- 14. Sci-fi exploring the damn, dirty way evolution continues in the far future (4 words)
- 15. Prophets, angels and an abortion clinic worker meet in the irreverent

comedy.

**Down**

- 16. Fantasy movie based on religious myths: The Chronicles of \_\_\_\_\_
- 1. 1960 dramatization of Scopes' 1925 trial (3 words)
- 2. 2001: A \_\_\_\_\_ Odyssey
- 3. Zemeckis sci-fi exploring the need for proof in matters of faith and science
- 4. Thomas More's faith vs. Henry VIII's rights: A Man \_\_\_\_\_ (3 words)
- 5. Jimmy Stewart, and others, debate the ethics of murder in this real-time drama
- 7. Bill Maher documentary reviewed

in this issue

- 9. Charles Laughton's story of a corrupt preacher: \_\_\_\_\_ of the Hunter
- 10. Ben Stein's thoughtful, convincing, and completely unbiased look at creationism
- 11. Ethan Hawke suffers for being naturally selected, instead of designed in a lab
- 13. Humans (named Atouk, Lar and Tala) and dinosaurs co-existed, apparently

**Answers on page 18.**

# Pro-life Police State or Pro-choice Democracy?

by Lee Salisbury



Lee Salisbury

The term “pro-life” sounds so wholesome, so full of good intentions. How could anyone question a movement seeking to save the unborn from the alleged baby killers?

The pro-life answer is that those pro-choice folks are just amoral, narcissistic, licentious heathens whose sole concern is sexual promiscuity and worldly pursuits.

[...]

Laws would be legislated making abortion a criminal act deserving a murder conviction and imprisonment for both the mother and her doctor.

The pro-life premise is “life begins at conception.” But if “life begins at conception” what are we to make of miscarriages? Approximately one-quarter of all known conceptions end in a miscarriage. If God designed women’s bodies to miscarry then God is also responsible for aborted fetuses.

How would a pro-life America deal with miscarriages? Would they establish a Miscarriage Commission to investigate whether the mother played a role in that miscarriage? Maybe she purposely encouraged that miscarriage by what she ate, or if she drank alcohol, or engaged in unexplained physical exertion, or accidentally fell down a few stairs. The pro-lifers will want a detailed accounting of the death of any embryo/fetus.

[...]

What a catastrophe this would be to revert to the pre-Roe v Wade days. Women desperate to end a pregnancy would again resort to self-abortion, often not only killing the fetus but causing irreparable harm if not death to themselves.

It’s ludicrous to think that a pro-life America would eliminate abortions. Abortions would only be

driven into back allies. A pro-life America would become a police state imposing immeasurable anxiety and mental distress for all women of childbearing age. Family planning would not exist. Women would be isolated in a world where their sole approval comes from bearing children—child after child after child.

Fundamentalist Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) foster the pro-life movement. These Christians believe it their duty to impose their religious dogma on others.

But there is a difference between fundamentalist Christians and liberal Christians. The former consider it their God-ordained duty to judge those with whom they disagree. Their God is aghast at the failures of others, justifying their intolerance. Liberal Christians leave the judgment of others to God. God’s love and omnipotence are great enough to deal with every human shortcoming. Liberal Christians practice tolerance.

Does that mean pro-choice people favor abortion? No, pro-choice people disdain abortion. However, they refrain from judging others who are in circumstances different from their own. They recognize that some women find themselves in extremely difficult if not impossible situations.

Those supporting pro-choice want to find alternatives to abortion just as much as anyone. The pro-life stance is destructive to all. It is a legalistic position reflecting a vindictive judgmental inept God. No mercy, no freedom to counsel, nothing but condemnation and judgment, such as the Old Testament man received caught picking up sticks on the Sabbath – he broke the law, God killed him.

There is no perfect answer to the problem of abortion, but there are proven documented ways to minimize abortion. Abortions are the product of unwanted pregnancies. Minimize un-

wanted pregnancies; minimize abortions. It is a well-documented fact that countries that provide sex education and make contraceptives available have far fewer abortions per capita than countries prohibiting abortions. If one were sincerely concerned about aborted fetuses, wouldn’t one want such an answer?

So why won’t pro-life candidates like Michele Bachmann, Matt Dean, or Kathy Lohmer seek to minimize abortions? They have no intention of minimizing abortions; in fact, they need the continuance of abortions to justify their political ambitions. Pro-life adherents blindly follow.

[Lee Salisbury is a member of Minnesota Atheists. A version of this article appeared in the October 21, 2008 issue of the *Stillwater Gazette*.]

(Continued from page 9)

“saved” by enough religious counseling.

Richter said he was very afraid to tell his parents he was gay many years ago. When he finally did, his mother was accepting, but his father wasn’t—at first. Then, one of his sisters convinced him, by and by much later, to admit he was an “abomination,” as a phrase in the Bible says, and he needed Christian help. His emotions mixed up, Richter did not know where to turn. A woman, who told him aversion therapy was the way to go (and who later turned out to be a married lesbian) convinced Richter to try to go straight.

So he joined several Christian movements. One was called Outpost Ministries and the other was called Exodus International. The theories behind those movements, and many similar ones in the world, are that with enough biblical exposure the gay and lesbian feelings will go

(Continued on page 15)

On Saturday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, Minnesota Atheists attended the Twin Cities Book Fair hosted by Rain Taxi and held at the Minneapolis Community and Technical College. Grant Steves and James Zimmerman helmed the booth while distributing “Get out of Hell Free Cards,” selling atheist-themed books and t-shirts and engaging in great conversations with many of the attendees. Many signed up for a complimentary copy of our newsletter.

**Right: Grant Steves (left) and James Zimmerman set aside their philosophical arguments long enough to smile for the camera.**



from page 14)

away.

Richter said he tried and tried to change. Now, he is convinced there is absolutely no way gays can change into straights or, for that matter, straights can change into gays. Richter, now a dedicated atheist, said all of the Christian change-the-gay movements are based on an “absolute lie.”

He said those movements are hypocritical, pretentious, bad-faithed, and can even lead to suicide because many people who join, or are coerced to join, are humiliated or made to feel worthless from the day they join. Richter further said many leaders of those movements have sex with their patients and then lie about it. Richter has years of documented research showing how leaders of the movement were themselves caught in the very thing they condemned.

Richter believes sexual orientation, both heterosexual and homosexual, has a biological basis. He has done 10 years of research, he said, that proves his point.

“I’m trying to educate people,” he said. “This so-called Christian ex-gay movement is a lie. It’s a fraud, and I know it. People can’t change their sexual orientation. All they do is

(Continued make people confused and suicidal.” about human sexuality.

Richter said he knows many religious leaders who are gay, including leaders of cure-the-gay movements, who claimed they turned straight and then got caught in same-sex scandals. The most recently famous, he said, is Ted Haggard, national head of the American Evangelical Movement.

After Haggard was discovered having sex with a massage man, he went into an aversion program so he would not be gay anymore. Richter said Haggard, like so many anti-gay Christians, is a hypocrite.

“A lot of them are having sex with the ones they’re trying to help,” he said. “All they’re doing is ruining people. People are committing suicide because of the twisted messages they’re getting.”

Richter said he is happy with his sexual orientation now. He said the effort by Christian groups to change his sexuality was a big mistake that just made him and other people unhappy.

“I’m happy now, and I’m not living a lie,” Richter said. “I wish other people would learn that. We’d all be happier.”

Richter said everybody—heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual—would benefit by reading books

“There are so many good books about sexuality at the library,” he said. “If you’re a young gay teenager, please go there and check those books out. That’s a good place to start if you’re afraid. Knowledge. Research.”

Richter, a former Catholic, is now a deeply committed atheist. He said he believes in “critical and rational thinking” that can bring a better world for all concerned if they would only understand the way ancient myths came to be accepted, through permutations, thoughtlessly, as modern Christian certainties.

Richter said the “Christian Right” is making people—heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual – needlessly confused and antagonistic.

For young people, sexually confused, Richter especially recommends a book called *Born Gay* by Dr. Quazi Rahman, available at any bookstore.

<http://thenewsleaders.com/articles/2008/10/09/sartell/news/news2.txt>

[Originally published in *Newsleaders: St. Joseph, Sartell, Waite Park, East Side*, October 9, 2008]

# A Review of Bill Maher's *Religulous*

by George Kane

*Religulous*

Lionsgate Films

Directed by Larry Charles

101 minutes

On Wednesday, October 8th, we had perhaps our best-attended Reel & Meal. Over 20 of us met for dinner

at the Edina Grill, and a few more met us at Edina Cinema to see Bill Maher's *Religulous*. Most of the crowd found the event posted on the Meet-up

webpage and attended their first Minnesota Atheists event. This is probably a good indicator of where we should be looking for attendees to our Reel & Meal events. Rather than target movie selections to the sometimes arcane tastes of our regulars, we should look for opportunities to use them as an outreach to younger, contemporary atheists who are not organizationally involved.

*Religulous* is a series of interviews by comedian Bill Maher, who traveled around the world asking members of religious groups about their beliefs. Maher has an unfailing gift for finding absurdities in reli-

gious myths and dogmas, which kept moments of hilarity coming at a crisp clip. Still, I agreed with one in our group who felt that Maher ambushed his unsuspecting subjects. It reminded her in that regard of director Larry Charles' earlier work, *Borat*.

In fact, early in the movie, a trucker at a rest stop prayer meeting complained angrily that he did not like the questions Maher was asking and stormed out. Maher also got tossed out of the Vatican where, like Michael Moore chasing after the General Motors CEO in *Roger and Me*, he wandered the halls looking for the Pope. He was also kicked out of a mosque over the objections of the mosque member he was interviewing.

*Religulous* is an equal-opportunity ridicule engine, taking jabs at Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mormonism, TV evangelism, and even pagan cults. Maher's *modus operandi* is to confront

believers with absurdities in their scripture and then give them the floor to explain them. One particularly pleasant surprise was a Vatican priest who agreed without hesitation that the Bible stories were foolish and who admonished Maher that "no one believes those things any more." Most of the time, Maher feigns an open mind when he conducts his interviews, but his questions are traps intended to encourage the interviewees to reveal beliefs that he considers absurd.

Every atheist is certain to find *Religulous* witty, urbane, and entertaining throughout. But the religious faithful, particularly Christians, will complain that it was never Maher's intent to present a serious, honest dialogue. Maher did not invite any respected academic theologians to appear but focused instead on questioning amateurs unprepared to rebut his skepticism.

At the end, speaking in the Valley of Armageddon, Maher makes it clear that he is not just peddling doubt, as he had claimed at the outset, but that he views organized religion as threatening and harmful to the world. I'm sure that everyone in our group had already figured that out.

**Maher's *modus operandi* is to confront believers with absurdities in their scripture and then give them the floor to explain them.**

**The religious faithful, particularly Christians, will complain that it was never Maher's intent to present a serious, honest dialogue.**



Left: Reel & Meal attendees enjoy dinner before watching *Religulous*.





**Book Review:*****Atheism Advanced*****by David Eller****American Atheist Press****468 pages****by Grant Steves**

Professor and cultural anthropologist David Eller's first book, *Natural Atheism* (2004), designed an introduction to atheism that gave depth and understanding of atheism to individuals. In his most recent book, *Atheism Advanced* (2007), Professor Eller presents a new perspective on what atheism could be. Atheism is more than the absence of god-beliefs; it is the absence—indeed the rejection—of belief altogether. He has coined a new term to describe the atheist perspective: discredism (pronounced dis-cred-ism). It “suggests not just the passive or indifferent absence of belief but an active, intentional, and principled dis-missal of and dis-respect for belief. It is a deliberate dis-connection from the entire notion of belief, dis-sociation from the practice of believing, and ideally and hopefully a dis-abling of the power of belief. For our purposes it is the position or life—way of being without belief(s).” For Eller, this term is the “rejection of beliefs or creeds, and a reasoned avoidance of belief.”

In *Natural Atheism*, Eller argued and clarified the difference between believing and knowing. Knowing is based upon observed and empirical data. Believing is a matter of acceptance without empirical data. He contends an atheist should approach ideas from a scientific view. They need to look at ideas with empirical eyes and

not the eyes of faith.

Eller presents the concept of discredism in the last chapter of *Atheism Advanced*. The first 350 pages explore what an atheist is in relation to theism, the language of religion, how religions have re-created themselves, and the necessary divide between science and religion.

With the eyes of an anthropologist, Eller examines how religion has been used as a tool to manipulate the lives of people. As the governments of Europe expanded outward, they carried religion and spread it like a virus over the world. With a missionary zeal, born of being the chosen of a god, they were converted by fear and force. They brought a belief in slavery and exploitation of inferior people. Whether it was Christianity spreading westward or Islam pushing eastward they brought a common mental set, e. g., a scriptural inerrancy and some shared religious basis.

This is a significant book that looks at the language of religion and its use in culture. It is a task that Eller, a cultural anthropologist, philosopher, and scientist, is equipped to present. In the second chapter, he examines the language of religion and atheism. Coming from a Judeo-Christian culture, we take terms like god, sin, and soul and use them with a degree of understanding. When Professor Eller was in Australia, he discovered these terms have no meaning for the indigenous people. They do not know what these terms are about or how you might use them. We as atheists should have a similar reaction to the language of religion: “I have never heard of them” or “They

mean nothing to me at all.” It is not just the meaning of the language of Christianity that we do not know. It is all religions. That which is devoid of meaning is not possible to discuss. Religion is based on belief. Belief can exist without religion. However, atheism can live without either of them. As L. Wittgenstein said, “Believing is not thinking.”

The imposition of a religion on a culture is not only a belief system about the inexplicable, but it is also a changing of the way a person views time, the environment and the self. Christianity focuses on time coming to an end, an environment over which man has dominion, and a self defined in terms of and limited by relationship to a god. The Australian culture was antithetical to this Christian paradigm. As a matter of fact, most indigenous people had a different relationship to the environment. They lived in the environment and did not think of dominion over it. Western religious culture brought an end to their way of thinking.

Professor Eller started his book with a Nietzsche style use of aphorisms. What follows are a few concluding aphorisms from the author:

- 1) “There is no such thing as religion—only religion-s.”
- 2) “There is no such thing as morality—only moralit-ies.”
- 3) “You say your god is unknowable? But the unknowable and the non-existent are indistinguishable.”
- 4) “The best argument against any religion is all the other religions.”
- 5) “So many gods, so little reason.”

**Freethought Cryptogram**

Eg xepqhoeop ei hqn mopnt ug hqn puwi, hqno hqn

puwi mtn zuozntonw buihxk rehq httni. —Xmu Hin

[Answer on Page 18]

# New Drug *Placeb-X*®

Renowned medical doctors the world over are heralding the newest Rx on the market as a wonderdrug. *Placeb-X*® is also new on the market and is being recommended. The patented formula of specially refined sucrose and dihydrogen monoxide has an unprecedented ability to do whatever the patient wants it to do. If you have a disease or ailment such as social anxiety, low-confidence, cancer, proclivity toward self gratitude, acne, HIV, receding hair-line, imminent death, etc., worry no more! Countless studies dating back to the dawn of controlled studies show that if you take *Placeb-X*® you will immediately, or at an undefined point in the future, report improvement in your condition.

Even more astonishing is the ability of *Placeb-X*® to allow the patient to have a sacred experience with their deity of choice. Take *Placeb-X*® and talk directly to your god either aloud or through silent prayer and receive 100% unambiguous replies in the form of: a spontaneous overwhelming feeling of wellbeing; a premonition that persuades you to change your mind about something; mysterious light sources in pictures you have taken; natural disasters that *almost* destroy your belongings and/or end your life; misfortune befalling someone you have always suspected as due for a comeuppance; and including, but not limited to, religious figures, sayings, and icons appearing in or on toast, glass, dirt, food, cereal, soup, wheat fields, dreams, and sometimes in person.

In addition to doing whatever it is that you want it to do, *Placeb-X*® will do nothing at all for the die-hard ni-

hlist. If you wish our product to bear no results, you are guaranteed to not get whatever you want. All you have to do is not believe in the medicinal properties of sucrose dihydrogen monoxide. This aspect of *Placeb-X*® is called "atheist-mode."

**Features:**

- Cure mode (take as many pills as you want and know that you're on your way to healing).
- Sacred Hum (take as many pills as you want and listen to the god-approved hum in the air telling you not to worry).
- Atheist-mode (take as many pills as you want and listen to the hum in the air telling you not to worry).



**Side Effects:**

- Cognitive dissonance, diarrhea, heart palpitations, perspiration, dry mouth, dizziness, dermatitis, vertigo, hemoglobin complications, iron deficiency, headache, constipation, upset stomach, sluggishness, nervousness, agitation, bloody stool, euphoria, weakness, previously unaccounted for strength, low blood sugar, infection, inflammation, scarring, loss of function, fever, malaise, nausea, weight loss, weight gain, bloating, etc.

or

- Contentment.

**Dosage:**

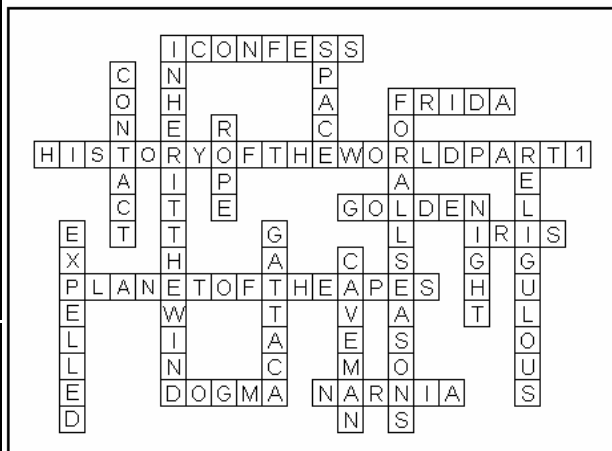
- Between 1mg (1 pill) and 60mg (entire bottle) daily.

A parody by Keith Lodermeier

**Right: Map to the 5th Sunday Spaghetti Dinner on Sunday November 30 from 4:00 to 7:00 pm at 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W. in the apartment complex party room.**



**Crossword Puzzle Answers Key from page 13**



**Answer to Freethought Cryptogram from page 17**

If lightning is the anger of the gods, then the gods are concerned mostly with trees. — Lao Tse

## Things to do, places to go: A calendar for atheists

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. **Atheist/Agnostic AA**, 3249 Hennepin Ave. S., #55 (Men's Center, in the basement) Minneapolis, Open to men and women. FFI: tcAgnostic@gmail.com

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, 1-3:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists monthly meeting**.

Every Sunday, 10:30 - noon, **Brunch Social**. Q.Cumbers, 7465 France Avenue South, Edina. Bring your AWE for a \$2 discount.

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, **Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund**. Price: \$6.66. (June, August, November 2008)

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday, 6 p.m., **Freethought Toastmasters Club**. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to Party Room.) Roger Belfay, (651) 222-2782 or George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday, 5-7 p.m., **Happy Hour South**. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W. 66<sup>th</sup> Street (corner of Penn Ave. and 66<sup>th</sup> St.), Richfield, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. Old Country Buffet, Co. Road B2 between Snelling and Fairview, Roseville. Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. New China Buffet, 105 85th Ave. NW, Coon Rapids. Bill Volna, (612) 781-4273.

4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday, **Meal and a Reel**, Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin Ave. and Lake St.) 6 p.m. meal, 7 p.m. movie. George Kane, (651) 488-8225. Details in Atheists Weekly E-mail.

Thursdays, 7 p.m., **Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)** general meeting. 3d floor Coffman Memorial Union, 300 Washington Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455. Contact

cash@cashumn.org.

1<sup>st</sup> Thursday, 6-9 p.m., **"Atheists Talk" TV taping**. MTN, Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday, evening. **Rochester Area Freethinkers** monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn64@hotmail.com or (507) 259-4237.

4<sup>th</sup> Thursday, 6:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists board meeting**. Location varies. George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

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**To sign up for Atheists Weekly E-mail (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.**

**To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, go to <http://atheists.meetup.com/493>.**

# Minnesota Atheists

[www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org)

P.O. Box 6261, Minneapolis MN 55406

### JOIN OR RENEW MEMBERSHIP

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- \$25 -- Newsletter Only

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>>Minnesota Atheists has IRS 501(c)(3) status. All contributions are tax-deductible. <<<

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[AirAmericaMinnesota.com/listen](http://AirAmericaMinnesota.com/listen)**

**"Gay Muslim activists.  
That is a very rare job description."  
— Bill Maher in *Religilous***



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