

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action SM

Volume 19 Number 1

January 2009

Minnesota Atheists Joins Lawsuit to Stop Religious Activities at Presidential Inauguration

Minnesota Atheists has joined as a plaintiff to a lawsuit by Michael Newdow to halt the prayers and religious invocations scheduled for Barack Obama's presidential inaugu-

ration on January 20, 2009, as a violation of separation of state and church. PDF versions of the lawsuit and its four appendices can be found at Minnesota Atheists' website.

day, December 29, 2008 in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia by attorney Robert Ritter on behalf of attorney Michael Newdow. Besides Minnesota Atheists, other plaintiff groups in the lawsuit include the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), and Atheist Alliance International (AAI).

The lawsuit contains names of both groups and individuals as plaintiffs. In addition to the group Min-

(Continued on page 4)



According to the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC), Dr. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church is scheduled to give an invocation and the Reverend Dr. Joseph E. Lowery is scheduled to give a benediction at the upcoming presidential inauguration.

The lawsuit was filed on Mon-

January Meeting: Dan Barker!

Our January 18th meeting will feature Dan Barker, Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) who will discuss and sell his new book *Godless*, which describes his trip from being an evangelical preacher to being one of the leading atheist activists in the country.

In addition to always being an entertaining speaker, Dan is a talented musician and songwriter. You won't want to miss meeting him.

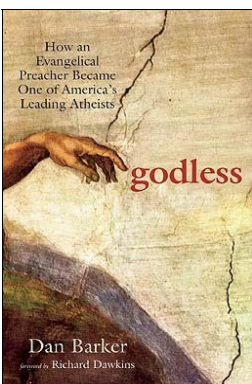


Left: Dan Barker

Always provocative, the FFRF sent a billboard truck to prowling the streets of St. Paul during the Republican National Convention with the message "Keep Religion out of Politics," and has

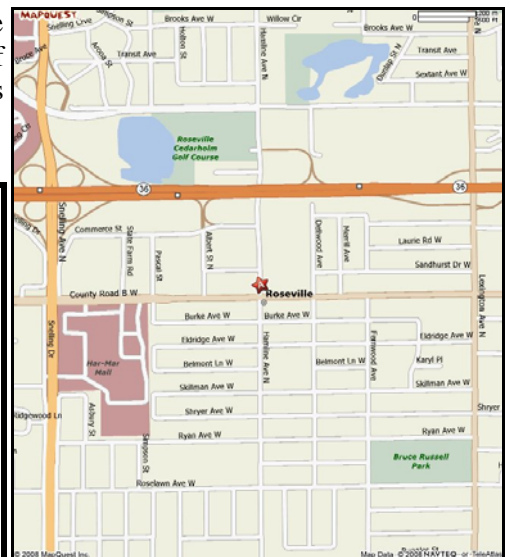
been active in church-state lawsuits and posting atheist messages on billboards.

We will also be accepting nominations at the meeting for board members and officers of Minnesota Atheists for the election in February. See page 5 for further details.



MNA Meeting on Sunday January 18, 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. – Dan Barker program
- 3:00-3:30 p.m. – Social Time.
- 4:00 p.m. -- Panda Garden Buffet



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Building Fund:
\$111,862.40

Honorary Members

Dan Barker
Gerald Erickson, PhD
Annie Laurie Gaylor
Dick Hewetson
Robert M. Price, PhD

MNA Meetup members: 351
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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Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnatheists.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.

President's Column by August Berkshire



The big news this past month is that Minnesota Atheists was asked by Michael Newdow to join his lawsuit, "**Newdow v. Roberts,**" to stop government-sponsored religious activities at Barack Obama's presidential inauguration on January 20. (See page 1.) This came about because I had heard through national atheist sources that he was going to file a case and I contacted him to be on our radio show on January 4. He agreed, and asked if we would like to be added as plaintiffs to the lawsuit. After a quick consultation of our board of directors, we added our name. Newdow also asked me if I would like to join as an individual plaintiff, as president of Minnesota Atheists, and I was happy to do so.

Our January meeting 18 will feature Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) co-president **Dan Barker** talking about and selling and signing his new book *Godless*. (See page 1.) Both Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, the other FFRF co-president, have been extremely generous with their time and talents towards Minnesota free-thought groups.

Minnesota Atheists was **in the news** a lot this past month. You will see the articles reprinted elsewhere in this newsletter.

We have renewed our contract for our radio program, "**Atheists Talk,**" for another six months at a reduced rate. (See page 16.) This will give us time to set up a live podcast program, which may eventually take the place of paying for time on KTNF radio. Speaking of our radio program, I have turned over directorial duties to Mike Haubrich. I always feel great when I can lead a worth-

New Projects and New Leaders

while project, do my best for a while, then turn it over to someone else of equal or greater talent. It is a tribute to Minnesota

Atheists that we have been able to attract such a great number of people willing to make contributions to our group.

Our December **Winter Solstice Party**, a joint project with the Humanists of Minnesota, was a huge success. After slow initial sales, we ended up with 80 people. There will be a complete report with photos in our February newsletter.

In December we did an experiment and issued an **electronic news-**

libraries in four months. One way to look at this is that we are spreading the wealth of atheism to the four corners of the Twin Cities. Another way to look at it is that we really need a building of our own.

Speaking of a building of our own, our **Building Committee** is checking out a former restaurant in Richfield as a possibility. If we make a bid, it will be considerably less than the asking price. We could use more money for both the purchase and the maintenance of a building. Please make a donation to our Building Fund if you can. Even better, become a monthly donor of \$10 or more. Every little bit helps.

Finally, at our January 18 meeting we have **nominations for our annual February elections**. (See page 5.) I am proud to have been the Minnesota Atheists president this past year. However, my new duties as vice president of Atheist Alliance International

mean that it is time for me to pass the baton of the Minnesota Atheists leadership to the next generation. Accordingly, I look forward to nominating Bjorn Watland as the next president of Minnesota Atheists. If elected, he will be the only leader under 30 of a freethought group in Minnesota (excluding student groups). He will also head the state's largest and most active group. It is no coincidence that these two facts go hand in hand. But running Minnesota Atheists takes all of us working together. If you are interested in serving on our board of directors and would like more information, please contact one of the current officers listed on page 2.

And, oh yes – Happy New Year everybody!

It is a tribute to Minnesota Atheists that we have been able to attract such a great number of people willing to make contributions to our group.

letter. To be honest, as an old fogy, I had my doubts about the project, but I must say Bjorn Watland did a superb job. He also issued an electronic press release about the "Newdow v. Roberts" lawsuit. Again, someone new has stepped forward with fresh ideas, talent, and energy, to take Minnesota Atheists to the next level.

Our **January 18 meeting** will be the last one we will hold at **Roseville Library** for a while since they will be shutting down for remodeling. Our **February 15 meeting** will be at the **Rondo Library** (University & Dale in St. Paul), our **March 15 meeting** will be at **Southdale Library** in Edina, and our **April 19 meeting** will be at the **Ridgedale Library** in Minnetonka. That's four

(Continued from page 1)

Minnesota Atheists, August Berkshire, president of Minnesota Atheists and vice president of Atheist Alliance International, is listed as an individual plaintiff.

Michael Newdow achieved prominence in 2004 when he argued before the U.S. Supreme Court that public schools should not lead children in the "Pledge of Allegiance" because it contains the words "under God." Minnesota Atheists signed on to a friend of the court brief in that case.

Minnesota Atheists was the only group to



Dr. Michael Newdow

testify at the Minnesota State Capitol against legislation mandating the recitation of the "Pledge of Allegiance" in Minnesota public schools. (Feb. 13, 2003.) Minnesota Atheists did this because the Pledge contains the phrase "under God." While the legislation ended up passing, the final bill contained greater protections for the rights of dissenters than the original bill, probably due to Minnesota Atheists' testimony.

Michael Newdow is scheduled to be interviewed live on Minnesota Atheists' "Atheists Talk" radio program on Sunday,

January 4, 2009, 9:00-10:00 a.m. on KTNF AM 950 radio "The Voice of Minnesota." It can be streamed live at: <http://www.am950ktnf.com/listen> and will be available later at <http://mnatheists.org>.

"Minnesota Atheists was pleased to accept a personal invitation from Michael Newdow to be a plaintiff in this lawsuit," stated August Berkshire, president of Minnesota Atheists. "The swearing in of a president is a secular event. The oath of office is in the U.S. Constitution and it contains no religious references. It is unfortunate that while Barack Obama campaigned on a theme of unity, the very act of becoming president will serve to divide Americans along religious lines."

The 300 Club

The 300 Club was established by Minnesota Atheists at the suggestion of member Rode Monroe. The goal is to get 300 people to pledge \$1,000 each over a four-year period (an amount that averages \$5 per week per donor) to raise a total of \$300,000 for the Building Fund.

The following people have joined the 300 Club so far. We will continue to publish this list as it grows. Numbers in parenthesis indicate multiples of \$1,000. When at least \$1,000 of the pledge has been paid, the person's name will be highlighted in bold. We have recently changed who tracks this information, if we missed your name, or do not have your information correct please contact Steve Peterson. To date we have \$64,000.00 in pledges and we have received \$40,333.38.

To join the 300 Club, contact, Steve Petersen, at (651) 484-9277 or chair@mnatheists.org.

Kathy Alme
Robin Anderson

Anonymous
August Berkshire (2)
Charles Boltuck
Dean Borghorst
Jack Caravela
Dan Carnicom
Richard & LaGretta Dean
Tom Dooley
Cynthia Egli
Norman Ehrentreich
Erik Englebretson
Andy Flamm
Eric Frame
Dorothy French
Kevin Hardisty
Kristine Harley
Guy Harper
Mike Haubrich
Bruce Honnigford
Laura Hutt
Geri Jensen
Ron Julien
George Kane
Brian Knoblock (3)
James Koran
Jerrold and Joyce Larson
June Haiyan Li
Otto and Jeanette Link
Christopher Matthews
Vanita Mishra
Shirley Moll

Rod Monroe
Bob Muldoon
Ted Nagel
Bob and Marilyn Nienkerk
Bill Paulson
Steve Petersen
Jerry Rauser
Matthew Richardson (3)
Tom Riddering
Lee Salisbury
Paul Schenck (4)
Bob Schmitz
Alvin Shimek
Jon Strand
Bill Talmage
Georgia Tsoi
Bjorn Watland
Brett Welch
Jim Whitney
Susan & John Wiik
Rachael Wilson
Fern & Bob Wodtke
Jeff Wolfe
Vern Young
[Your name here!]

Total pledged so far: \$62,000

Total pledges fully paid so far: \$18,000

Minnesota Atheists Nominations & Elections

Nominations for the Minnesota Atheists board of directors will occur at the **January 18, 2009** meeting at the Roseville Library, and elections will be held at our **February 15, 2009** meeting. Nominations will open and close at the January 18 meeting. We will publish and mail candidates' statements prior to the February 15 meeting elections.

There are nine positions to fill, elected in the following order: President, Associate President, Chair, Associate Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors-at-Large. Our bylaws provide that anyone who runs for one position and loses may run again for any other position that has not yet been elected.

Some incumbents will be running for reelection, but there will also be some vacant seats. All terms are for one year. Now is your chance to step forward and help guide Minnesota Atheists!

Candidates for all but the three Director-at-Large positions must have been members of Minnesota Atheists for at least one year as of the time they assume office on March 1, 2009. Candidates for the three Director-at-

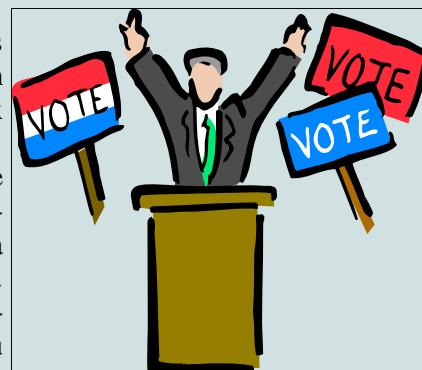
Large positions must have been members for six months.

You must be nominated by another Minnesota Atheists member. You cannot nominate yourself. You need not be present

to be nominated. (If you wish to nominate someone not at the January 18 meeting, please check beforehand to make sure that person is willing to serve if elected.)

Nominees should send candidate's statements (up to 150 words) to the MNA newsletter editors (editor@mnatheists.org) by January 24, 2009. We would also like to have a JPEG headshot of each candidate.

For more information, contact August Berkshire at (612) 588-7031 or pres@mnatheists.org.



Financial reports

Building Fund:	\$3,204.24	James Bodsberg	\$10.00	Jeff Simon	\$13.34
LaGretta Dean	\$250.00	Rick Calissi	\$25.00	Tom Stavros	\$10.00
Norman Ehrentreich	\$250.00	Annie Chase	\$50.00	Martin Steitz	\$25.00
Erik Englebretson	\$100.00	Jennifer Cottrell	\$20.00	Grant Steves	\$13.34
Sue Halligan	\$65.00	LaGretta Dean	\$250.00	Paul Tetreault	\$36.68
Guy Harper	\$150.00	Crystal Dervetski	\$30.00	Richard Trombley	\$20.00
Mike Haubrich	\$90.00	Matthew Dittloff	\$75.00	Vic Tanner	\$50.00
Brian Knoblock	\$114.24	Todd Erickson	\$50.00	James Whitney	\$50.00
Jeanette & Otto Link	\$1,000.00	Dan Feyma	\$20.00	Rachel Wilson	\$100.00
Christopher Matthews	\$150.00	Carl Hamm	\$13.34	Vern Young	\$50.00
Steve Petersen & Shirley Moll	\$50.00	Kevin Hardisty	\$30.00	Anonymous	\$36.00
Cathy Prody	\$400.00	Mike Haubrich	\$20.00	Visibility (General) Fund: \$412.00	
Matthew Richardson	\$100.00	Paul Heffron	\$20.00	Linville Doan	\$15.00
Bob Schmitz	\$100.00	Mark Hougen	\$25.00	Norman Ehrentreich	\$15.00
Michael Seliga	\$20.00	Max Joiner	\$5.00	Gary Fischler	\$50.00
James Whitney	\$75.00	Robert Muldoon	\$68.34	James Koran	\$25.00
Vern Young	\$150.00	Paul Nelson	\$50.00	Brian Petersen	\$150.00
Anonymous	\$140.00	Steve Petersen	\$136.68	Steve Petersen & Shirley Moll	\$45.00
Radio Fund:	\$3,059.06	Jerry Rauser	\$20.00	Gordon Schleicher	\$75.00
Greg Anderson	\$25.00	Ioannis Roussos	\$10.34	Scott Siesennop	\$12.00
Jim Barri	\$25.00	Lois Schadewald	\$25.00	Leonard Sojka	\$15.00
August Berkshire	\$1,526.00	Bob Schmitz	\$30.00	Vern Young	\$10.00
		Art Scearcy	\$75.00		
		Michael Seliga	\$20.00		

Freethought Cryptogram

Efwu gwy nj woobjujc etufipu jqtcjygj gwy wsoi nj ctoktoojc etufipu
jqtcjygj.

Gfbtoui hfjb Ftugfjyo

Answer on page 18.

Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

We produced four programs in the past two months. In November, James Zimmerman interviewed Grant Steves in two programs titled "Inerrancy: The Christian Text and Christian Fundamentalism Why?" In December, Grant Steves conducted two interviews titled, "Lynn Fellman as Artist and Lynn Fellman as DNA Artist." If you would like to help on the cable program or sponsor the program on your city or have ideas for a future program please contact me at chair@mnaatheists.org.

Cable Crew: Art Anderson, Brett Stenbridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, George Kane, Todd Erickson, Lynn Fellman and Grant Hermanson,.

Podcasts: MinnesotaAtheists.org. 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 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. and 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.



Above: Grant Steves interviews artist Lynn Fellman for the December show.

Below: James Zimmerman (right) interviews Grant Steves for the November show.





The latest 5th Sunday Spaghetti Dinner was held on November 30. We raised \$661.10 for the MNA radio fund. Thanks to George Kane, Steve Petersen, and Ron Julien for working so hard behind the counter preparing great food!

Left: Ron Julien (rear) and George Kane prepare dinner for 60 hungry atheists.

Photos by Steve Petersen

Challenging the Deepest Beliefs: Minnesota Atheists President Encourages Discussion Between Those with Different Views

by Nia Jonesz

Published in the Reporter, the student newspaper at Minnesota State University, Mankato, on December 2, 2008. <http://tinyurl.com/msu120208>

August Berkshire, president of the Minnesota Atheists, will present “The Top 12 Excuses Religious People Give for the Horrible Behavior of their God” at 7 p.m. Wednesday in Centennial Student Union 284 at Minnesota State.

The event is hosted by Campus Atheists and Agnostics. According to organization member Trista Ayers, the presentation is designed for non-religious individuals and religious individuals to open discussion on important topics.

“People are more than welcome to bring their own ideas,” Ayers said.

Many of the members of Campus Atheists and Agnostics know Berkshire on a personal level. He played a big role in getting the MSU Atheists

and Agnostics chapter off the ground, people talking and thinking.” Ayers said.

Berkshire gave a presentation on campus last fall about the “unconvincing” arguments for God’s existence. He will tackle another controversial topic Wednesday by challenging the reasons religious individuals give for why bad things happen to good people. After Berkshire’s presentation on the topic, those in attendance are encouraged to ask questions and voice their personal opinions.

“I think it’s something that does piqué a lot of people’s interest,” Ayers said. “You just have to be willing to challenge your beliefs.”

No matter what individuals’ beliefs are, Ayers said, Berkshire’s presentation will force people to re-examine those beliefs and why they hold them. She added that everyone is welcome at the event.

“We’re not all evil people,” Ayers said of atheists and agnostics. “We aren’t going to try to convert anyone or anything. The goal of this is to get

Berkshire is known for his affinity to start interesting, and not always popular, conversations. On his Web page, augustberkshire.com, he blogs about the 5 C’s of atheism.

“Yes, atheism is a conservative position,” Berkshire wrote. “We accept statements only so far as there is reason and/or evidence to back them up. Anything else is speculation.”

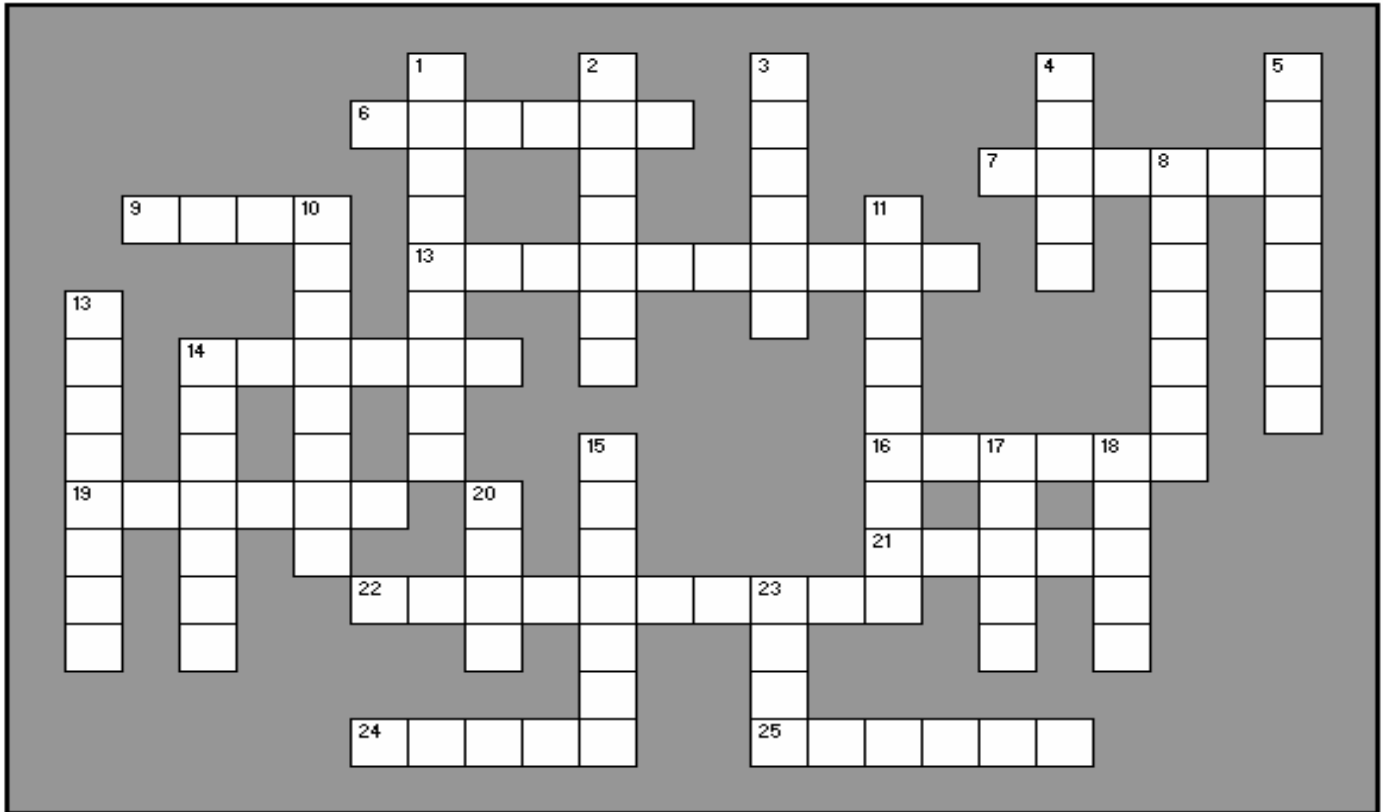
He goes on to discuss the clarity, consistency, contradiction-free, courageous lifestyle he attributes to atheism.

Though the majority of Berkshire’s postings are adamantly atheist, he is not afraid or unwilling to engage in civil discussions with those holding views opposite his own. The Web page also contains recording of his recent appearance on *KKMS Live with Jeff and Lee*, a Minneapolis/St. Paul Christian talk radio show.

Nia Jonesz is the Reporter news editor.

Past, Present, and Future United States Presidents Crossword Puzzle

The men whose last names make up the answers to this puzzle have all been called to serve as Commander-in-Chief. Match the quote to its speaker. Some last names occur more than once. Not all quotes were said during the speaker's Presidency.



Across

6. What the world needs today is a definite, spiritual mobilization of the nations who believe in God against the tide of Red agnosticism. ...And in rejecting an atheistic other world, I am confident that the Almighty God will be with us. (In a 1950 radio address)

7. I congratulate you, my fellow-citizens, upon the high state of prosperity to which the goodness of Divine Providence has conducted our common country. Let us invoke a continuance of the same protecting care. (During inaugural address)

9. I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. (In an interview by R.I.Sherman)

13. In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in

America's heritage and future. (Spoken while signing bill authorizing addition of the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance)

14. It's contrary to my beliefs to try to exalt Christianity as having some sort of preferential status in the United States. That violates the Constitution. I'm not in favor of mandatory prayer in school or of using public funds to finance religious education. (As quoted in a 1998 issue of *Christianity Today*)

16. Freedom prospers when religion is vibrant and the rule of law under God is acknowledged. (During a speech before the National Association of Evangelicals in Miami)

19. I enter on the trust to which I have been called by the suffrages of my fellow-citizens with my fervent prayers to the Almighty that He will be gra-

ciously pleased to continue to us that protection which He has already so conspicuously displayed in our favor. (During inaugural address)

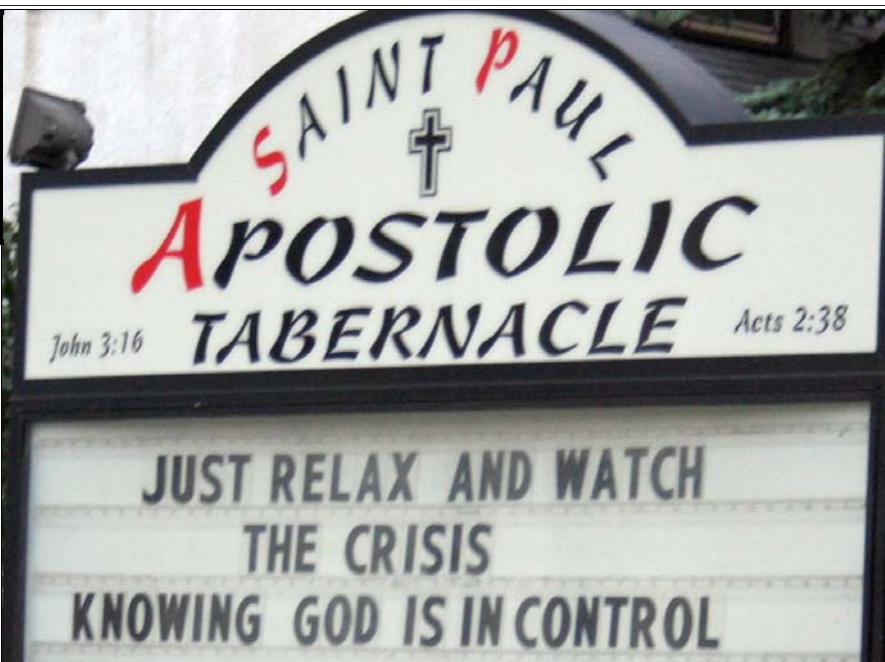
21. Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation - at least, not just. We are also a Jewish nation and a Muslim nation and a Buddhist nation and a Hindu nation and a nation of non-believers. (During Key-note address at a "Call to Renewal" conference sponsored by *Sojourners* magazine)

22. Religious controversies are always productive of more acrimony and irreconcilable hatreds than those which spring from any other cause. (In a letter to Sir Edward Newenham)

24. The Jews are irreligious, atheistic, immoral bunch of bastards. (Spoken to White House Chief of Staff Bob

(Continued on page 9)

Right: This picture, taken on Lexington Avenue near Highway 94, epitomizes what's wrong with Christianity: The belief that everyone should just sit back and do nothing while waiting for God to fix all the problems we created.



(Continued from page 8)

Haldeman)

25. Religious and racial persecution is moronic at all times, perhaps the most idiotic of human stupidities. (As recorded in his private writings collection *Where the Buck Stops*)

Down

1. To discriminate against a thoroughly upright citizen because he belongs to some particular church, or because, like Abraham Lincoln, he has not avowed his

allegiance to any church, is an outrage against that liberty of conscience which is one of the foundations of American life. (In a 1908 letter to J. C. Martin)

2. We do not want an official state church. If ninety-nine percent of the population were Catholics, I would still be opposed to it. I do not want civil power combined with religious power. I want to make it clear that I am committed as a matter of deep personal conviction to separation. (During an interview on *Face the Nation*)

3. Never for a moment have I had one doubt about my religious beliefs. There are people who believe only so far as they understand - that seems to me presumptuous and sets their understanding as the standard of the universe. I am sorry for such people. (In a letter to Nancy Toy)

4. Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private schools, supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the Church and the State forever Separate. (In an 1875 speech in Des Moines)

5. The divorce between Church and State ought to be absolute. It ought to be so absolute that no Church property anywhere, in any state, or in the nation, should be exempt from equal taxation; for if you exempt the property of any church organization, to that extent you impose a tax upon the whole community. (During an 1874 speech as a member of Congress)

8. My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the scriptures have become clearer and stronger with advancing years, and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them. (In a letter to Judge J.S. Wakefield, after the death of his son)

10. We Americans have no commission from God to police the world. (Addressing Congress while President)

11. I am for freedom of religion, & against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another. (In a letter to Elbridge Gerry)

13. In my view church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled. (Addressing a crowd during the 1856 presidential election)

14. We have to find a way to define the future in terms of a humanity that goes beyond our country, that goes beyond any particular race, that goes beyond any particular religion. (During a 2004 lecture at the University of Kansas)

15. Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect. (In a letter to William Bradford, Jr.)

17. Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth? That it laid the corner stone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity? (During an oration on Independence Day)

18. The question before the human race is, whether the God of nature shall govern the world by his own laws, or whether priests and kings shall rule it by fictitious miracles? (In a letter to Thomas Jefferson)

20. I feel like God wants me to run for President. I can't explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me. Something is going to happen... I know it won't be easy on me or my family, but God wants me to do it. (In a discussion with evangelist James Robinson)

23. I do not believe in the divinity of Christ, and there are many postulates of the orthodox creed to which I cannot subscribe. (In an 1899 letter to Yale University)

Answers on page 18.

The Sunny Skeptic**Crystal Dervetski****Atheist Dating and Relating:**

Staying Safe and How to Meet the Old-Fashioned Way

Last month, we talked about where atheists can meet people online, which is one of the easiest ways to meet people. That leads us into the safety concerns for meeting someone, and other places to meet people who share your beliefs.

When meeting someone online, first, assess their profile. Does it seem legitimate? If you can, have a trusted friend take a look at it. This is another advantage of meeting people online: it's quite easy to email that profile to a second party!

Email or text message the person for a period of time. Become comfortable with who they are in writing, and their personal style. You can learn a lot from how a person writes, both formally and informally. Ask some questions, and get to know them over the net.

When you decide to meet in person, make sure it's in a place where you both feel comfortable. Always meet in public the first time. Do not tell someone where you live or have them pick you up! Meet at the designated location and arrange for your own transportation. If alcohol is going to be involved, keep track of your drinking - do not drink too much. Not only could this make you unsafe, but it may not be a great first impression for your date!

If you decide to go for another date, continue to meet in public (both arranging your own way to get there) until you feel comfortable with that person. Most of all, you should try to relax at least a bit and not be too afraid of all of the internet meeting

horror stories you've heard. Meeting someone on the internet can, many times, give you more information about that person than meeting them in other, more conventional ways.

Remember, whether you've met on the web or in person, if you are ever uncomfortable at any point in your interactions with someone else, make sure to discontinue those interactions! It is very important to follow your instincts and intuition with other people in any setting. Do not set yourself up for anything that makes you feel uneasy or may be dangerous.

Maybe you're not ready for the internet spin on dating or meeting friends? Where atheists meet people outside of the internet is not really different than where anyone else would go to meet people. If you are specifically looking to find another atheist (whether as a pal or to share your life with), you will have to tweak your methods a bit. Join organizations that coincide with your beliefs, especially local organizations, which offer more opportunities to meet those in your area. Think of local groups, such as Minnesota Atheists, that cater to your point of view and allow you to meet people in the area. Minnesota Atheists has two Meet Up groups, and other local organizations have their own as well!

If you're finding there are not many, or any, local groups for people that you would like to meet, for friends or dating, think of starting one! Yes, it will take some work, but it will surely get you out and meeting people and will be a sure-fire way for others to take notice of you.

Volunteer for social causes that you believe in outside of your atheistic beliefs, such as politics and phil-

anthropic work. You will meet people that at least share your politics and ideals, and hopefully from there, also share your atheist perspective. You can also feel good about the work you do in these organizations aside from the personal benefits they may bring.

When you go to the bookstore, find the atheist book section and take a look. Is there anyone there that looks like someone you'd like to get to know better? Maybe you'll be able to strike up a conversation, and at the very least, recommend a good book to someone who is thinking about atheism.

Above all, keep yourself open and available. No one ever met a friend or date by sitting alone in their house doing nothing.

Have more dating and relating issues? Have issues with this topic? What's important to you in a relationship? To read a personal volunteer story or to comment on this article, go to the online forum at mnatheists.org.



Comments from the whip Review of *Misquoting Jesus* Grant Steves

Misquoting Jesus
by Dr. Bart Ehrman
Harper Collins Publishers, 2005



by Grant Steves

Why be even remotely concerned or interested in the debate over the inerrancy of the Bible? Because approximately forty million or more people in this country do believe the inerrancy of the Bible and about two hundred million more people believe the Bible to be the Word of God. Atheists may have written the Bible off as fiction, but others have not. Our continued interest in the debate over the Bible, Koran, and other religious books is about being informed by the most recent and accurate evidence on these issues.

Misquoting Jesus is a more recent effort to examine the text of the New Testament. In a more complex and scholarly work in, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (1993), Dr. Ehrman set down his argument about the New Testament text with more complete footnotes and comments. This gives a reader a choice in matters of complexity of materials.

Misquoting Jesus has a popular style of writing, and as a result it became a best seller. It is easy to see why this became a best seller. It is easy to see why this became a best seller from the introduction to the concluding depth. Dr. Ehrman's introduction describes his journey of faith in scripture to a skeptic of the scripture and an agnostic.

Dr. Ehrman is a highly qualified New Testament scholar. He has studied with the very best scholars in the field of New Testament scholarship. The result has been an increasingly skeptical position on the authenticity

of the text. In the seven chapters of his book, he examines issues of: 1) the question of the beginning of the Christian Scriptures; 2) the role of copyists in the transmission of scripture; 3) the various editions, manuscripts, and differences; 4) the origins of the texts; 5) the importance of the originals; 6) how theology determines test; and 7) how the social world influenced the text.

Judaism and Christianity are religions of the book. They depend on the literacy of its members. The need for a literate few is necessary to read and copy the texts. The written word should assure us of having a reliable text. However, the politics of theology may influence the copyists and the interpretation. The New Testament had its inception as an oral tradition. We have no personally written documents from Jesus. What we have are written copies from individuals who recorded what they heard while listening to the experiences of people who knew Jesus. A reliance on others to tell your story reduces the possible accuracy, and we must rely on still others to copy the original. Dr. Ehrman estimates over 400,000 problems in the 170,000 words that comprise the text of the New Testament.

A pagan, Celsus, writes of the Christian copyists: "Some believers, as though from a drinking bout, go so far as to oppose themselves and alter the original text of the gospel three or four or several times over, and they change its character to enable them to deny difficulties in face of criticism." (p.52, *Misquoting Jesus*) Celsus clearly exposed a weakness of the

early Christian writings. This was an acknowledgment of different renderings and copyists' errors. In one example, the Johnine Comma, a scribe inserts these words, "There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one..." (1 John 5:7-9). Without this verse you still can assume the Trinity, however, this states it simply. You are reminded that the Trinity was one of the concepts being discussed about the nature of God. Altering this verse helps to tip the scale.

The story of the adulteress (John 8:1-11) has been applied as a standard of forgiveness; however, it is now identified as not part of the Gospel. The above errors influence the creditability of inerrancy. It is difficult to argue that the Bible is the perfect Word of God. At best a person could argue that the humans who wrote the Bible were sincere.

However, the idolization of the Bible by some religious is unwarranted. The Bible as idol is a false idol. If they argued that the book has interesting historical myths and stories, it would not matter if there were errors. When a religion looks to a book that has numerous errors in it, we must conclude that both the book and the religion are wrong. For someone to argue that 400,000 errors are not important is to fail to accept the reality of an errant text. These contradictions and errors leave us with a document that has been used to manipulate and fool those who desire to believe and find certitude.

News & Notes

by George Kane

Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) won an important skirmish against South Carolina promoting religion on license plates. Last month, the legislature authorized issuing "I Believe" auto license plates for a fee, embellished with a Christian cross and the image of a stained glass window. AU initiated the suit *Summers v. Adams* on behalf of three Protestant ministers and a Rabbi who are South Carolina residents, as well as the Hindu-American Foundation and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. The state filed a motion to dismiss the suit, but U.S. District Court Judge Cameron Currie ruled that the suit should proceed to trial. The judge issued a temporary injunction restraining the state Department of Corrections from producing and the state Department of Motor Vehicles from distributing the plates until the suit is decided.

In Kentucky, American Atheists Inc. has joined forces with the American Civil Liberties Union and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in a suit filed on behalf of nine state residents to oppose religious clauses in the law that created the state's Department of Homeland Security. The clauses, included in an amendment authored by state Rep. Tom Riner, (D-Louisville), received little notice when the bill was originally passed.

The first clause requires that a permanent plaque stating that the "safety and security of the Commonwealth cannot be achieved apart from reliance upon Almighty God" be posted at the state's Emergency Operations Center. The other clause requires the Executive Director of Homeland Security to publicize "the dependence on Almighty God as being vital to the

security of the Commonwealth."

In order to establish standing to file suit, the plaintiffs must show that they have been harmed by these requirements. The plaintiffs therefore assert that they "suffer anxiety from the belief that the existence of these unconstitutional laws suggest that their very safety as residents of Kentucky may be in the hands of fanatics, traitors, or fools."

The suit states that the law was passed in response to the September 11 attacks, which it calls a "faith-based initiative."

The other clause requires the Executive Director of Homeland Security to publicize "the dependence on Almighty God as being vital to the security of the Commonwealth."

Outgoing President George W. Bush disappointed a lot of conservative Christians when he discussed his religious views on ABC's *Nightline*. Asked if the Bible was literally true, Bush replied: "Probably not. ... No, I'm not a literalist, but I think you can learn a lot from it, but I do think that the New Testament for example is ... has got ... You know, the important lesson is 'God sent a son.'" The president also said that he prays to the same God as those with different religious beliefs. "I do believe there is an almighty that is broad and big enough and loving enough that can encompass a lot of people," Bush said.

Bush denied that the decision to go to war in Iraq was determined by his religious beliefs: "I did it based upon the need to protect the American people from harm," Bush said.

"You can't look at the decision to go into Iraq apart from, you know, what happened on September 11. It was not a religious decision," he said.

"I don't view this as a war of religion. I view this as a war of good, decent people of all faiths against people who murder innocent people to achieve a political objective."

He said he felt that God was with him as he made big decisions, but that the decisions were his.

A couple of months ago, the British Humanist Association ran an ad campaign on London buses. The ads read "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." They inspired advertising campaigns by atheist groups in the US, but the ads here have elicited howls of protest from Christians.

The American Humanist Association is paying \$40,000 to run ads on Washington D.C. buses throughout the month of December. The ads read simply "Why believe in a god? Just be good for goodness' sake." The good-humored ads have drawn hundreds

of calls to Washington's Metropolitan Transit Agency in protest. The MTA cannot pull the ads, however. In the 1980s they were sued for pulling ads that ridiculed President Reagan for running a "Jelly Bean Republic." They are under court order to accept all ads that are not factually misleading or false, that do not violate laws or incite violence, or employ profanity.

The furor is greater in the Washington state capitol, where the Freedom from Religion Foundation posted a plaque reading "*At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail. There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.*" First the plaque was stolen, but returned to a radio station. After the plaque was returned to its spot at the capitol, a reported 500 people showed up to protest it.

(Continued on page 13)



Merry Christmas from an Atheist



by Eric Jayne

I love Christmas! That shouldn't come as a big surprise since it's arguably the most popular holiday in America. However, I might raise a few eyebrows if I added I am an *atheist* who loves Christmas. Many people might find a tremendous contradiction in a self-proclaimed atheist wishing friends, family, and neighbors a merry Christmas.

Like many freethinking secularists, I see absolutely no contradiction and I will continue to unabashedly practice Christmas traditions with my family while staying consistent with my freethinking philosophy. The way I see it, all of the fun parts of Christmas are secular: decorating trees, exchanging gifts, candy canes, eggnog, cookies, parties, lights, culinary overindulgence, Santa Claus, Rudolph, Frosty, and so on. And, in my opinion, the numerous festive secular and novelty Christmas songs are far better than their dreary religious counterparts.

I understand that Christmas is often recognized as a celebration of the birth of Jesus, and "Christ" is the linguistic anchor in the word "Christmas", but it is important to remember that winter solstice pagan celebrations, which predate Christianity, deserve the credit for establishing December 25th as the date of our intoxicating annual snow draped yuletide.

It is commonly understood that

after the Roman Emperor, Constantine converted to Christianity he teamed up with the Christian church in the 4th century and co-opted the pagan celebratory day of December 25th. The church, with the Emperor's support, invented and branded that day as the date Jesus was born, thereby facilitating the conversion of pagans to Christianity. It was the ultimate proselytizing strategy.

Presently it seems that contemporary Christmas celebrations have more popular secular humanistic

Christmas is well on its way to becoming an all inclusive humanistic celebration of goodwill rather than an ecclesiastical observance of an ancient legend.

themes than religious. We're often reminded that it's the season of giving and to remember those less fortunate. Collectively, we're a kinder nation during the Christmas season and we donate to disadvantaged families exponentially more than any other time of year. We make extra effort to be with our family and friends and often exchange gifts with our co-workers. It seems that, by way of memetic evolution through natural selection, Christmas is well on its way to becoming an all inclusive humanistic celebration of goodwill rather than an ecclesiastical observance of an ancient legend.

In spite of media pundits and propagandists, there is no threat, or "War on Christmas". We rationalists

understand this, but Bill O'Reilly continues to propagate a fanciful organized militant group of Secular Progressives (which he simplifies to "SP's") who are interested in forcing retail employees to say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas". Of course it's a ridiculous notion to declare a war on a holiday and equally outrageous to suggest secularists wish to trample on the constitutionally protected free speech rights of retail employees. Unfortunately these glaring fallacies matter little as these ideas have been popularized in recent years.

As atheists I believe we should overtly celebrate Christmas and take ownership of a beautiful day that originated as a celebration of the winter solstice. We need to capitalize on the secular themes of Christmas such as decorating trees, donating to charities, exchanging gifts, and visiting with family. We should unapologetically bask in the secular humanistic glory of Christmas traditions. I'm not necessarily suggesting that we freethinking secularists brazenly redefine Christmas (or December 25th) overnight as a solely humanistic holiday, but by nurturing the fun, popular, and secular elements of the Christmas season I believe the date will continue to lose its Christian façade until it's collectively recognized as a day to celebrate the kindness of humanity. Merry Christmas and happy New Year!

(Continued from page 12)

I understand that Christians will disagree with the message of the plaque, but it does not call for any action against Christians. Particularly it does not call for denying their right to freedom of speech. As FFRF co-president Dan Barker said, "Our

members want equal time, not to muscle, not to coerce, but just to have a place at the table."

The protesters, to the contrary, demanded that the atheist plaque be removed. The Rev. Kenneth Hutcherson, pastor of Antioch Bible Church in Redmond, demanded that the athe-

ist plaque be removed: "Just because you must represent everyone in the state doesn't mean that you put up with intolerance from the people that you represent." I'm sure that he was completely oblivious of his own hypocrisy.

Another Reader Disagrees with [Columnist Ron] Scarbro

by August Berkshire, President [of] Minnesota Atheists, Minneapolis

The following letter to the editor appeared in the Sartell Newsleaders on December 18, 2008.

<http://www.thenewsleaders.com/articles/2008/12/18/sartell/opinions/columns3.txt>

Ron Scarbro claims "One of the tenets of Christianity, thankfully, is tolerance." He then spends the rest of his column berating atheists and pagans. (*Newsleaders, Sartell, Opinions, "So this is Christmas - peace and goodwill to all!" Dec. 12*).

Christmas is not to be found in the Bible. Judging from the nativity story, the birth of Jesus would have occurred in the spring. (Jehovah's Witnesses don't celebrate Christmas.) The earliest reference to Christmas being celebrated on Dec. 25 - the winter solstice in the old Julian calendar -

was in Rome in 354. In 380, the Roman emperor Theodosius ordered all pagan temples to be destroyed and forced pagans to accept Christianity.

Pagans had celebrated the winter solstice as the birth/rebirth of their sun/savior gods. It was so popular the early Christians could not stamp it out, so they co-opted it for the birth of their god. However, all the fun parts of the celebration are pagan in origin: gatherings of families and friends, feasts, gift-giving, lights, music, decorated trees and more.

In fact, the Bible states, "Learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are in vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest... They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not." (Jeremiah 10.2-4)

From 1659 to 1680 the Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony prohibited the observance of Christmas:

"Whoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas and the like, either by forbearing labor, feasting or any other way upon such account as aforesaid, every such person so offending shall pay for each offense five shillings as a fine to the country."

The U.S. Congress was in session on Dec. 25, 1789, and also for 64 of the next 67 years. It wasn't until 1836 that Alabama became the first state to make Christmas a legal holiday. In 1894, Christmas was included in the first group of federal holidays. Previously, Congress often met, and mail was delivered, on Christmas day.

Scarbro wonders if atheists and pagans can be "at least as tolerant as Christians?" We'll do better than that. We'll allow Christians to continue to imagine their god was born on Dec. 25, so long as they don't try to force their religion on the rest of us.

Season's Greetings from the Secular Side By August Berkshire

The following article appeared in the [Minneapolis] Star Tribune on November 22, 2008.

<http://www.startribune.com/opinion/commentary/34900444.html>

'Tis the season. With winter coming, some members of the religious right have begun bracing themselves for the so-called annual atheists' "war on Christmas." While we think that the government and public schools should remain neutral when it comes to religious celebrations, we have no interest in depriving anyone of whatever private celebrations they wish to conduct.

Nevertheless, in case you were wondering, here are the plans some of us have for December.

The cards we will be purchasing

will not say "Merry Christmas" (or "Happy Hanukah" or "Happy Eid") but rather "Season's Greetings."

After all, the original "reason for the season" is the winter solstice, which has long been appropriated by religious people to celebrate the birth or rebirth of their sun/savior gods. Nowadays, with religion in decline, the reason for the season is becoming merely a time for festivities. What's wrong with that?

The trees that many of us will have in our homes will have colorful lights, originally symbolic of the post-solstice lengthening of days, but now just a pretty sight.

Of course, we will not have angels on top of our trees. We know this will make us unpatriotic as, in this economy, it is likely to lead the tree-top-angel-making industry to seek a federal bailout.

The meals we will share will not have prayers said over them, but we will give thanks to those who pro-

vided them and to our families and friends.

The songs we sing will be secular - *Jingle Bells*, etc. But, fear not: Atheists are just as likely to sing them out of tune as religious people, though we will derive no less joy.

And jolly old Santa Claus? Well, the disappearance of milk and cookies left out for him and the appearance of wrapped presents are evidence in the minds of many that he exists. We'll relax our skeptical standards for a day and leave Santa's existence up to each person's imagination.

We wish everyone well in celebrating the season as they see fit. Let us set aside our differences and come together in the goodwill of our shared humanity. It is the Jewish-Christian-Muslim-Buddhist-Hindu-pagan-humanist-atheist thing to do.

August Berkshire is president of Minnesota Atheists.

On Woo

By Vic Tanner

According to Beliefnet, more than one fifth of Americans self-identify with the label "spiritual but not religious," which I've always interpreted as "religious but lazy." Stepping back and viewing the phrase in a slightly less judgmental tone, it is more than likely an attempt to distance oneself from the dreaded term "organized religion;" a personal declaration of "I'm not one of *them*." But, as we atheists have long ago realized, it's not the act of organizing that's bad, it's the unfounded beliefs. "Oh I'll keep the irrationality, thank you. I just don't want to be organized."

As I've become aware of this mass diaspora of coordination, I began to realize that I'm, in fact, surrounded by people with completely indefinable beliefs. Many of them find it difficult to even verbalize things that they feel strongly about. The most entertaining way I've had someone describe their belief system to me was with a wrist twisting motion; as in, "I believe in (holds hand next to head, flicks wrist a bit)". At first, I thought that he had become distracted by a fly, but once I realized that the little wrist twitch was intended as a description of his religious beliefs, my heart sank a bit.

In some ways I find this ambiguity of belief more irritating than fundamentalism. Just because it is so ... well, ambiguous. Not being able to even state your beliefs in any meaningful way makes it utterly impossible to question them. You could never find your beliefs to be either true or false. It makes intellectual honesty and self-discovery a near impossibility. And face it, if the only reason

you didn't join up with Jim Jones and move on down to Guyana is because the trip itself seemed a bit too organized for you, then you definitely need a little introspection.

I suppose this lack of demarcation shouldn't really be surprising. There is a long history of abuse of definitions by spiritually minded people attempting to blur unflattering aspects of their religions. It seems that ignoring unsettling dogmas is far easier than reconciling them. Removing the definitions all together is just the next step in the process of cleansing your beliefs.

I've recently had a very frustrating conversation with a man who kept insisting that he was not religious. Religious people were "wacky" and "not to be trusted". No, he wasn't one of them. Though, Jesus Christ did speak to him (audibly - he could hear his voice) and tells him to do things (as sinister as it sounds, the things he was told to do were along the lines of fastening his seat belt). Whenever I questioned him on the voices he heard, he became quite irate. He wasn't religious and he wasn't crazy, he told me; and he knew that he wasn't crazy, because when he answered Jesus, he didn't move his lips. That, to him, was the dividing line between rationality and irrationality.

There's a quote that I've often heard, but I've never really been sure if I agreed with: "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything." I think that I would like to alter this quote to make it a bit more poignant: "If you never question anything, you'll believe in anything."

Research has shown that the largest religious group today is "no religion". But, unfortunately, this may not mean that people are abandoning religion. They may just be abandoning organization.

If the only reason you didn't join up with Jim Jones and move on down to Guyana is because the trip itself seemed a bit too organized for you, then you definitely need a little introspection.

"God" and Abortion

by August Berkshire

Beginning with some premises (#1-6) that few Religious Right anti-choice people would disagree with, we follow with a scientific fact (#7), leading to a couple surprising conclusions (#8-9).

1. God is all-powerful.
2. God is all-good.
3. Everything God does is good.
4. God wants humans to be good.
5. If humans imitate God, who is all-good, then humans will be good.
6. God created the human reproductive system.
7. At least 25% of fertilized human eggs are spontaneously aborted.
8. This makes God the world's biggest abortionist.
9. Humans should have more abortions.

(January 22nd marks the 36th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade.)

“Atheists Talk” Radio Report: Two Shows for Less than the Price of One!

By August Berkshire

At our November meeting we announced that we were not going to renew our contract with KTNF AM 950 radio due to cost. Instead, we were going to create a live podcast of our program, which would cost us almost nothing. Now it looks like we’re going to have the best of both worlds.

KTNF did not want to lose us, so they made a lower, counter-offer, which we accepted. We have signed a contract to continue for the first six months of 2009.

However, KTNF would like to charge us the full rate again after those six months. The only way we can do this is to find a co-sponsor who will pay for half. With that in mind, we are open to experimenting, by changing our show into an “Atheist-Theist News Hour” and finding a religious co-sponsor.

We know our point of view will sound more reasonable than a religious point of view, and there might well be things we agree on. Moreover, we think a program that has some debate will attract a larger audience. (College atheist-theist debates always draw a bigger crowd than either side alone.) So, the program would be a combination of news and interviews with both sides collaborating on the topics. It would continue to be turned into a podcast afterwards.

Meanwhile, we will move our standard “Atheists Talk” to being a live podcast, at a set day and time each week, which can be streamed live on computers and turned into a podcast afterwards. We will get a special phone number so people can call in. We will also operate a live on-line chat room for questions and comments. A further advantage of this setup is that we would not have any commercials.

There is also a possibility that KFAI (Fresh Air) radio would be interested in our “Atheists Talk” program, but it could take a long time before there would be an opening for us.

The new year will also bring some key personnel changes. Mike Haubrich is stepping down as our program’s host in favor of Stephanie Zvan, who has already hosted a few shows and received favorable reviews. After a year of being the director, I will be turning over the reins to Mike Haubrich. Both Mike and I will continue to occasionally interview people on the show.

Continuing as other interviewers, we have Lynn Fellman, Scott Lohman, Grant Steves, George Kane, Cynthia Egli, Bjorn Watland, and Steve Petersen. For technical support we will have Bjorn Watland and Drew Hau. Paul Nelson and John Funk will also be contributing their talents to the program.

In the past two months we aired programs 43-51 of “Atheists Talk.” Mike Haubrich hosted the programs in November and Stephanie Zvan hosted the program in December. Those programs were:

Nov. 2 – “The State of Science Education in Minnesota” with Scott Lanyon, Randy Moore, and Sehoja Cotner, interviewed by Lynn Fellman.

Nov. 9 – Veterans Day Special: “Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF)” with Kathleen Johnson, interviewed by Steve Petersen.

Nov. 16 – “Dialogue with a Christian Proselytizer” with Todd Allen Gates, interviewed by Mike Haubrich.

Nov. 16 – “Fundamentalisms” with Grant Steves, interviewed by August Berkshire.

Nov. 23 – Thanksgiving Spe-

cial: “Finding Your Family and the Shoah Project” with Matt Kaplan, interviewed by Lynn Fellman.

Nov. 30 – “Inerrant the Wind: The Evangelical Crisis in Biblical Authority” with Robert M. Price, interviewed by Grant Steves.

Dec. 7 – “The Islamic Threat to Secular Society” with Austin Dacey, interviewed by George Kane.

Dec. 14 – “American Humanist Association” with Maggie Ardiente, interviewed by Scott Lohman.

Dec. 21 – “Secular Coalition for America” with Lori Lipman Brown, interviewed by Steve Petersen and August Berkshire.

Dec. 28 – “The Year in Biological Sciences” with Perry Hackett, interviewed by Lynn Fellman.

Even though we got a reduced rate contract with KTNF, we still need your support for our program. 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).

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!

Isaiah's Virgin Conceived like every other Young Maiden

by Lee Salisbury

Reprinted from the Stillwater Gazette,
[http://www.stillwatergazette.com/
 articles/2008/12/30/opinion/
 opinion420.txt](http://www.stillwatergazette.com/articles/2008/12/30/opinion/opinion420.txt)

As a former bible-believing evangelical pastor, I empathize with Pastor Mark Becker's feelings of offense with Andrew Carnegie comment - calling God a "fiend." Independent thinkers like Carnegie, especially when demonstrative of indispensable magnanimity to society, threaten commonly embraced views that atheists are evil.

Pastor Becker correctly observes that Carnegie was a responsible steward of his fortune. However, Carnegie's philanthropic motivation differed from the Christian motivation. Carnegie was motivated solely by what was the "right thing to do here and now" with no thought of pleasing an imaginary God who intimidates unbelievers with hell and rewards believers with heaven.

Christian theology dictates that Carnegie burn eternally in an imaginary hell. Yet, every time we enter the Stillwater Public Library - or one of the thousands of other libraries he funded - Carnegie's generosity and wisdom are contrasted with the harsh vindictiveness of the Christian God.

I applaud Pastor Becker's acceptance of evolutionary theory as fact. Pastor Becker separates himself from the self-serving, narrow-minded fundamentalist clergy who oppose our young people's understanding science for the sake of perpetuating the mythical creation story. This sad promotion of the Genesis account as historical fact has become an obstacle to young minds searching out the biological realities that evolution so marvelously explains.

Carnegie's rejection of an "angry God" who must "punish somebody" is understandable for those able to reason outside the box of man-made tradition.

The bible's God knew in advance that Adam and Eve would sin. Nevertheless, this God created them, allowed for their temptation, and then contrary to the basics of any parent's love becomes angry at the very event He planned. This God then blames His newly created ignorant victim alleging "free will." Today's civil law describes God's horrendous act as "entrapment." Carnegie rejected this convoluted irrational God as the theological manipulation of an authoritarian priesthood who fabricated a scenario to justify their own existence in order to foist it upon fearful gullible humans.

I suspect Carnegie would also reject Pastor Becker's reasoning of "a virgin will be with child and bear a son and she will call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14) as being fulfilled in "God is with us" (Matthew 1:23). This is one of many Old Testament scriptures lifted out of context to justify the claim that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.

The popular claim that Jesus was born of a virgin based on Isaiah 7:14 is a gross misrepresentation of Isaiah's words. Christian theology required a savior of divine seed untainted by Adam's sin. In addition, Matthew was competing with other Greek, Egyptian, Persian and Roman savior-god stories whose saviors were born of virgins. Thus, Isaiah's so-called virgin birth solved this dual-faceted challenge.

Isaiah told Israel's King Ahaz: "The Lord will give you a sign: Behold an almah will conceive" (Isaiah 7:14). The Hebrew word meaning "maiden" was mistranslated in the third century BC Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible as "virgin." Isaiah acknowledges he approached this almah; she conceived and gave birth to a son (Isaiah 8:3). Isaiah's almah conceived without any intervention by God. There was no virgin birth prophesied. Immanuel meaning "god is with us" received the credit for Ahaz's victory over the King of Syria.

The Jewish people were not dumb. As expected of any rational people they rejected Matthew's fabrication. This proved calamitous for the Jews. The Gentile Christian victors who generations later wrote the crucifixion story purposely blamed the Jews so the Romans would look like innocent law-abiding citizens. Hence, Martin Luther and multitudes of Christians had an excuse for the centuries of heinous anti-Semite atrocities culminating in the Roman Catholic-aligned Hitler's extermination of six million Jews.

To add further to the Christian theological cauldron of make-believe and the chagrin of Christian theologians, there are no original manuscripts of the gospels or epistles. No one knows who actually wrote them. The number of gospels and their alleged eyewitness accounts are, at best, half-truths. All that scholars have are copies of copies of copies edited and re-edited over many centuries in order to accommodate the continuously unfolding doctrinal requirements of church hierarchy.

This should come as no surprise. Christianity's evolution parallels the development of every religion - whether Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or Jewish. Doctrinal requirements dictate the eventual interpretation required, whether it be a revered Mullah or Bishop, all so the respective sect could claim to have "the truth."

Nevertheless, myth in every culture has always provided powerful examples for us hero-loving humans. Myths illustrative of heroic sacrifice, selfless love and commitment to a cause greater than us have proven inspirational. To the extent that they inspire us to reach beyond our all too oft uneventful lives, they are beneficial.

Thus, our Christmas holidays (that actually originated from the secular solstice celebrations) inspire gift giving and joyful celebrations by virtue of the mystical story of Joseph, Mary, baby Jesus and the Magi.

Home for the Holidays — and the Family Conflicts

by Jamie Thomas, on-line *TC Daily Planet*, December 23, 2008
<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/article/2008/12/23/home-holidays-and-family-conflicts.html>

Shopping, cleaning, cooking, and plenty of shoveling — the holidays are hard enough without the stress of family conflict. Most families have at least minor disagreements over the holidays, but for some the conflict resides in the religious basis of the holiday itself.

For all the challenges families with religious differences may face during the holiday season, it can still be an opportunity to foster understanding and respect, said Barbara Rudnick, program manager of Family Life Education at Jewish Children and Family Services of Minneapolis.

Rudnick counsels interfaith families — families that blend different religious backgrounds.

Some interfaith families choose to identify themselves as one religion, but have extended family members that are of another religion, Rudnick said. These families can run into complications when celebrating with grandparents or extended family that observe different holidays.

The key to a happy holiday is talking about specific preferences and expectations before the pressure of the holidays takes over, Rudnick said. Discussing dietary restrictions, appropriate presents and even details such as whether gifts are wrapped in Hanukah or Christmas paper ahead of time can avoid hurt feelings.

“If you have the conversation ahead of time people aren’t so emotionally wound up and stressed out,” she said.

Rudnick said the holidays also offer an opportunity to teach chil-

dren valuable lessons about tolerance and the importance of family tradition.

“What you say to them is, ‘it’s not our holiday but we celebrate grandma and grandpa’s holiday with them because we love them and respect them,’ children get that,” she said.

Bjorn Watland, an atheist and director of Minnesota Atheists, said he generally has no problem celebrating Christmas with his Christian family. He has even attended Christmas church services with his parents.

August Berkshire, president of Minnesota Atheists said this practice is common among his members.

“When the religious parents are hosting the event, the child is not going to raise any fuss out of respect for the parents,” he said. “The point of view of the of the atheist child is just to tag along and make the parents happy.”

But Watland, whose father is

studying to become a Lutheran pastor, admitted it can be hard to have an open conversation with his parents about his beliefs and it doesn’t get any easier at Christmastime.

“Ever since I came out as an atheist there’s been sort of a tension there and it doesn’t necessarily go away when the holidays happen — it just kind of gets ignored,” he said.

Jamie Thomas (jethomas319@gmail.com) is a freelance journalist living in South Minneapolis.



Past, Present, and Future United States Presidents Crossword Puzzle Answer Key

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- Clarifications:
 9 across - spoken by George H. W. Bush
 17 down - spoken by John Quincy Adams.
 1 down - spoken by Theodore Roosevelt
 10 down - spoken by Benjamin Harrison
 18 down - spoken by John Adams
 20 down - spoken by George W. Bush

Cryptogram solution
 What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence.
Christopher Hitchens

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**.

Every Sunday, 10:30 - 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 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

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**"Isn't it enough to see that a garden is
beautiful without having to believe that
there are fairies at the bottom of it too?"
— Douglas Adams**

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