

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action SM

Volume 19 Number 10

November/December 2009

November Meeting: What Today's Atheists and Humanists Can Learn from John Dewey

John Dewey, born in 1859, was arguably the most important American public intellectual of his era. As one of the founders of the modern humanist movement, Dewey's approach toward atheism in many ways set the tone in America for the rest of the 20th century. But if that's the case, why was the religious right so successful in the latter half of the century? What went wrong?

Answering these questions, and thereby learning from Dewey, will be David Niose, president of the American Humanist Association (AHA). (Minnesota Atheists is an affiliate of the American Humanist Association.)

Niose's background includes experience in law and mass communication. A graduate of Boston University's School of Public Communication and Suffolk University Law School, he has practiced law in Massachusetts since 1990. He has also worked in print and broadcast media, taught both history and law, and written extensively on a wide

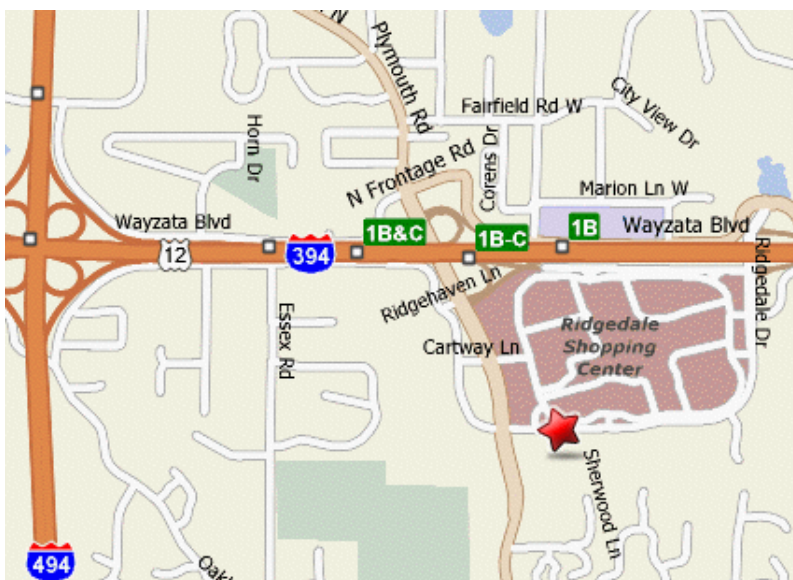
array of social and political issues.

Niose has spoken to freethought groups around the country, emphasizing the importance of utilizing mass media to inject Humanist ideas into the public dialogue, improve the public image of Humanists, and sway public opinion away from the religious right.

In addition to being president of the American Humanist Association, Niose also sits on the advisory panel of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA).

After the meeting we will have dinner at the Chinese Wanderer's Garden Buffet.

Please join us!



When?

Sunday, November 15, 2009

1:00-1:15 p.m. - Social Time

1:15-1:45 p.m. - Business

Meeting

2:00-3:30 p.m. - Speaker

Where?

Ridgedale Public Library

12601 Ridgedale Drive

Minnetonka, 55305

In This Issue...

President's Column	3
October Meeting	4
Book Review	5
New Policies	6
Winds of Change	8
<i>The Survey</i>	8
Bank with No Prophets?	9
Solstice Reminder	9
Prayer Cancellations	10
Cryptogram	11
State Money	13
Jesus of the OT	13
Celebrating Scripture	14
Badge Order Form	15
News and Notes	16
Financial Report	16
Cable Report	17
The Sunny Skeptic	18
Things To Do	19

Minnesota Atheists Board of Directors

board@mnatheists.org

President: Jeannette Watland
pres@mnatheists.org, 612-709-6719

Associate Chair: Jack Caravela
achair@mnatheists.org, 612-788-9665

Treasurer: Andy Flamm
treas@mnatheists.org, 612-251-3904

Secretary: George Kane
sec@mnatheists.org, 651-488-8225

Director-at-Large: Cathy Prody
dir1@mnatheists.org,

Director-at-Large: Crystal Dervetski
dir2@mnatheists.org

Director-at-Large: Vic Tanner
dir3@mnatheists.org

Honorary Members

Dan Barker

Gerald Erickson, PhD

Annie Laurie Gaylor

Dick Hewetson

Robert M. Price, PhD

MNA Meetup members: 597
Life memberships: 31

Building Fund:
\$120,437.98

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

Published by Minnesota Atheists,
P.O. Box 120304 New Brighton, MN
55112
612-284-4495, info@mnatheists.org
www.MinnesotaAtheists.org

Editorial Board, editor@mnatheists.org

James Zimmerman, editor
Zgoatee@Gmail.com

Chief Photographer: Richard Trombley

Membership/change of address:
Jack Caravela, address@mnatheists.org,
612-788-9665

Public Relations: George Kane
pr@mnatheists.org, 651-488-8225

Atheists Weekly E-mail (AWE):
Crystal Dervetski, awe@mnatheists.com

Cable: Steve Petersen,
cable@mnatheists.org, 651-484-9277

Webmaster: Bjorn Watland,
web@mnatheists.org, 612-708-5029

Podcasts: Grant Hermanson,
podcast@mnatheists.org,

Copyright 2009 Minnesota Atheists.
Minnesota Atheists is an affiliate of Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Council for Secular Humanism, and International Humanist and Ethical Union.

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 Jeannette Watland

Change Doesn't Mean Goodbye



On October 22nd, Bjorn Watland, President of Minnesota Atheists resigned from the board, due to personal reasons. As Associate President, my initial reaction was to worry about myself. I now have to take on new responsibilities, and anxiety admittedly took a temporary hold on me. Then the emails started coming in, and I realized I had made a mistake. I shouldn't be worrying about myself at all. My primary concern is now, and always will be, the membership. This leadership transition took the board of directors by surprise, and I can only imagine how the membership will take the news. My first job as President of Minnesota Atheists is to ensure all of our members that we will proceed with is business as usual. I will not allow our organization to fall apart.

Since Bjorn has been so publicly active, I'm sure many of our

members are not familiar with me. It would only be natural to doubt my leadership capabilities. Why not? Up until this point, I've worked behind the scenes. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I'm a 24 year old atheist living in St. Paul. I've been serving on the board of directors for Minnesota Atheists for two years, first as a director-at-large, then as Associate President. I have also been serving on the board for Camp Quest of Minnesota for approximately the same amount of time. I am open about my atheism to friends, family and coworkers. Because I'm so open, I have often felt ostracism, distrust, and even hatred from the public. Minnesota Atheists is an organization where I can be myself. I know others feel that way, whether they are "out" or not. Knowing that this organization is the only safe haven for many people is what drives my dedication to helping this organization grow. With membership demographics changing, there are many young parents with children joining. I want to work on making Minnesota Atheists more family friendly. Most importantly I want to continue working on building respect and understanding of the

Freethought community. We can't make people agree with us, but we can at least gain respect.

There is no doubt in my mind that this organization will continue to move as smoothly as ever. Bjorn will continue to help as organizer of the Meet-up, a vital component of Minnesota Atheists. He is not going away. The board of directors has been extremely supportive and hard-working in the transitions we've made this year. Each person serving on the board has dedicated time and energy to something they care deeply about, and deserve many thanks. But so do the members and supporters of this organization. Not only do you support atheist rights, but you make this a second home for so many people. I have found so many amazing, caring friends in this organization, something I am very thankful for. I love that our events are a place people feel welcome. It is a place where they see eye to eye with people, and can speak their mind, without fear of persecution. So I urge you all to keep coming to events, and to keep this community alive, and I thank you for your support and encouragement. Trust that it does not go unnoticed.

"In recent times there have appeared those who want to read the bible literally and legalistically, like a technical manual. Read literally, certain sections of the bible support slavery, the property status of women, racial segregation, and genocide on religious grounds."

-*Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, edited by Maurianne Adams, et. al.

The October MNA Meeting



Dr. Avalos.

At the member meeting held at Southdale Library on October 18th, Minnesota Atheists were treated to a lecture by Dr. Hector Avalos titled: "Can Science Prove Prayer Works?"

Dr. Avalos discussed the difficulties involved in creating and maintaining a controlled study involving prayer. How, for example, can a study account for random prayers being offered by unknown individuals? How would it be possible to take into consideration someone's prayer that all people on Earth get well, or that only some people get better? Even more confusing is the fact that some individuals might purposely pray that harm befalls people of certain religions. And, really, shouldn't god be a kind of 'Super Doctor;' one who shouldn't even need to be asked in the first place?

Dr. Avalos also noted that results attributed to a god's saving power are likely to have other possible causes once a little research is performed. For instance, god, if indeed he does save some people from plane crashes, seems less capable of saving those who are involved in airplane crashes that occurred when the plane falls from higher altitudes,



Southdale Library. Photo credit: Matthew Richardson.

instead of when it is close to landing or take-off. Dr. Avalos also pointed out that crash-test dummies survive phony wars at the same rates as real soldiers in real wars, provoking the question: does god save dummies? In the matter of faith-healing, Dr. Avalos, himself a former 'healer,' performed a healing in which his skillful manipulation of an audience member's legs affected an apparent 'cure.'

In the end, Dr. Avalos concluded that, no, science can not prove that prayer works and, even if it could, we would still be left with the question of which god did the healing. This point was made clear by citing Bhagavad Gita 7:22, wherein the Hindu god Krishna claims he alone performs healing, no matter which god a human worships.

The Board of Directors also thanked three members for their work in the organization over the past year. Awards were given as follows:

For his service photographing members at our events, the Board of Directors of Minnesota Atheists recognized Richard Trombly with the 2009 Atheist Snapshot Hotshot Award.

For his perseverance, resourcefulness and ser-



President Bjorn Watland (left) congratulates James Zimmerman on his award. Photo credit: August Berkshire.

vice editing our newsletter, the Board of Directors of Minnesota Atheists recognized James Zimmerman with the 2009 Atheist Pen Award.

For her on-air and off-air service to the Atheist Talk radio and podcast program, the Board of Directors of Minnesota Atheists recognized Stephanie Zvan with the 2009 Atheist of the Airwaves Award.

Book Review: *The Greatest Show on Earth*



by Ryan Sutter

I was raised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and therefore a creationist. I qualified as one of the "history-deniers" that

ful, powerful, incredible fact, described by an elegant, lovely theory.

I left creationism behind, left my religion behind, left my belief in God behind, and became an ardent fan of both biological science and Richard Dawkins. Dawkins wasn't entirely responsible for my deconversion, but he certainly played a pivotal role. Considering the fact that his new book seemed to be targeted at

Professor Dawkins describes in his latest book *The Greatest Show on Earth*. I believed that human beings were created 6,000 years ago and that evolution was a lie. I had never looked deeply into the matter. I trusted my parents and my religion. The creationist literature they indoctrinated me with was very convincing to me when I was twelve. When I was thirty, however, I had some doubts and I revisited the subject, I re-read the literature, and I was no longer convinced. In fact, I became convinced that creationism was nothing more than propaganda. This did not cause me to believe evolution was true, but it was enough to get me to read a book on evolution for the first time in

my life. I chose Dawkins' book *The Blind Watchmaker*. I expected creationist-style propaganda but instead, thanks to Professor Dawkins' excellent and clear explanations of the fundamental concepts underlying evolutionary theory, I learned the truth. Evolution is a fact, a beauti-

people like I used to be, I held out high hopes that this would be the sort of book that might make a difference, that could maybe convince some creationists to accept evolution. After reading it over, unfortunately, I don't feel this will be the case. This seems to be a book that predominately preaches

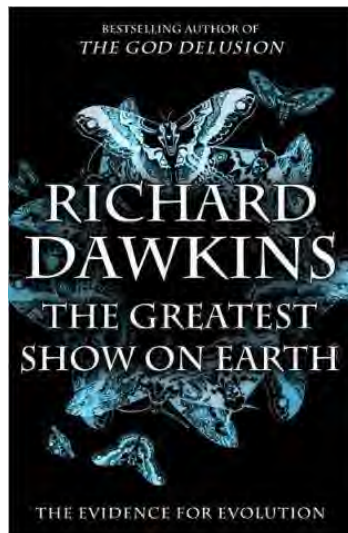
information, basically everything one would expect from a book written by Dawkins. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book, but I think it failed in its stated goal: spelling out the evidence for evolution as a response to the history-deniers.

The book's shortcomings are tactical more than anything. For example, the first two chapters are devoted to stating very vehemently that evolution is a fact and the 40% of Americans who believe otherwise are deeply misinformed. It showcases the differences between facts and theories and the differences between the scientific and colloquial meanings of the word theory, but it is hard for me to imagine a less inviting introduction to such a book for somebody who is one of those history-denying 40-percenters. Before ever producing the evidence, before demonstrating the facts, the book confronts the reader with the statement that

evolution is absolutely a fact. To somebody who is skeptical about evolution, them's fightin' words. To come out

with your conclusion before you've made your argument in the way that Dawkins does here almost seems to presuppose that the reader already agrees with the author. In a book purportedly calculated to convince an evolution-doubter or two this seems like a

(Continued on page 12)



The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution, by Richard Dawkins, Free Press, 480 pages, ©2009



by George Kane

New Policies

The first annual review of our public policies was completed,

and Revision B was accepted at the October meeting of the Board of Directors. Members of the committee that performed the review were Bjorn Watland, Crystal Dervetski, August Berkshire and myself. The review committee made minor, non-substantive edits to existing policies, and added new policies, which are provided below. – George Kane

Government Entanglement with Religion

Threats to Secular Government

A core policy concern of Minnesota Atheists is to secure secular government from the superstitions, prejudices and dogma of religion. The most acute threat around the world is from a global network of religiously inspired paramilitary cells.

Religious insurrection can never be defeated by bullets, because there will always be more of the faithful ready to take up arms. Paramilitary groups can only exist when they have support in their communities. Victory in this war depends much less on the action of armies than the contest of beliefs and values. Armies can never win the clash of cultures, though they will have occasional, limited roles.

Around the world, perceived insults to their religion have incited immigrant communities to violent rioting. The response to these problems must be not only in police actions, but also in cultural outreach. It is cru-

cial that countries that have adopted secular values do not compromise them. We cannot abandon our commitment to equality and justice, or condone religious discrimination, and not be recognized as hypocrites. Neither can we yield on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. We must not succumb to the self-censorship that silences legitimate criticism of religion for fear of violent retaliation.

Religious Law

In nations where law is dictated by religion we find severe human rights violations (particularly against women and the GLBT community); legal suppression of non-believers (including criminalizing apostasy); and religious indoctrination that masquerades as education. This clearly demonstrates that secular government leads to a higher quality of life and greater equality.

We must strive to strengthen the world's commitment to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Especially we have to oppose the efforts in the United Nations to have defamations of religion recognized as an international crime.

Public Education

The Constitution of the state of Minnesota draws clear guidelines for the separation of religion and government Article 13, Section 2, by identifying the lines where government and religion must not intrude upon one another: "In no case shall any public money or property be appropriated or used for the support of schools wherein the distinctive doctrines, creeds or tenets of any particular Christian or other religious sect are promulgated or taught," and also Ar-

icle 1, Section 16: "nor shall any money be drawn from the treasury for the benefit of any religious societies or religious or theological seminaries." Minnesota Atheists supports clear guidelines for separation of religion and government in all areas of public education (K- University) and asserts that it is better to err on the side of clear separation than to support a policy that violates these guidelines.

Opponents of the separation of church and state try to influence education policy in several areas:

1) Science in the classroom

In the teaching of science, public schools need to adopt a curriculum that is approved by the scientific community. For example, evolution is a theory that has been accepted by established science. Religious stories of creation by supernatural means have no basis in accepted science and are matters of faith. Intelligent Design is a supernatural claim that cannot be verified empirically, makes no predictions, and is not falsifiable. Furthermore, the *Kitzmilller v. Dover* case clearly established that Intelligent Design is not science and should not be taught in science class.

In the non-science curriculum, public education should not display any bias toward religion. Schools should teach about the influence of religion on culture and society, but without endorsing religion or religious ideology. In literature and history classes it is permissible to use religious texts as long as there is no promotion of religion over non-religion.

2) Prayer

Prayer should follow established Federal guidelines for public schools (K – univer-

sity). No public employee should lead or endorse prayer in the public schools. Prayer should be a private matter and not involved in any ceremony or activity promoted by a public school. Collective prayer is always coercive for elementary and high school students. A mandated moment of silence is only a thinly veiled collective prayer.

In the event that a public school should designate a room for prayer, meditation, or silence, the room should not be used for proselytizing. Anyone using the room should do so in silence when others of a different belief system are present. No symbols, books, or literature should be permanently displayed in the room. The room should not promote any religion over any other, nor religion over non-religion.

3) Sex education in public school

Public schools should provide a sex education curriculum that is consistent with the research on what is effective and helpful to the health of students. An abstinence-only program that is taught with a religious motivation violates separation. Abstinence may be advocated only in conjunction with instruction in safe prophylactic practices.

4) Religious activities in public schools

In 1990, in the case *Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*, the Supreme Court ruled that the Equal Access Act, which permitted public school students to form religious clubs that meet during non-instructional time if they permit secular clubs, was constitutional. The Court ruled in 2001 in the case *Good News*

Club v. Milford Central School that if public schools rent out rooms to secular groups that they must rent them to religious groups on the same terms. In both cases, the court ruled that public schools may not discriminate against groups on the basis of religious content. Earlier courts came to contrary rulings by applying the Lemon Test, which Minnesota Atheists believes should be the governing precedent.

Accepting the decisions in the *Westside* and *Milford* cases, Minnesota Atheists believes that public schools must still take care to avoid violating the Establishment Clause. Rooms should be rented to religious groups at the same rate applied to secular groups, and strictly audited. No student or staff member may be required to participate in any religious activity. There may be no religious indoctrination during instructional time. Faculty may not promote or recruit for religious Equal Access Clubs or for outside religious groups meeting on school grounds, as this would give the appearance official endorsement. All school-sponsored activities must avoid in act and appearance promoting religion.

Minnesota Atheists opposes the practice of religious release time.

5) Teaching comparative religion and texts

Comparative religion and religious texts (Bible, Koran, etc.) may be taught if presented in an unbiased manner with text material that clearly has no presentation bias. Advocacy, both religious and atheistic, must be strictly

avoided, even by outside presenters. The public school must balance the bias that may appear in such classes by performing a close scrutiny of the materials used and of the instructor. Instruction in comparative religion done from a secular approach may have a positive effect on students. A survey of world religions should include atheism and other non theistic worldviews.

6) Vouchers

Vouchers are a method of giving parents a choice in the schools their children attend. Public funds, even where given to the parent to spend, should not be used to pay for an education at a religious school. Funding school programs that include religious activity makes it difficult if not impossible to separate the funding of religious from non-religious instruction. It is therefore our policy that vouchers should not be used in any payment to attend a religious school.

7) Academic Freedom

Academic freedom should be a guideline for the presentation of material within the public school system (K – University). The teaching of any subject should protect the right of an educator to present their material without infringement. The guideline for academic freedom does not extend to the presentation of a religious bias in any curriculum presented in a public school. For example, Intelligent Design must not be taught as an alternative to evolution in a science classroom. ID might be presented along with other concepts of creation in a study of cultural

(Continued on page 11)

WINDS OF CHANGE BLOWING WEAKLY IN AFRICA

In Uganda, we don't have the right to freedom of speech and the right to assemble peacefully to discuss political issues. The very disappointing thing is that the Government and religionists think that issues of faith, belief and religion should not be debatable.

If caught discussing the issues facing GLBT people, the police will suddenly come upon us, beat us, blackmail us, and drive gays and supporters of gay rights to the dungeons. Currently, the government of Uganda is proposing a new bill that will require the death penalty when convicted of homosexual charges, this bill also criminalizes anyone who defends or associates with a gay, lesbian person. The bill is currently in Parliament.

On several occasions, the government threatened to expel diplomats from Uganda for offering advice on how the government should tackle the GLBTs issues. As I write this, every day the police and other state security agents arrests gays and put them behind bars and blackmail them as child molesters.

Members of the Atheist Association of Uganda are bound together by our separation of state and religion, concerns regarding overpopulation, abortion, GLBTs rights, and by our common humanity. We hope that this initiation will create a bond between AAU and all free thinkers and atheists in MN and the surrounding states.

But we have no influence in any country. We are all pawns in a ridiculous game that powerful people are playing, a game that is destroying human happiness as well as the planet. Happiness should be a right of everyone born. But a few of us

have chosen to not withhold our activism while the people and the environment are being destroyed. We



Kirumira Mpagi Michael

must rise up against the few people who try to dictate how we should live our lives.

On gay life, many people in Uganda and outside the

country know about my campaigning for the last several years for GLBT. In America, I am aware of heterosexuals who actively support gay rights. Here in Uganda, this concept is unknown. Gay people have assumed that I am gay because I support their freedom. When I fail to respond to them as they expect, they have shunned me. This breaks my heart.

I have suffered a lot for this work. I have observed that gays only get rights in countries that are relatively wealthy, and where citizens generally live in freedom from fear of their government. Most importantly,

(continued on page 10)

The Survey



Used by permission. Special thanks to Bill Mutranowski. Visit atheistcartoons.com for dozens more atheist-themed laughs.

A Bank With No Prophets?



by **Bob Schmitz**

The business section of the October 24th *Pioneer Press* contained an article headlined "Regulators close 2 Otsego bank sites." Bank regulators closed two branches of Riverview Community Bank of Ostego after the banks were deemed to be

critically under-capitalized. This article points out

that when Riverview was opened in March, 2003, founder Chuck Ripka informed the *Pioneer Press* "that God told him to get the bank going." Ripka also reported that God said, "Chuck, if you do all

the things I have told you to do, I promise you I will take care of the bottom line." The bank reported its last profit in September 2007. Mary Kiffmeyer, former Minnesota Secretary of State and a Christian fundamentalist, was on the board of Riverview. Kiffmeyer thankfully has not been re-elected. It seems God let Chuck and Mary down. I wonder how they are spinning this turn of events. I suppose they might tell us God had a purpose and in due time they will discern that purpose if they just keep praying. It is indeed shocking to learn that there are people in today's world who base their business decisions on pure fantasy. I will be contacting my banker soon to make sure he is not a prosperity gospel Christian.

To see the full *Pioneer Press* article, visit twin-cities.com.

Freethought Follies and Solstice Celebration
Sunday, December 20th.
The most fun you'll have all year!



*See Flyer in
 this
 Newsletter
 for Details.*





Prayer Cancellations

by Vic Tanner

The ever increasing diversity of religious faith in America can cause quite a bit of turmoil amongst their followers. As it turns out, these differences might be

more dangerous than previously thought.

As America's religious landscape becomes more and more diverse, there is a very real danger that conflicting prayers offered to different gods may phase cancel each other out in much the same way that noise silencing systems work, rendering the prayers useless.

Noise cancellation, or active noise control, is a method for reducing unwanted sound. It can make something as loud as helicopter blades practically silent. It does this by sending out a second sound wave with the same amplitude but the opposite polarity as the original sound. The original sound wave and the new sound wave combine and effectively cancel each other out making the rotors appear silent.

In much the same way, it may be possible that prayers sent to different gods could be sent on different wave lengths. These wave lengths could be off phase from each other just enough that they might cancel each other out, making prayers to the Christian god silent.

Winds of Change (*continued*)

GLBT people have rights where there is freedom of intellectual expression. People in these wealthy, well-maintained countries may say they follow a religion, but never go to church or do anything about it.

That describes much of the western world, but until all those things happen in Uganda and the general African continent, there is no hope of equality for gays.

Even in some egalitarian societies, minorities such as gays have to treat everyone as an enemy until proven otherwise, and very carefully negotiate between the enemy lines, not attracting too much attention. Africa is now the most Christian/Islamic continent and therefore the most homophobic.

The AAU hopes that, in generations to come, the winds of change will start blowing in Africa as the result of our continued work in this lagging-behind continent. But Africans need friends like you if we are to bring that fundamental impact within our lives and societies.

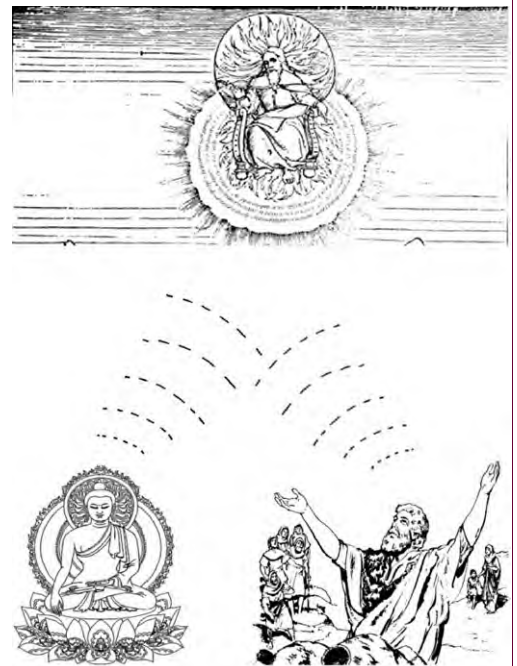
At this point, it is just a hypothesis, but the data does make sense.

Prayers to differ-

ent gods, after all, could not be traveling at the same wavelength. Otherwise all the gods would get their messages mixed up. And, as has been found in recent studies, prayers do not appear to work any better than mere chance. This could be because the prayers are not getting through.

Phase cancellation appears to be the principle danger to Christian prayers, which are omnidirectional, like the bass frequencies lower than 100Hz that emanate from your home theater's subwoofer. Muslim prayers, however, are unidirectional and must be precisely aimed toward the Kaaba Stone in Mecca in order to be effective. If they miss their intended target they will continue

past it and shoot off into space at the speed of prayer, bouncing off of Mars, and eventually landing on the planet Kolob, where the Mormon God will find them.



Freethought Cryptogram

Myhxcnhxm csnjim sfpX cy lx lxgnxpXt cy lx mxxj.

- Uwcsnx, nj Unze Txcyux'm zyhnz mcunv "Yjx Lni Sfvvr."

(For answer, see page 16)

New Policies (continued)

(Continued from page 7)

differences, but not as science. The Bible may be taught as literature, but it should not be taught with any doctrinal bias, e.g., claiming that the virgin birth of Jesus or the Trinity are matters of fact and not faith. Academic freedom does not give a license to teach lies as truth, faith as fact, myth as science, or material not endorsed by sound educational practice. Education should teach critical thinking and not dogma.

8) Charter Schools

Charter schools are publicly financed schools designed for a specific need or curriculum. Charter schools should be bound by the same rules ensuring separation of church and state as conventional public schools. Even if the students of a charter school are of a single relig-

ion, the school must not be used as a vehicle of religious instruction. No school should be housed on the same grounds as a house of worship, and when school employees have church offices, there must be a clear delineation of responsibilities.

End of Life Issues

Laws regulating end-of-life issues must be based on individual freedom and secular consequences. Religious ideas – such as the belief that humans have “souls” or that a god’s wishes must prevail – cannot be considered when making secular law. Such religious ideas may legitimately influence personal decisions, but they cannot be the basis for secular laws that must apply to everyone.

Minnesota Atheists supports the right of mentally competent, terminally ill people who are unable to find relief from their illness to have the voluntary options of self-termination, doctor-assisted suicide,

or euthanasia. Consent of the patient in these end-of-life decisions shall be sufficient to shield doctors and others from legal prosecution in their efforts to fulfill the wishes of terminally ill patients.

Minnesota Atheists supports safeguards to ensure that the personal decision to end one's life is truly voluntary. We support efforts to make sure that the desire to self-terminate is not merely the result of depression that might be alleviated through medication or counseling, or of financial or emotional pressure being put on the person by relatives or others.

Minnesota Atheists encourages people to create living wills (advance care, end-of-life directives) to make their end-of-life desires clearly known to people they trust, who can, if necessary, act on their behalf if they become unable to communicate.

It is only by giving people the right to make such end-of-life decisions for themselves that we maintain human dignity.

Book Review (continued)

bad review here. I think the book is an informative read from

tactical misstep. The first few chapters seem likely to dissuade, rather than seduce, a creationist who may be open-minded enough to see the error of their beliefs and change. Telling somebody they are wrong is never as powerful as demonstrating it to them.

For a reader who is already convinced of evolution or who is disillusioned with creationism, the beginning of the book likely presents very little problem, but I had hoped for something a little more approachable. The same holds true for much of the rest of the book, but for a different reason. While the good Professor does indeed cover a massive amount of ground, discussing molecular clocks, artificial and natural selection, genetic clocks, fossil evidence, DNA, and the like, he doesn't cleanly connect the dots and he writes at a level that many readers among the 40% would find daunting rather than illuminating. The fundamental problem is that he was never a creationist himself so he doesn't know how to think like one (some might say that is an oxymoron) and there-

fore constructs his argument in a way that is likely to be dismissed by them as confusing. Many times during the book I found myself thinking, "wow, that's really interesting, and I'm glad you shared that, but I can't imagine that my dad or brother would understand the implications of it and why it provides strong evidence for evolution; they would just miss the point". Dawkins does an excellent job of covering the ground, but a less excellent job of making it clear why this particular evidence strongly supports the conclusion of evolution rather than creation. It's as if he is so well aware of the subject, that he doesn't even realize how many things he is taking for granted on the part of the reader. Unfortunately, creationism is all about muddled thinking and half-baked "reasoning". To liberate people from its grip, they need to be confronted with clear, simple, inescapable conclusions they can't avoid. I don't trust many of them to be presented with a bunch of evidence and then see the bigger picture themselves.

I'm really not trying to write a

a great mind, but I am just not sure who the audience for the book truly is. It seems best suited to shoring up the stores of knowledge in people who have already broken free from creationism and need to fill in the gaps in their understanding of evolution. In that sense, it is a fine companion to his previous books, such as the phenomenal *The Ancestor's Tale* and the classic *The Blind Watchmaker*. However, if you're looking for a book to give your wacky creationist brother or neighbor to get them to see the light, this is not the book. It's not clear enough about the implications of the evidence it presents and it is likely to turn off more tentative readers in the first chapter or two. More's the pity. I hear his next book is a children's book. Maybe that will be the one for the creationists.

Summary: A good read, interesting material, probably not likely to make many creationist converts but definitely likely to be of interest to people who already accept evolution and want to learn more.

Three out of five stars.

Electronic MNA Newsletters

Increase the effectiveness of your Minnesota Atheists membership dues—switch from a paper to an electronic newsletter.

It costs us about \$22.00 per year per person to print and mail a paper version of the newsletter. It costs us *nothing* to email an electronic version. Also, you'll receive the electronic version sooner and it will be in full color.

If you're interested in making the switch from the paper to the electronic version of our newsletter, please contact editor@mnaatheists.org.

Constitution is Clear: No State Money for Religious Schools

by **Bob Schmitz**

(Note: the following appeared as the 'Letter of the Day' in the Thursday, October 28th edition of the Minneapolis Star Tribune. -ed.)

Tuesday's commentary "TiZA's success should not be punished" by two representatives of the Minnesota NAACP overlooks one salient fact: TiZA is a religious school collecting tax dollars in violation of the Minnesota Constitution. In addition, it is in a position to cherry-pick a student population designed to bolster its test scores. Ask it to take in any child coming through the door from the neighborhood, and I am willing to wager that those test scores will drop. It is not a public school and should not be funded by the taxpayers. I have been a member of NAACP for many years and will not renew my membership. The writers present a specious argument in defense of a school that is breaking the law.

I applaud the Minnesota Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union for taking TiZA to task. The Minnesota Department of Education is also to be commended for finally exercising its authority over charter schools. The 30 or so religion-sponsored charters mentioned in the commentary should also be investigated. Article XIII, Section 2 of the Minnesota Constitution states: "In no case shall any public money or property be appropriated or used for support of schools wherein the distinctive doctrines, creeds or tenets of any particular Christian or other religious sect are promulgated or taught." The charter school law was not intended to be a cover for religious institutions wanting to secure state funding. Charter schools, such as TiZA, that have violated the Constitution while receiving our tax dollars should be required to reimburse the state for all funds received to date.

Jesus of the Old Testament

by *Matthew Richardson*

The other day I was reading an article written by a gay expert on religion. He said that Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. Well, of course, that's completely untrue. Jesus thoroughly condemned homosexuality in Leviticus and in various books in the New Testament.

But a Christian would respond by saying: "No, no, you don't understand the Holy Bible. Jesus was not featured in the Old Testament." Well, okay, not by that name, but Jesus is busy throughout the Old Testament, slaughtering multitudes, inflicting swarms of insects and drought, aborting babies, and so on.

How do Christians define their god? Christians say that their monotheistic religion consists of "three gods in one." One is the father, another is the son, and another is a "holy ghost."

What is this holy ghost? I thought about that. It

has to be something that can't make a whole lot of noise, so it's probably their pet cat. But anyway, all three of those gods have been described – by Christians – as "eternal."

The father, son, and their little pet always existed, but one of them, the father, decided to send his son down to earth, give him flesh and having him pretend to be a human – an act of divine deceit.

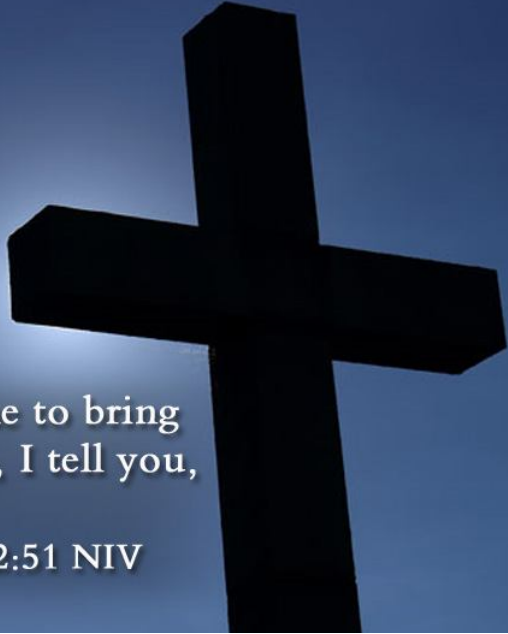
Here's what all three said about gay people: From the Good News Bible "No man is to have sexual relations with another man; God hates that." -Leviticus 18:22. "Even the women pervert the natural use of their sex by unnatural acts. In the same way the men give up natural sexual relations with women and burn with passion for each other. Men do shameful things with each other, and as a result they bring upon themselves the punishment they deserve for their wrong-doing." -Romans 1:26-27.

In both of these cases, the father, the son, and Fluffy are speaking with one voice (and using poor St. Paul as their press secretary – something like a dummy). Hence, Jesus, in both sections of the Holy Bible, condemns homosexuality.



by Eric Jayne

Nearly all Christians have a few favorite bible verses that they find to be deeply inspiring. The texts from many of these verses have been stamped on aesthetic snapshots depicting a variety of scenic natural landscapes.




Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.

Luke 12:51 NIV

Celebrating Biblical Scripture

Having observed several such pictures on display in neighboring office cubicles at work, I came to find it very curious that the recurring maniacal proclivities that dominate the bible (genocide, slavery, womanly submission, capricious rules, etc.) are not represented.

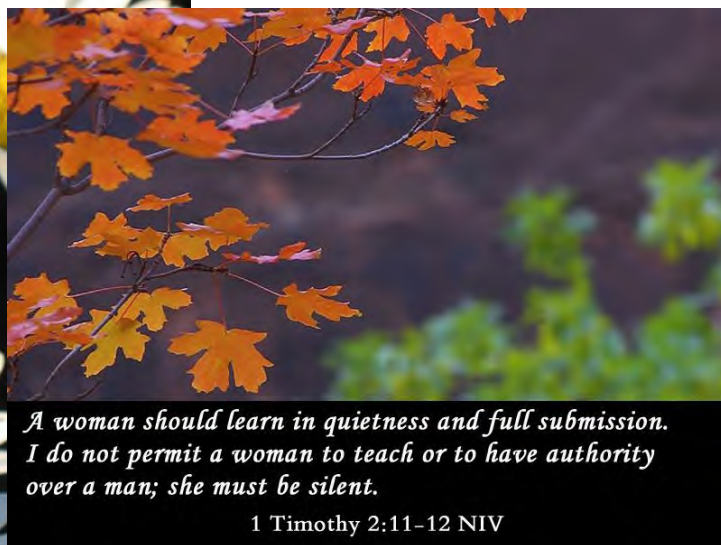
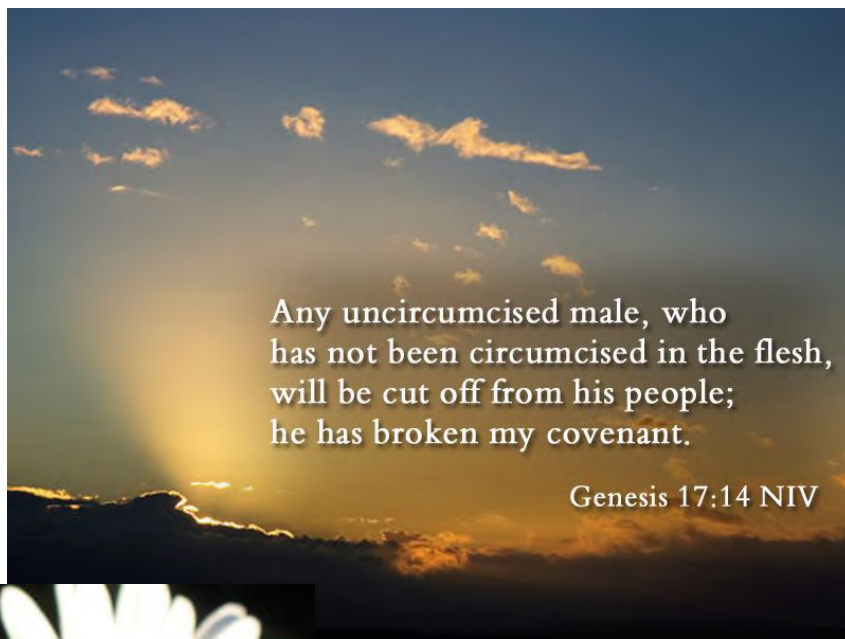
With the help of royalty-free pictures from *publicdomain-pictures.net*, along with Photoshop and the bible, I created a few bucolic pictures that extol biblical scripture in all of its demented glory. The Old Testament and New Testament are both represented as are the New Interna-



The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed.

Joshua 11:14 NIV

tional Version and King James translations. Of course there's a lot of savage biblical fodder to choose from, some arguably even more wicked than the verses I selected, so we can consider these to be just a few examples of the many inspirationally challenged pious art to be produced. If you have photo-editing software I encourage you to make your own. It's fun, free, decorative, and would make a great stocking stuffer for Christmas!



Minnesota Atheists Name Badge Order Form

Get your own engraved name badge

only \$10.00 with pin or clip fastener
(add \$2.00 for magnetic fastener)



To Order

1. Fill out form at right
2. Submit with your payment to any board member
3. Make checks payable to Minnesota Atheists

Name (20 character maximum per line)

Fastener Type: Pin Clip Magnetic (\$2.00 extra)

Amount Paid: \$ _____ Cash Check

(The badge shown above is just a sample; yours needn't say "George Francis Kane" unless you specifically request that it does. -ed.)

News and Notes



George Kane

Ambiguous Wording

absolute protection of freedom of expression, leading some to assert that the Human Rights Council Resolution on Freedom of Expression

would be ruled unconstitutional if it were ever adopted here. Fear of violence has cowed many critics into self-censorship, however. Recently, Yale University Press published *The Cartoons That Shook the World*, by Jytte Klausen, on the original Mohammed cartoons, yet deleted the cartoons themselves!

Improving cooperation with Muslim states may be a very practical diplomatic tactic, but it is not worth trading away the recognition by the United Nations of freedom of expression as a universal human right. In the near future, the Human Rights Council will have to decide what this bill actually means when Muslim nations use it to justify jailing religious dissidents for blasphemy, or demand that other nations silence critics of Islam. The Obama administration is likely to find that solid relations between nations cannot be built on ambiguous wording.

The Obama administration achieved a diplomatic coup at the United Nations this month when the Human Rights Council unanimously passed a resolution on freedom of expression that was jointly sponsored by the United States and Egypt (http://www.unitedstatesaction.com/documents/Oct2009-UNHRC/A_HRC_12_L.14_Rev.1-English.pdf.) The unanimous vote appeared to settle a confrontation between the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which seek to make blasphemy an international crime, and Western nations that uphold protections for individual expression against suppression by government. The resolution is a peace offering to the “Muslim street” and our Arab allies, to show a new spirit of sympathy and flexibility not evident during the Bush administration.

While not expressly endorsing blasphemy prosecutions, the administration departed from other Western allies by balancing freedom of speech against protection for religion. This is of particular concern to the International Hu-

manist Ethical Union (IHEU), a non-governmental organization with Observer status on the Council, which has stressed in discussions that only individuals, and not religions, have rights that the Council must protect. The Muslim states argue that individual rights are always accompanied by responsibilities, which is their justification for the right of governments to censor and prosecute opposition.

The resolution has no force in law, but it provides Muslim countries with moral authority to suppress domestic dissidents and to shame international critics for “negative religious stereotyping.” The U. S. State Department crowed that “in adopting this resolution, the Human Rights Council gives clear voice to a shared international understanding of the responsibilities of governments to condemn and address hate speech and to promote respect and tolerance.” But the boundary between hate speech and rational criticism is political, and the Muslim nations accepted the resolution as supporting laws against blasphemy “to promote respect and tolerance.”

Even in the West, protection for the right to criticize religion is in decline. In the years since the Cartoon Intifada in 2005, blasphemy prosecutions in Europe have increased to deter critics who might, by offending Muslims, provoke renewed violence. The United States has a uniquely

October Financial Report

Building Fund

Louis Geeraerts \$20

Vernon Young \$100

Visibility Fund

Scott Muir \$25

October Cable Report



George Kane, right, interviews August Berkshire on The Six C's of Atheism.

by Steve Petersen

For the October program George Kane interviewed August Berkshire on his pamphlet *The Six C's of Atheism*. If you would like more information on his pamphlet go to augustberkshire.com.

I would like to thank two of our long time volunteers for the cable program: Raleigh Nelson who was our sponsor in South Washington County and has helped on and off with the program for over 20 years, and Jack Richter, our sponsor from St. Cloud. Both of these volunteers found they could no longer maintain the chores. We have found Jim Bodsberg to host in South Washington County, but no other sponsor in St. Cloud for now.

Cable Crew: Art Anderson, George

Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg 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.

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

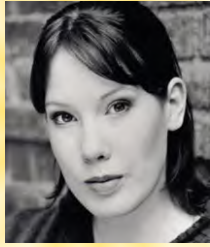
South Washington County: Channel 14. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Bodsberg.

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Channel 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

Cryptogram Answer

Sometimes things have to be believed to be seen.

- Ruthie, in Rick Detorie's comic strip "One Big Happy."



Crystal Dervetski

CD Review: *Here Comes Science*

They Might Be Giants (TMBG) just released their new-

est addition to their already amazing catalog of children's albums. But before you relegate this one to the kids, it's really important that you take a listen. John Flansburgh and John Linnell have once again achieved new musical heights, and have created a children's CD that is wonderful for adults to listen to as well. Moments in the CD will make young and old absolutely giddy with delight.

TMBG tackle a wide variety of scientific topics, from waves and rainbows, to the universe, to the way the human body functions. They're even kind enough to reprise their cult hit, "Why Does The Sun Shine?" (a late 1950s children song written by Tom Glazer). They follow up the catchy tune with an update that explains "Why Does the Sun Really Shine," in which they discuss the most recent theories of the sun being plasma, and not necessarily a gas. You'll want to hear this one if you've ever wondered if the line "that thesis has been rendered invalid..." can be sung in a sexy, hip way. (It can.)

"Meet the Elements" and "I Am A Paleontologist" introduce children to chemistry and paleontology, respectively. Hearing TMBG bassist Danny Weinkauf is a real treat; he has a great singing voice and sense of humor. You'll surely smile when he discusses the evolution of species and how interesting it is to study the fossils of various creatures.

Probably the songs that atheists will find the most fun to listen to are "Science is Real", "Put It To the

Test," and "My Brother the Ape."

There has been some controversy regarding the song "Science is Real" amongst people of faith. The portion of the tune they most object to is the following:

"Now I like those stories about angels, unicorns and elves / Yeah I like those stories as much as anybody else / But when I'm seeking knowledge either simple or abstract /, the

Here Comes Science, They Might Be Giants Disney Sound, released September 2009.

facts are with science. The facts are with science."

It seems that certain religious groups object to their precious angels being lumped in with unicorns and elves. Of course, most freethinkers will relish this moment and listen to the song over and over just because of this line alone.

But if the people complaining would even take the time to listen to the rest of the album that they may find "My Brother the Ape" and "Put It To the Test" to be much more offensive to them.

In "My Brother the Ape", TMBG have written a song about the interconnectedness of life from the point of view of a man writing a letter to his sister. He has just attended a family reunion, and was surprised who he found in attendance. He somewhat resents the fact that he is compared to the apes, and tells her that he doesn't think he looks like them in any way. Then he states this brilliant observation:

"But I'll admit that I look more like a chimp than I look like my cousin the

shrimp /Or my distant kin the lichens or the snowy egret or the moss. /And I find it hard to recognize some relatives of ours / like the rotifer, the sycamore, iguanas and sea stars..."

Lastly, in my favorite song of all, TMBG encourage young people to "Put It To the Test." I don't know what could be more 'dangerous' for children than to tell them they should learn to think for themselves

and to try to find the answers to questions or problems they encounter in their lives. Although the video that TMBG presented

for the song highlights the scientific method and shows experiments on plants, weight, and other more concrete subjects, I can't help but view most of the lyrics with an atheistic perspective. Here is a sampling of what I find are the most excellent lyrics from this song:

"If somebody says they figured it out and they're leaving any room for doubt come up with a test / Are you sure that that thing is true, or did someone just tell it to you?"

"If you want to know if it's the truth, then, my friend, you are going to need proof- Come up with a test / Don't believe it 'cause they say it's so. / If it's not true, you have a right to know."

"A fact is just a fantasy unless it can be checked..."

So, with the holiday season just around the corner, you probably have some seasonal gift giving to do. Consider this CD your best bet for children young and old. I'm thinking of buying as many copies I can afford and giving them out with my usual anonymous seasonal giving... And don't forget all of your kin, including the other Great Apes.



Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org
P.O. Box 120304, New Brighton MN 55112

JOIN OR RENEW MEMBERSHIP

- \$35 – Individual Membership
- \$45 – Household Membership
- \$75 – Sustaining Fund Membership
- \$20 – Student (newsletter by email, send copy of fee statement or high school ID)
- \$600 – Life Membership
- \$25 -- Newsletter Only

DONATE TO SPECIAL FUNDS

- \$ _____ General Expense / Outreach Fund
- \$ _____ Building Fund
- \$ _____ Radio Fund
- \$ _____ Monthly Donation

All memberships include the newsletter.

To pay by credit card or PayPal, please

Payment by: Check (enclosed) for \$ _____ payable to **Minnesota Atheists**.

Name: _____ Phone (____) _____

Address: _____

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

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

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. **Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous**, 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**. (No meeting in July or August.) See MNAtheists.org for details.

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. (May, August, and November 2009).

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, nup@Minn.net.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 p.m., **Dinner Social**. 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, nup@Minn.net. Details in Atheists Weekly E-mail.

Thursdays, 7 p.m., **Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)** See

cashumn.org for program and location.

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.

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists board meeting**. Location varies. Grant Steves, 651-774-1992

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

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

Minnesota Atheists
P.O. Box 120304
New Brighton, Minnesota 55112

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

DATED MATERIAL—DO NOT DELAY



NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage
PAID
Minneapolis MN
Permit No. 1613

“Langdon often reminded his students that most modern religions included stories that did hold up to scientific scrutiny: everything from Moses parting the Red Sea ... to Joseph Smith using magic eyeglasses to translate the Book of Mormon from a series of gold plates he found buried in upstate New York. *Wide acceptance of an idea is not proof of its validity.*”

—**Dan Brown**, *The Lost Symbol* (italics in original text)

**“Check out the Minnesota Atheist Podcast
at
mnatheist.org.”**