

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in ActionSM

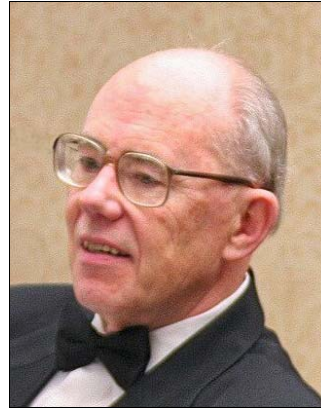
Volume 18 Number 8

September 2008

September meeting

Discussing Atheism & Humanism

Sept 21, 1-3:30, Ridgedale Library, 12601 Ridgedale Dr., Minnetonka



(From left) Atheists George Kane and Jeannette Sorensen will pair up with Paul Heffron and Matt Labo (not pictured) to clarify the differences between the two perspectives. Moderating the discussion will be Grant Steves (right).

As groups we wonder about the differences between atheism and humanism: do those difference matter? A panel of representatives from Minnesota Atheists and Humanists of Minnesota will address the questions of differences. They will make suggestions as to where we go from here and address other issues and concerns raised by panelists and audience members.

Minnesota Atheists have selected George Kane, a member of several years, and Jeannette Sorensen, a newer member, to represent the Atheist side of this engaging discussion. The Humanists will be represented by Paul Heffron and Matt Labo.

The moderator of the program will be Dr. Grant Steves. As an audience, we need and want you to bring your questions to help keep the discussion lively.

At this meeting, we will also be handing out our annual awards to honor distinguished Minnesota Atheists members.

September 21 MNA Meeting Ridgedale library, Minnetonka

1:00-1:15 p.m. – Social time.

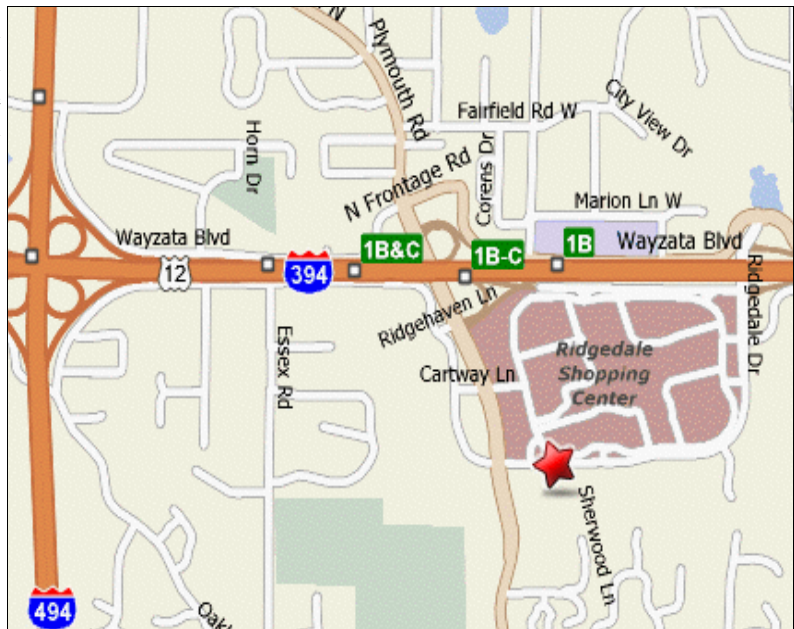
1:15-1:45 p.m. – Business Meeting.

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. – Dinner at Wanderer's Garden,
13059 Ridgedale Dr. Minnetonka, MN 55305
(Menu or \$10.50 Buffet)



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\$106,825.30**

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Annie Laurie Gaylor
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**MNA Meetup members: 283
Life memberships: 31**

Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

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

The Minnesota Atheist

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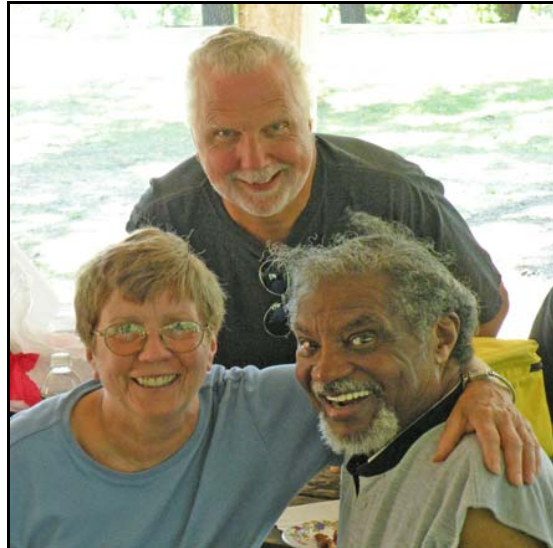
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Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnaatheists.org. Submissions may be edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

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.

The last picnic of summer...



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, 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.

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. 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.

August Fund Reports

Building Fund:	\$335.00
Guy Harper	\$50.00
Mike Haubrich	\$105.00
Christopher Matthews	\$50.00
Steve Petersen	
in memory of Fern Wodtke	\$50.00
Russell Sussan	\$10.00
Vern Young	\$50.00
Anonymous	\$20.00
Building Fund total:	\$106,825.30

Radio Fund:	\$145.00
Mark Dickinson	\$40.00
Matthew Dittloff	\$25.00
Dan Jordan	\$15.00
Russell Sussan	\$15.00
Vern Young	\$50.00

Visibility (General) Fund:	\$50.00
Greg Anderson	25.00
James Koran	25.00

Innovation 2008: Renewing America Through Smarter Science & Technology Policy

by **Bonnie Marsick**

If you're interested in the importance of government policy in science, the Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy at the University of Minnesota is having a conference called "Innovation 2008: Renewing

America Through Smarter Science & Technology Policy" on October 20-21st. Science Debate 2008 supporters Peter Agre and Ira Flatow will deliver the keynotes, and supporters Andy Fire, Lawrence Krauss, Russ Lefevre, Chris Mooney, Genie Scott, Susan Wood, Mary Woolley, and many others will be presenting on a variety of topics important to the next administration. Check back to the conference website for details as they unfold: <http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/stpp/events/innovation2008/index.html>

Freethought Cryptogram

PEDN M BMO M GEIQ MOW SUV ZMO GNNW QEB GUT M WMS, PEDN

QEB M TNXEPEUO MOW QN'XX IHMTDN HU WNMHQ ATMSEOP GUT M

GEIQ. MOUOSBUVI

[Answer on Page 14]

Atheism: a-the-ism [noun]

by James Zimmerman

I have been an atheist on two separate occasions in my life. Currently, of course, I am one. But several years back, I was an atheist for approximately thirty seconds.



On that occasion, when my conscious mind at last caught up with what I had been denying for years, I privately updated my belief structure from Christianity to atheism. But no sooner did I declare myself an atheist than I switched my self-designation to agnostic.

The reason?

Simple: the definition of the word; or, more accurately, my perception of the word. And that is, quite possibly, the biggest misconception people generally have of atheists.

The *New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (1989) defines atheism as "the denial of the existence of God, particularly with regards to theistic formulations." But perhaps the *Cynic's Dictionary* comes closer to the definition held by the majority when it defines atheism as "a godless religion that retains all the dogmatic posturing of the faiths it so confidently denies, with few of the consolations."

It was the general consensus that an atheist is so dogmatic, so hard-headed in their beliefs that led Thomas Huxley, in 1869, to coin the term 'agnostic.' For many who leave the religion of their childhood, the label 'agnostic' seems more favorable; more palatable.

But is this really true? Does the term 'atheist' imply someone who is inflexible in their beliefs about the supernatural, whereas an 'agnostic' is, though still going to hell, at least

open to the possibility of a god?

'Agnostic' literally means "without knowledge," that is, an agnostic either has not looked into the evidence for and against the existence of a god, or believes that not enough such evidence exists to make a decision. This has

led to the side effect of agnostics being viewed as ignorant, indecisive, or incapable/afraid of stating their beliefs.

The same Greek prefix in 'agnostic' (a-) also makes an appearance at the beginning of the word 'atheist.' Strictly speaking, then, an atheist is not, as many believe, opposed to the idea of a god (that would be an antitheist) but is, simply, "without god."

So if neither word labels someone as a person who rejects reason and evidence, what's the difference?

David Mills, in *Atheist Universe*, claims the difference between an agnostic and an atheist is guts. The two worldviews overlap, he says, but the latter is a more firmly held position. Douglas Adams even styled himself a radical atheist, to signal that he really meant it. He had thought about it a great deal, and it was an opinion he held seriously.

The atheists, then, have done their homework. They know that the "Something from Nothing" belief of the religious is flawed; that the "First Cause" argument begs the question. They understand that, while it is not possible to unequivocally disprove God, the burden of proof falls upon those who hold the affirmative position. Even if evidence was brought forward proving the existence of a supernatural entity, this still doesn't answer the question of which god. While Christians categorically reject

thousands of gods on the basis of lack of evidence, an atheist merely rejects one additional god. This is why the term 'agnostic' has come about: a coherent definition of 'god' must be put forward before the question of its existence can be meaningfully discussed. After all, even an atheist will admit there are *some* gods - each year, American Idol anoints a new one!

At one time, all humans were atheists, and everyone is born an atheist. It is only due to the introduction of religion, in civilization at large, and on an individual basis that the term has become a necessary identifier. In that way, 'atheist' is a retronym - like 'silent film,' 'bar soap,' and 'acoustic guitar' - it is a term that has been employed to a preexisting object to separate it from what was invented later. In the end, however, 'atheist' is a term, like 'youth' or 'white' or 'Christian,' that is self-applied and, though there is a vague consensus as to its meaning, means something different to each person who applies it.

So whether you consider yourself to be impartially agnostic, technically agnostic, a *de facto* atheist, or a strong atheist (four terms provided in *The God Delusion*), make sure your philosophical position is understood by those that inquire of it.

How about you? Yes, you, the reader? We'd like to get an idea of how our readers define the term 'atheist' and publish some of the responses in our next issue. Please email your personal definition, along with some facts about yourself (lifelong atheist? Retired? College student?), to the author of this article at: Zgoatee@Gmail.com. And bring your thoughts on the definition of "atheism" to our meeting at the Rosedale Library on September 21st (see page 1 for more information).

"Atheists Talk" Radio Report

By August Berkshire

In the past month we aired programs 29 to 32 of "Atheists Talk." Mike Haubrich was the host for all of these shows. Those programs were:

July 27 – "Evo-Devo: What do a mouse's paw and a bat's wing have in common?" with P.Z. Myers, interviewed by Lynn Fellman.

July 27 – Atheist blogger and ex-Mormon C.L. Hanson, interviewed by Bjorn Watland.

Aug. 3 – AM 980 KKMS Christian Talk Radio hosts Jeff Shell & Lee Michaels, interviewed by August Berkshire.

Aug. 10 – Secular Coalition for America director Lori Lipman Brown, interviewed by Scott Lohman.

Aug. 10 – Humanist philanthropist Louis Appignani, interviewed by Scott Lohman.

Aug. 17 – "Food, Cooking, and Human Evolution" with biologist

Greg Laden, interviewed by Lynn Fellman.

Aug. 17 – *Box Out* by local author John Coy, interviewed by Grant Steves.

We often go to Q.Cumbers restaurant after our broadcasts. After the July 27 program, P.Z. Myers and C.L. Hanson joined us. The gathering had been advertised by P.Z. on his science blog Pharyngula and 40 people showed up!

Minnesota Atheists continues to bring the atheist/humanist message to the Twin Cities airwaves. We are developing a loyal listenership, not only locally but internationally (via podcast) as well.

As we have indicated before, this is a very expensive project, costing us **\$18,200 annually**. However, we have seen an increase in membership and we believe the show has been well worth it. If you agree, won't you consider making a special

donation to help keep us going? You can send a check (with "Radio Fund" in the memo line) to Minnesota 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** (humanistsofmn.org), the **Secular Coalition for America** (secular.org), and **Q. Cumbers** restaurant in Edina (qcumbers.com). The organizations are excellent and the restaurant has great food!



Cable Report

By Steve Petersen

This past August, James Zimmerman interviewed Dr. Grant Steves on two programs regarding Islam. The first was Reformation in Islam: what is Islam, what are its main divisions and tenants? The second program focused on the Islamic holy book *The Koran*. Dr. Steves gave particular attention to the book's origin and accuracy in matters of science. He also discussed the variance in translations and the difficulty in obtaining an accurate reading in languages other than Arabic.

If you have ideas for a program please contact Grant 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 Stenbridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, George Kane and Grant Hermanson.

Podcasts: MinnesotaAtheists.org. Made possible by Grant Hermanson.

Cable schedule

Burnsville/Eagan Community Television: Channel 14. Check their web site www.bectv.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 and 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.

Across

4. Victorian era novelist whose last name is a substitute for "Devil."

6. Humanist who created a "wagon train to the stars."

8. Author who called religion "arbitrary, clearly invented balderdash."

10. U.S. President and Father of the Constitution.

11. *Auld Lang Syne* author, Robert _____.

13. Mr. Clemens, when not writing.

15. *The Dunciad* author, Alexander _____.

19. Antitheist *Missionary Position* writer.

22. Gave science fiction its *Foundation*.

23. Pulitzer Prize winning poet with a chilly last name.

24. The other half of Ono's *Double Fantasy*.

25. English poet who penned *Endymion*.

26. Dubbed God as "Big Brother."

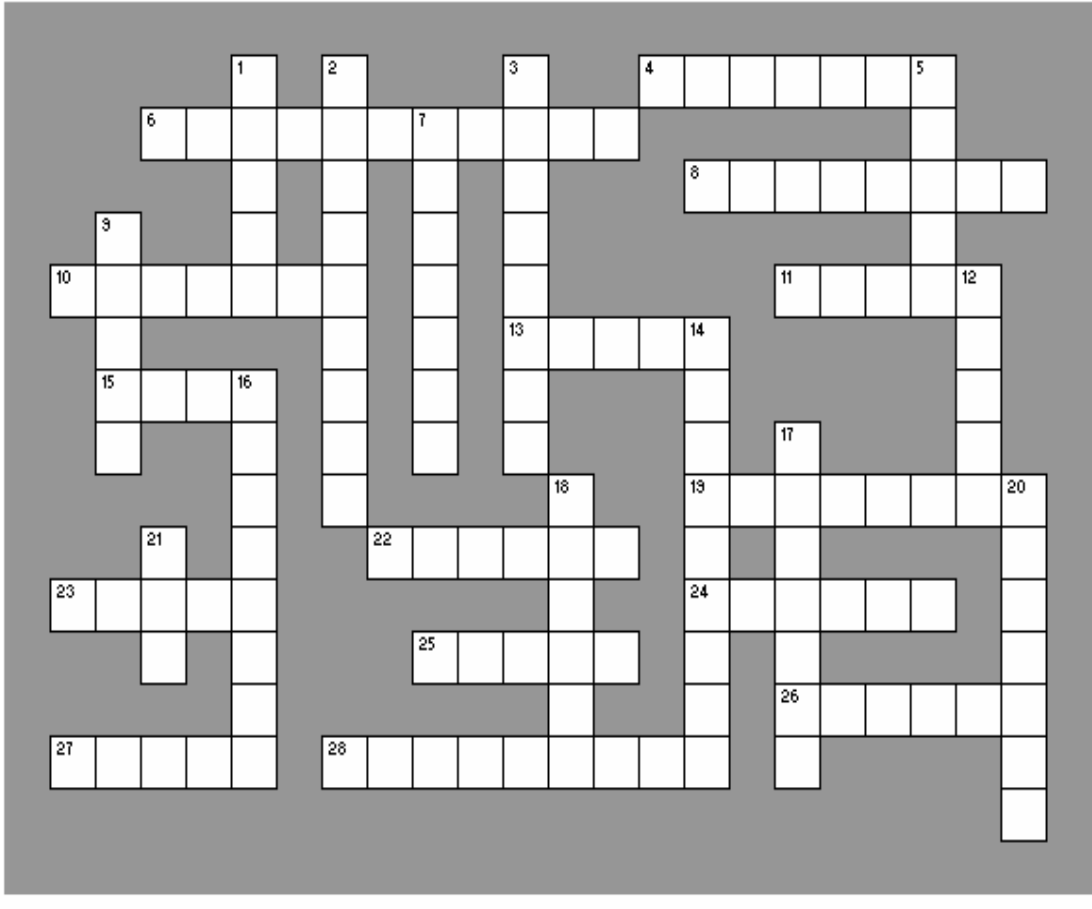
27. Film director with a penchant for New York.

28. Founding Father who called for separation of church and state.

[Answers on page 14]

Non-believers Crossword Puzzle

The men and women who form the answers to this puzzle either declared themselves atheists or distanced themselves from belief in a personal god. All answers are last names only.



Down

1. *Mostly Harmless* author who nixed God in favor of 42.

2. Author, World War I vet and polydactyl cat owner.

3. *Andromeda Strain* author.

5. Science popularizer who demanded extraordinary evidence.

7. *Seventh Seal* auteur.

9. Musician who warned against eating yellow snow.

12. Tolkas biographer and partner, Gertrude _____.

14. Hollywood star with three Acting Oscars on his shelf.

16. Scientist whose god didn't play dice.

17. Activist who penned *The Declaration of Sentiments*.

18. This actress is a *Brave One* in her atheist views.

20. Secular humanist and cartoonist who worked for *Peanuts*.

21. Nineteenth-century author of the macabre.

Review of *Me of Little Faith*

James Zimmerman

Me of Little Faith

Written by Lewis Black

Penguin Group

242 pages

Comedian Lewis Black takes on religion in his latest book, a follow-up to his 2006 works *Nothing's Sacred*. Black states his reason for authoring this book by saying on page 4, "I think [religion is] taken too seriously, and anything that takes itself too seriously is open to ridicule."

That being said, Lewis steers his way through matters of faith by offering surprisingly little ridicule. *Me of Little Faith* is uneven in its theme. It is occasionally witty, frequently sidetracked (Black spends two chapters lamenting airline delays), but never very funny.

In his more humorous moments, Black defines Judaism as "not merely a religion but a perfect neurosis." And on page 47, in a chapter about the Pope, Black says, "I am definitely in favor of a Pope God himself chooses. And while we're on the topic, I am not in favor of a president who thinks God chose *him*."

For the most part, though, Black is ambiguous about his faith and about faith in general. Readers will find themselves convinced that Black believes in a god in one chapter, then just as sure that he doesn't in the very next chapter. For example, after offering sarcastic comments on religion,

Black jumps into a chapter about his late brother Ron, sincerely claiming that he is now an archangel. Black insists that since his brother's death, career doors have inexplicably opened to him, explaining, "No doubt some would say that I was finally reaping the rewards for my works, or that things were naturally falling into place, or that it was just the luck of the draw. I say it was my brother, working in mysterious ways. It's like religion: You believe what you want to believe."

Black is funniest when targeting the obvious. He attacks astrology and Mormons. He pokes fun at the Christian who paid \$28,000 for an image of Jesus on a grilled cheese sandwich and devotes two chapters to televangelists (including one dedicated entirely to Jimmy Swaggart).

When it comes to traditional faiths, though, Black plays it safe. In the chapter on Islam (the shortest one in the book), he says, "Islam. All I'm saying is, I got nothing to say," and seems to think his readers will find this hilarious. It is, to say the least, a missed opportunity, especially coming from a man who claims God has a sense of humor.

The highlight of the book is "The God Lists," wherein Black delineates his reasons for and against belief. Most of the reasons he gives for believing are, ironically, of human invention, including:

- A perfect martini
- A hole in one
- An airplane taking off and landing on time
- An unexpected check
- To hedge my bets

While the reasons he doesn't believe in God are far more compelling. They include:

- E. Coli
- AIDS
- Hemorrhoids
- Anyone who tries to convert me
- Catheters
- The history of organized religion
- Nazis
- The fact that he doesn't reveal himself to me.

Despite his seeming non-belief in parts, Black gives little space to agnostics and atheists about whom he says "[they] feel that the lights go out and that's that. I don't see any comfort in that."

The penultimate chapter (the longest in the book) is a reproduction of a play Black wrote while in college. It's difficult to follow, not funny, and one suspects it was inserted into the book as a self-indulgent means to lengthen the manuscript to meet the publisher's requirements. Skip this chapter and, while you're at it, about half the book.

Astrological Prediction for September 2008

by The Safe Astrologer

During September of 2008 CE, a library somewhere will be inconveniently closed.

This will be a time of day that almost anyone would assume to be a

time of day that a library would be open to the public. Yes, on a certain day in September, a particular person will travel the entire distance from their apartment to a library only to find that the library will most assuredly have locked doors and no cars in the parking lot. And despite this person's attempt to find a source of light while peeking hopefully into various windows, there will only be light

coming in from other windows. There will also be no gracious employee willing to let this person in since this person knows exactly what they want and would only take a minute, three at max.

The victim will thus be forced, seemingly with guided malice, to pay retail for the item of interest at a chain bookstore.

Islam on the Offensive at the United Nations

by George Kane



George Kane

It's time to update the lead story from my News and Notes column in the April issue. The International Humanist Ethical Union (IHEU) continues to struggle in the Human Rights Council against the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). UN Human Rights Council president Doru Romulus Costea of Romania has ruled that no one may judge a religion in council proceedings. Criticism of Sharia law or fatwas is therefore prohibited, making it impossible to speak up in the Human Rights Council for victims of Islam's human rights abuses.

David Littman, representing the IHEU and the Association for World Education, presented a paper to the Council to address an agenda item on "Integrating the Human Rights of Women throughout the United Nations system." Contrary to protocol, the representative from Egypt obtained an advance copy from an interpreter and came prepared to silence Littman.

Littman spoke for only 22 seconds before the Egyptian representative stopped him on a point of order. At the first mention of female genital mutilation, Egypt objected that Littman was going to criticize Sharia and that it is not permissible for the Council to criticize religion. This claim was quite false, as Littman did not mention Sharia in the subject paragraph, but in true McCarthy fashion, the Egyptian representative brandished his copy of the text of Littman's presentation. Since the other members did not have copies, they could not object to refute him.

At one point in the discussion, he commented that "Islam will not be

crucified" in the council. April, the Human Rights Council adopted the *Resolution Combating Defamation of Religion* with a vote of 24 countries in favor, 14 against and 9 abstentions.

Christian symbol.

Littman was rarely able to deliver a full paragraph without interruption. He was stopped by 16 objections on points of order including a 40 minute delay while the president of the Council considered whether allowing Littman to continue should be brought to a vote.

In his ruling, President Costea said that the Council "is not prepared to discuss religious questions and we

In keeping with the Mecca decision, however, the OIC has decided to move the resolution to the General Assembly to make it binding on all UN members. The IHEU has submitted a paper strongly opposing the resolution on the grounds that it rescinds the individual human rights of freedom of expression and religion when they conflict with collective sensitivities. Individuals have rights, the IHEU asserts, but not religions.

Opposition to the *Resolution on Combating Defamation of Religion* is one issue on which atheists in the United States should be able to unite with our usual political rivals on the religious right.

Jay Sekulow, the Executive Director of Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), has recently devoted many of his daily radio programs to this resolution. He says that combating defamation of religion "sounds like a good thing," but he warns his audience that the resolution is only intended to protect Islam.

But, even though he is on the side of freedom of expression, Sekulow feels obliged to lie about the resolution. Over the course of several days he stated repeatedly that its purpose is "to make Christianity an international crime." His theory is that Christianity claims to be the only path to salvation, and so would be interpreted as defaming Islam. But in fact, he was unable to find any instances of this claim. If you go to the web site of the ACLJ, or its European adjunct the ECLJ, the examples they provide of charges of defamation against Islam are mostly secular, and none of them against Christians.

UN Human Rights Council president Doru Romulus Costea of Romania has ruled that no one may judge a religion in council proceedings.

don't have to do so." He added that "Declarations must avoid judgments or evaluation about religion.... I promise that next time a speaker judges a religion or a religious law or document, I will interrupt him and pass on to the next speaker."

The confrontation in the Human Rights Council is the result of a meeting in Mecca in 2006 where the OIC decided on a policy to tolerate no insult against Islam anywhere in the world. The Mecca meeting was followed immediately by the Cartoon Intifada.

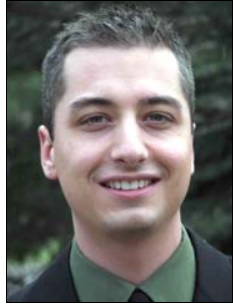
The next issue that the OIC has set before the United Nations was the renewal of the *Resolution on Combating Defamation of Religion*. It was introduced in 1999 to the old Commission on Human Rights as a *Resolution Against Defamation of Islam*. After text changes it was adopted as a non-binding resolution under its current title, condemning attempts to incite hatred of any religious group, and has been renewed each year since. In

Allah Meat Countered by Darwin Meat

by Keith Lodermeier

Recently in northern Nigeria, four pieces of meat were found at a diner in Birnin Kebbi with the words "Allah" inscribed in Arabic on them. Subsequently, hungry devotees flocked to the restaurant to witness the miracle gristle as well as to get a bite of presumably blessed food.

Shortly after the Allah meat was discovered and made international headlines, another culinary miracle occurred in the restaurant across the street. The words "Punctuated Equilibrium" mysteriously appeared on two large meatballs. However, few people were fooled by this obvious hoax and stated that it was merely a



Keith Lodermeier

calculated move of competition against the rival restaurant, which produces a dining atmosphere undoubtedly favored by Allah.

In an even greater display of supernatural eatery than the Allah meat, a restaurant down the block has, since the meat miracle, been advertising "Allah-flavored meat," and not just once but an every day guarantee of the god-tasting muscle.

"My meat is not just Allah's canvas for miracles as is the case with some lesser restaurants," said the owner, Odion Monmanyi. "Mine has been marinated in Allah and, to borrow from the similar Catholic tradition, has transubstantiated. But this is different from the Catholic

wafers because Allah has a far spicier taste, similar to Jerked meat. You can also get full on Allah but not on Jesus. A real god wouldn't want you to go hungry."

These statements have caused many Catholic churches in America to retaliate by releasing a line of ascetic cereal called "Holy Wheat Christ-os with Absolutely No Sugar." Each box contains exactly one marshmallow and a rosary prize.

"Now you can eat Jesus," said Theresa Riser the newly appointed Minister of Eucharist Foods, "every day before school or work as part of a complete breakfast."

Sister Riser is also working on a Eucharist pizza crust, which features a Jesus on the box with ancient Italian features such as a large black mustache and a plump figure.

Secular Ethics and the Bible

by Jeannette Sorensen

This year at Camp Quest, I was in charge of teaching ethics.

However, I was tired of presenting the same scenarios as in previous years, and I'm sure the kids were too. So I took a new approach. One of the main things I'm asked when I tell people I'm an atheist is "Where do you get your morals?" Atheists don't have the bible and the Ten Commandments to guide them in moral living. Telling a non-atheist that "morality is innate," though true, doesn't always sit well. You have to delve deeper.

I wanted to give the kids an intellectual arsenal. So I kept it simple. I stuck with two of the commandments. One of the commandments we discussed was "Thou shall not steal." I had the kids come up with as many



Jeannette Sorensen

people as possible that are harmed when someone steals. The point was to show kids that one action can effect many people.

Therefore, when you have a moral decision to make, think of not only how it will make you feel, but also consider the long-term effects.

The things they came up with were amazing. They talked about house-foreclosures. They talked about the effects of the economy (such as in the rise of prices at stores). They talked about how a store owner could go bankrupt and take it out physically on his family. Certainly they did not fully understand the economics. But I was very impressed by their awareness of other members of society.

I also found it necessary not to bible bash, because camp teaches respect for other cultures. This got me

thinking about the messages the bible holds. There's plenty of horrible stuff in the bible, but — and this is going to be atheist blasphemy — there's some good stuff too.

Over the summer I read a wonderful book by A.J. Jacobs, called *The Year of Living Biblically*. Jacobs, a secular Jew, decided to take the words of the bible literally. What struck me the most is that he found great benefits in observing some pretty obscure bible laws. Here are some of my favorites:

*No wearing clothes of mixed fibers: What good could possible come from this? Jacobs found that most clothes without mixed fibers were white, so he started wearing white. Wearing white made him feel more joyous in his everyday life.

(Continued on page 14)

Atheist Weddings!



(Above) Minnesota Atheists members Bjorn Watland and Jeannette Sorenson were married in a lovely ceremony in the Normandale Japanese Botanical Garden attended by many of their MNA friends. Former minister and Humanists of Minnesota member Paul Heffron officiated. The reception afterwards was at the Centennial Lakes Park.



(Left) On August 9th, 2008, longtime Minnesota Atheists member Norman Barrett and Katherine Wiik, daughter of 300 Club members John and Susan Wiik, were married in a secular ceremony at the Weyerhaeuser Chapel on the campus of Macalester College. The couple's new names are Katherine Barrett Wiik and Norman Barrett Wiik.

Review of *Box Out*

By Grant Steves

Box Out, written by John Coy, Scholastic, Inc.
304 pages

Do you have a young person in your life that is not very interested in reading, but enjoys sports? A solution might be the new book by John Coy, *Box Out*. As a Minnesotan, Coy captures the values of the Midwest, and the value of basketball to so many young people. The active style moves the novel along and holds readers' interest. Coy smoothly introduces three significant modern issues without preaching. He allows the reader to draw personal conclusions about the values presented.

The first issue is about Darius, an African-American, who has recently moved into this small town. The coach uses subtle racism to get Darius off the team. Where were his friends? Who would complain and support him in his efforts against the majority culture?

The second issue concerns Liam's confrontation with prayer by the coach and team, and the creation of a religious group that promotes a brand of Christianity. Liam is a Catholic and feels this practice of prayer in public schools is wrong constitutionally. Again, John does not preach, but he allows the issue to develop in the story in a natural and smoothly presented manner.

Where are Liam's friends when he protests? How do they support his position against praying?

The last issue that is developed is gender identification. It is smoothly introduced without exaggerating its part in the story or the lives of these young people.

For an atheist, it is the question of separation of church and state that encourages us to explore this book. How does an individual in adolescence stand up to the powers of school and community to challenge them on the issue of prayer before each game of basketball?

What should Liam do? How will the community, school officials, family, and classmates treat him? It is not easy to get teenagers to read or to stand against the tide of their majority culture. However, John Coy offers possible answers for both problems. *Box Out* is for all readers. It is a book that will lead young people to want to read and older readers to recall the pressures of being young.

October 25th Blood Drive

Due to the terrific success of the Memorial Center Blood Drive, we're at it again. On Saturday, October 25th, beginning at 10:00 a.m., and running until noon, we invite you to come donate blood.

You are eligible to donate if you've donated blood before, or if you're over 17 years old and weigh more than 110 lbs. If you are sixteen years old, you are also eligible as long as you're over 130 lbs and 5 feet tall. All donors must be in good health.

Contact us at giveback@mnatheists.org or call 613-708-5029 to leave a message with your name, phone number and address and whether you have donated blood before at Memorial Blood Centers. We will then contact you with additional information.

Last time was a blast. We'll be going out for free pizza afterward.

Camp Quest

by Bjorn Watland

"It's Beyond Belief" is the tag line for Camp Quest of Minnesota. Packed full of reality, fun, and friends, Camp Quest only appears surreal. Imagine going to a camp where you learn about thinking critically, have fun with science, and meet new friends who have no problem letting you sneeze without saying "God bless you!" It sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? Well, this camp exists, and not just in Minnesota, but around the United States and Canada. Next year, Camp Quest expands to the United Kingdom.

This year, campers enjoyed horseback riding, poking voodoo dolls, and making care packages for homeless teens at the Bridge Project, among many other fun camp activities. Thirty kids ranging from eight to fifteen years old had fun together making tie-dye shirts, candles, and performing skits for their parents.

Camp Quest would not be possible without generous donations from individuals and organizations such as the Humanists of Minnesota. Financial support is only part of what makes a great camp. A terrific staff of volunteer counselors led by Camp Director Jaime Sabel who took a break from her duties as President of the Iowa Secularists to manage Camp Quest of Minnesota. Five of our counselors were from Iowa and brought many skills to camp. A seasoned board led by Rick Rohrer helped market, fundraise, organize, and recruit for the most successful Camp Quest ever. If you are interested in finding out more about Camp Quest of Minnesota, would like to volunteer, or make a donation, please contact us at 952-903-0520 or visit our website at minnesota.camp-quest.org.

News & Notes

by George Kane

For two decades there have been suits by secularists demanding that the **Mt. Soledad Cross** in San Diego be removed from a city park. Each case has eventually ended in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled each time that the 43-foot cross violates the Establishment Clause and must be removed. Yet the litigation continues because the City of San Diego thwarted the last order by gifting the monument to the federal government.

Although the plaintiff has changed, the monumental cross is still owned by a government body. All of the arguments that have decided the case before are unchanged and so should guide the decisions by the lower courts. Yet U.S. District Judge Larry Alan Burns ruled that “[t]he actual purpose of the monument is... to inspire patriotism and recognize those who died while serving our country and to provide solace to the families of the veterans it memorializes.... Because the Court has found Congress’ articulation of its purpose was bona fide, and not a sham to disguise ulterior religious motives, the actual purpose of memorial continues to be secular as Congress intended.” In other words, the cross can stand because it is not a religious symbol!

The local ACLU has until the end of September to appeal the case. Presumably, if they get the case back to the Ninth Circuit Court, they will win again. But, now that the cross is a federal monument, the next president can have it removed by a simple executive order. But in light of the deference to religion by the leading candidates, there is no possibility that will happen.

Turkey has survived its constitutional crisis, at least for now. After



George Kane

the government approved a constitutional amendment to allow women to wear Muslim headscarves in state universities, the federal prosecutor filed charges against the ruling AK Party at the Constitutional Court. The charges claimed that the AK Party, which was born from the ashes of an Islamic party that had been dissolved by the Constitutional Court, was attempting to undermine the constitutionally guaranteed secularity of the nation. If the AK Party were convicted, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul would have been removed from office and barred from

Michelle Bachmann (R-Stillwater) told the right-wing news site OneNewsNow that environmentalists like Nancy Pelosi are misguided because Jesus already saved the planet.

joining another party, along with 70 members of the parliament.

The Court struck down the constitutional amendment to restore the ban on girls wearing headscarves in public universities. The constitutional crisis was resolved when only 6 of the 11 judges upheld the charges against the AKP. To remove the government and ban the AKP would have required a 7 to 4 majority. Turkey’s chief prosecutor, Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya, may file new charges at any time, however.

The poor Summum religious cult must feel that the whole world is against them. Amicus briefs from public interest groups on both the secular left and the religious right came flying in support of their opponents after the Supreme Court agreed to hear the appeal of the case *Pleasant Grove City, UT, et al. v. Summum*.

Pleasant Grove has a Ten Com-

mandments monument in a public park. The Supreme Court came out with a couple of inconclusive rulings last year concerning when such monuments violate the establishment clause, reaching conflicting verdicts in *Van Orden v. Perry*, and *McCreary County, Kentucky v. ACLU of Kentucky*. It is therefore unclear if the Pleasant Grove Ten Commandments monument could pass a constitutional test. Summum offered Pleasant Grove a monument inscribed with its “Seven Aphorisms,” the central beliefs of the Summum faith. When the city refused its gift, Summum sued, claiming that the city denied its right to freedom of speech by discriminating on the basis of the city’s religious preference.

When the Tenth Circuit Court ruled in favor of Summum, Pleasant Grove appealed to the Supreme Court. Usually, in First Amendment Cases, you will find Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Anti-Defamation League, and People for the American Way Foundation on one side, and the American Center for Law and Justice, the Rutherford Institute, and the American Catholic Lawyers Association on the other. Instead, all of these groups, and many more on the hard-core left and right, submitted amicus briefs in support of Pleasant Grove.

Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann (R-Stillwater) told the right-wing news site OneNewsNow that environmentalists like Nancy Pelosi are misguided because Jesus already saved the planet. The report quotes Bachman as saying “[Pelosi] is committed to her global warming fanaticism to the point where she has said that she’s just trying to save the planet.... We all know that someone did that over 2,000 years ago, they saved the planet—we didn’t need Nancy Pelosi to do that.”

(Continued from page 10)

*No plowing the corners of your field: it's believed that not plowing the corners of the field, was so that poor people passing by could eat what the farmers left.

*Not coveting: You can waste a lot of time being jealous and wanting things. Instead of looking at gadgets at the Sharper Image, get out and spend time with family and friends.

*Tithing: I don't think a lot of the board members of Minnesota Atheists would complain if we required our members to give 10% of their income. I don't know about anyone else, but I feel damn good when I give money to a charity.

*Proverbs 31:6 - "Bring wine to the depressed" I'd take some booze for depression instead of being prayed for any day.

*Observing the Sabbath: Not doing *anything* is silly, but is it really such a bad idea to give yourself some rest?

*Saying Grace: this can be a helpful tool to remind you to be grateful and not take things for granted.

*This one is my all time favorite scripture: Proverbs 5:18 and 19 - "Rejoice with the wife of your youth...may her breasts satisfy you always, and may you be captivated with her love". I don't think this one needs any explaining.

I liken the bible to a Martha Stewart Catalog. I'm no fan of Stewart, but if I pick up her magazine for whatever reason, and find a tasty cupcake recipe, I'll sure give the her some credit. I'm humble enough to do so (speaking of which, the bible teaches humility, and I personally find humble people easier to deal with than ones with inflated egos). The point of all of this is not to promote the bible. I'll be the last person to do that. Where you get your motivation from is not as important as what kind of life you end up living.

Answer to Cryptogram

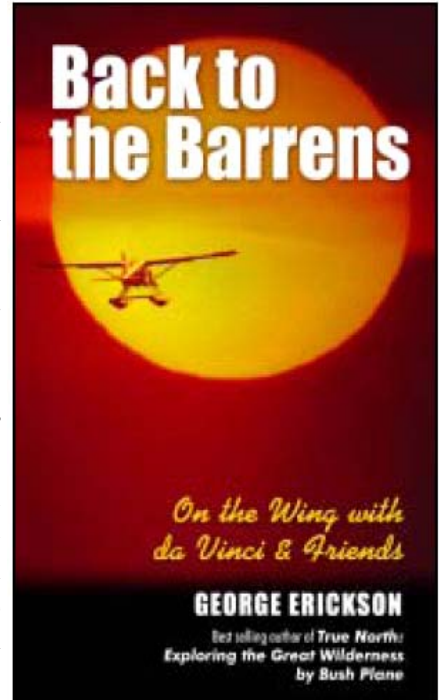
Give a man a fish and you can feed him for a day, give him a religion and he'll starve to death praying for a fish. — Anonymous

**BACK TO THE BARRENS:
On the Wing with da Vinci and Friends**

George Erickson

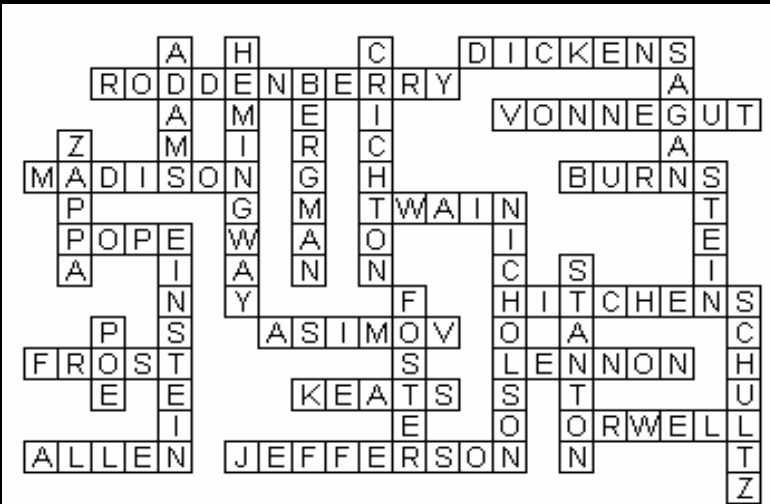
"a terrific book...." Clive Cussler
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George Erickson has spent the last thirty-eight summers traversing the northern provinces, Quebec, the Northwest and Yukon Territories and Alaska. In *Back to the Barrens*, he returns to the far north in search of new sights and stories to tell. Like Service and London, the giants who have captivated millions with tales told across a flickering campfire, he invites new readers to climb into the Tundra Cub II and fly off to a land where the northern lights shimmer, the rivers run cold, and cares slowly wither and die.



Profits from this book will be donated to Minnesota Atheists

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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

3rd Sunday, 1-3:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists monthly meeting**. (Beginning again in September.)

4th Sunday, 10 a.m. - noon, **Brunch Social**. Q. Cumbers, 7465 France Avenue South, Edina. Bring your AWE for a \$2 discount.

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

1st and 3rd 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.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 pm., **Happy Hour North**. La Casita, 1925 Perimeter Road, Roseville, just west of the Rosedale mall. George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

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

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

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

4th 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Minnesota Atheists

www.mnaatheists.org

P.O. Box 6261, Minneapolis MN 55406

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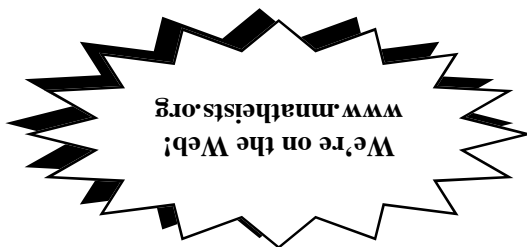
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**“There is no science in the Bible.
Zero. None.”**

Fr. George Coyne, retired head of the Vatican Observatory,
quoted in “Holy Alliance” by Michael Mason, Discover magazine, September 2008, p. 45.

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