

The Minnesota Atheist

From Darwin to Hitler? How Creationists Revise History

Once again in October, Minnesota Atheists is honored to have as our speaker Dr. Hector Avalos.



One of the most persistent arguments being used against evolution is that it led to the Holocaust. The movie, *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* makes this argument a cornerstone of its creationist agenda.

Dr. Avalos will refute this myth, and he will expose the real roots of the Holocaust in Christian anti-Judaism.

Dr. Avalos is Professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University, where he was named Professor of the Year in 1996 and Master Teacher in 2003. He received his Ph.D. in Biblical and Near Eastern Studies from Harvard in 1991, and is the author of numerous books, including *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (2005) and *The End of Biblical Studies* (2007). His talk is a version of a chapter he wrote for *The*

Christian Delusion (2010), edited by John Loftus.

His talk will be preceded by a Minnesota Atheists business meeting and followed by a trip to a restaurant.

Please join us.

IF YOU GO

What: Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting followed by Dr. Avalos' presentation

Where: Roseville Public Library, 2180 Hamline Ave N (Hamline & Cty Rd B)

When: Sunday, October 17th
 1:00-1:15 p.m. - Social Time
 1:15-1:45 p.m. - Business Meeting
 1:45-2:00 p.m. - Social Time
 2:00-3:30 p.m. - Presentation
 4:00 p.m. - Dinner

Panda Garden Buffet
 1706 Lexington Ave. N.
 (Lexington Ave. & Larpenteur Ave.)
 Roseville, MN 55113

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The Minnesota Atheist

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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.

Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

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

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Freethought Cooperation

August Berkshire



Cooperation among atheist and humanist groups of goodwill is always an admirable goal. For many years Minnesota Atheists has been a leader in this area. In just this year, we have worked cooperatively with the following groups:

Humanists of Minnesota - Ongoing co-hosting of summer picnics and the winter solstice party. Making their group's brochures available at festivals at which we have tables. Working cooperatively on our *Atheists Talk* radio show. Working together on the local appearance of speakers Sean Faircloth and George Erickson.

Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH) - Ongoing co-hosting of summer picnics. Providing pamphlets on atheism for them to distribute to fellow students. Sharing a speaker this November.

Camp Quest of Minnesota - Providing volunteers and donations. Making their group's brochures available at festivals at which we have tables.

Or Emet (Society for Humanistic Judaism) - Providing a speaker for one of their meetings.

Friends Free of Theism [St. Cloud] - Working together on our Adopt-A-Highway cleanup in Rice. Sharing a booth at the St. Cloud Gay Pride event.

Secular Student Alliance [SCSU, St. Cloud] - Providing pamphlets on atheism for them to distribute to fellow students. Providing a debater for a debate that attracted about 1000 people.

Rochester Area Freethinkers - Sharing a booth at the Rochester Gay Pride event. Providing a speaker for their upcoming December meeting.

Red River Freethinkers [Fargo] - Providing speakers for their recent regional conference.

Atheists, Agnostics, and Secular Humanists [NDSU, Fargo] - Providing a speaker for one of their meetings. Providing pamphlets on atheism for them to distribute to fellow students.

Lake Superior Freethinkers [Duluth] - Sharing a booth at the Duluth-Superior Gay Pride event. Providing a speaker for their upcoming November meeting.

Student Skeptic Society [UMD, Duluth] - Providing a debater for a debate that will occur in December.

La Crosse Area Freethought Society -

Sharing a booth at the La Crosse Gay Pride event. Providing pamphlets on atheism for them to distribute. Providing a PowerPoint presentation on atheism that they can use themselves at schools.

Secular Student Society [UW, La Crosse] - Providing a speaker for one of their meetings. Providing a debater for a debate that will occur in November.

American Humanist Association - Providing speakers for their national convention.

Atheist Alliance International - Providing speakers for their national convention. Conducting a joint membership mailing.

Foundation Beyond Belief - Becoming a founding Partner.

Our Speakers Bureau, chaired by Laura Hutt, is working on even more outreach.

In addition to the above-mentioned specific help that Minnesota Atheists offers other atheist and humanist groups, our Atheist Weekly E-mail, edited by George Kane, advertises freethought events throughout Minnesota and the border cities of Fargo and La Crosse.

At most of the festivals at which we have tables and booths, we not only offer pamphlets from Minnesota Atheists but also from the Humanists of Minnesota, Camp Quest, Foundation Beyond Belief, Secular Coalition for America, Secular Student Alliance, American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International, Freedom From Religion Foundation, and the American Humanist Association.

Minnesota Atheists is officially affiliated with American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International,

President's Column continued on page 5

Atheists Talk: Back on the Air!

by Steve Petersen



Minnesota Atheists restarted our popular radio program on August first. The host of the program is Mike Haubrich and the director is August Berkshire. We have a six month contract at a cost of \$5,320.00. We have sold some ads to help with the cost and had two \$500.00 donations from August Berkshire and Randy Quast to kick off the funding and a number of smaller donations. Each donation is greatly appreciated. Original music was composed, played, and recoded by Brent Michael Davis.

Our past programs have been as follows:

August 1: Scott Lohman interviewed Robert Price on his book *The Case Against the Case for Christ*;

August 8: Mike Haubrich interviewed Grant Steves on his research on Conversion, Deconversion and Religious Indoctrination;

August 15: Lynn Fellman interviewed Greg Laden on Old Bones & Modern Genetics;

August 22: Mike Haubrich interviewed Todd Torkelson on Skeptical Confessions of a Ghosthunter;

August 29: MNA was live at the State Fair with Mike Haubrich, August Berkshire, George Kane and Laura Hutt;

September 5: Humanists of Minnesota were live at the Fair with Scott Lohman, Dale Handeen, Nathan Curland and Mike Haubrich;

September 12: Stephanie Zvan interviewed Jason Thibeault on *Astrology & Evidence*;

September 19: Scott Lohman interviewed George Erickson on his book *Eyes Wide Open*.

The programs can be listened to on our web site www.mnatheists.org and are listed by date. Page back to the program you want to hear. The program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00. Central Time at AM 950, or streamed live from www.KTNF.com and type in a Minnesota zip code.

If you would like to donate to keep the program on the air, please go to: http://mnatheists.org/component/option,com_civicrm/Itemid,55/



Recent Events

by George Kane



For several years, we have celebrated the fifth Sunday of any month with a highly successful fundraising meal for our special projects. For the last couple of years, this has been a Flying Spaghetti Monster feast featuring a wide variety of sauces donated by members. This August, however, the fifth Sunday fell during the State Fair, and we were unable to secure any of our usual locations for the event. To keep our tradition alive, our *pastafarians* gathered for dinner at The Old Spaghetti Factory in Minneapolis. Since there was competition that day from the state fair and other events, the turnout was only a dozen, but the event raised \$283 in donations for the Radio Fund.

The American Atheists held its first

Statewide Minnesota Conference at the Southdale Library on Sunday, September 19. The four-hour event featured five presenters. Dr. George Erickson, former president of the Humanists of Minnesota, spoke about his latest book and about what must be done to cope with climate change. Lavanam, the director of the Atheist Center in India, spoke about Gora (his father), Gandhi and the struggle for civil rights of Untouchables. Cecil Bothwell, an atheist city councilman in North Carolina, extolled the virtues of atheism in a wide-ranging presentation that included rap songs he wrote. Crystal Dervetski presented a primer on critical thinking, and Dr. Bill van Druten ended the conference with a couple of atheist bedtime stories.

The highest attendance at one time was about ninety, but since people were arriving and leaving all afternoon, there is no way to determine the total number of people who attended.



Photos courtesy of Dan Jensen

President's Column (continued)

American Humanist Association, Center for Inquiry, Foundation Beyond Belief, and the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). (We are not eligible to become a chapter of Freedom From Religion Foundation but we have a great relationship with them.)

By supporting Minnesota Atheists you help support atheism throughout the state, nation, and world. Talk about a Big Bang for your buck!

Overlap in membership and economies of scale suggest that mergers might benefit our movement. On the other hand, we're all familiar with the adage that organizing atheists is like herding cats. Only time will tell, but Minnesota Atheists remains open to such discussions.

News and Notes



by George Kane

Two stories of religious strife between Christians and Muslims in America played out in September.

First came manufactured Christian outrage over the approval by New York City planners of a Muslim culture center down a side street two blocks from Ground Zero. Presidential hopefuls Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich demanded that the “Ground Zero Mosque” be stopped, as it was an insult to the people who died on September 11, 2001, and a triumphal celebration of Muslim conquest. When President Obama pointed out that New York City Muslims have a right to build a mosque on property they own, opponents of the project were dismissive. “Of course they have the *right* to build the mosque,” lectured Jay Sekulow, Executive Director of the American Center for Law and Justice. “That’s not the point.”

But if the right of Muslims under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment is, indeed, not the issue, why was Sekulow imploring listeners to his radio program to sign a petition asking the New York City Landmark Commission to prohibit the demolition of the building currently at the site? Sekulow made no attempt to justify this ruse. The petitioners had no interest in the historic importance or architectural artistry of the site. Their only concern is to stop the construction of the so-called mosque, which is nothing more than a large room in the planned 5-story building.

The whole campaign is about turning the mosque into a political issue, enlisting politicians to the cause of using the tools of government to deny Muslims their free exercise rights. If, as Sekulow claims, denying constitutional rights to Muslims is “not the point,” he should be urging politicians not to get involved.

Sekulow tells his listeners that those who express support for the right of Muslims to build the mosque are contradicting their professed support for freedom of religion, for women’s rights and the rights of individuals, because under Islamic rule these would be eliminated. This is of course nonsense. Support for any group to exercise the right to freedom of religious exercise guaranteed by the First Amendment in no way

implies support for their right to control government, in violation of the Establishment Clause of that same First Amendment.

Meanwhile, in Gainesville, Florida, under heavy criticism from government officials, Pastor Terry Jones cancelled plans to burn copies of the Qur’an in a bonfire on September 11. General David Petraus, Commander of US forces in Afghanistan, warned that it would inflame Muslim hatred and result in the death of American soldiers. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama denounced the plan as an insult not only to Islam, but to America’s treasured religious tolerance, and a thoroughly dumb idea. Even government officials are entitled to their opinion, and those comments served to distance the US government from Pastor Jones’ contempt for Islam. Disturbingly, however, local officials threatened to stop him for violating a regulation listing the materials that could be used to build a bonfire. Books are not on the list. They threatened to use a regulation enacted to reduce fire danger to suppress blasphemy.

It goes without saying that Pastor Jones’ planned bonfire was provocative and stupid. Burning the Qur’an, however, is constitutionally protected political expression and religious exercise. No matter how inflammatory or offensive people may regard burning someone’s holy books, government may do nothing to prevent it.

Pastor Jones heads the Dove World Outreach Center, which has fewer than 50 members. The whole incident has been derided by many commentators as a grievous case of media overreaction, creating international outrage over an event so insignificant that it deserved no notice. Others buy into General Petraeus’ consequential argument, and quote the nostrum that “rights demand responsibility.” They assert that Pastor Jones should have been stopped because it could be expected that people

News and Notes continued on page 15

***The Freethought Follies Are Coming –
We Are Looking for Singers and Actors!***

by Jerry Rauser

The Freethought Winter Solstice Celebration will be on December 19 this year (hosted by Minnesota Atheists) and planning is underway for the highlight of the evening, The Freethought Follies!



Actors and Singers Wanted!

We have some great wacky comedy skits and opportunities to sing with a vocal ensemble and professional backup band. We are looking for actors and singers of any skill level who are members of our Freethought Community and would like to participate.

Please contact Jerry Rauser at jrauser@comcast.net, or (763) 535-7637.



Dropping Jehovah: James Zimmerman's Critical Thinking Presentation

On September 11, James Zimmerman delivered an engaging presentation before the Critical Thinking Discussion Group in Maple Grove. Zimmerman spoke about his experience as a practicing Jehovah's Witness (JW) and the struggle he encountered from leaving the church and eventually becoming an atheist.

Zimmerman began his presentation by giving the 21 attendees a brief history lesson of the Jehovah's Witness religion. He explained how the religion was born out of the east coast religious revivals during the early 19th century and that while Charles Russell is credited as the founder by creating the Watchtower, it was Joseph Rutherford who came up with the name Jehovah's Witness and organized the religion into what we recognize today.

Zimmerman then delved into his own personal story. He explained that he was brought up in a devoutly JW home. By the age of eight, Zimmerman was giving JW speeches, and when he was old enough, he worked at the JW headquarters in Brooklyn. He had a bright future in the JW religion until he started to become skeptical of the Bible stories and rationale for specific doctrinal rules (forbidden birthday celebrations and contempt for higher education, to name a couple examples).

After doing some research of the flood story in Genesis, Zimmerman contacted the Watchtower Society with carefully constructed questions. He didn't want to come across as too challenging for fear of unfavorable consequences that would come

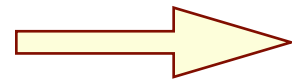
if he were thought to be an apostate. Unsatisfied with the answers he received, Zimmerman nonetheless kept the findings to himself, divulging the information only to a close JW friend. Shortly after this discussion his friend left the church, became shunned by his friends and family, and was divorced by his pious JW wife.



by Eric Jayne

In his presentation, Zimmerman explained the structural Orwellian nature enforced in the JW faith. This required him to keep his skepticism to himself and not share his doubt with anyone, not even his wife; for fear that she might divorce him. Zimmerman explained that if one is to openly question Bible stories and JW teachings they risk being reported to elders in the church, which could lead to being ex-communicated from their friends and family. In order to preserve his relationships, especially with his wife and young child, he had to join everyone else in shunning his ex-JW friend. He continued to keep his skepticism to himself until he and his wife had a very important discussion about a year after their friend was ex-communicated.

Zimmerman and his wife bravely admitted to each other that neither of them believed in the JW faith anymore. After a very long conversation they wondered where to go next: a Catholic church? Methodist church? Synagogue? One thing was for sure, they wanted to reconcile with the friend they'd been shunning. As it turned out, their friend held no ill feelings and now identifies as an atheist.



Dropping Jehovah (continued)

As Zimmerman explained to the group, the JW faith is a very logical approach to Christianity. It's intellectual in that members are required to read monthly issues of *The Watchtower*, multiple Bible study aides, and attend Kingdom Hall meetings several times a week. A significant purpose of the JW Bible study aides is to provide convincing arguments against other religious faiths and other Christian denominations so there was little interest for Zimmerman or his wife to attend any sort of religious services.

Zimmerman reasoned that since the meaning of the word "atheist" means a person "without theism"—its Greek rooted "a" means without and "theos" means God—and Zimmerman was

without a theological belief, he decided that he was now an atheist just like his ex-JW friend.

Before Zimmerman fielded questions from the attendees he offered a few strategic questions to ask JW doorknockers next time they might come to your door: "If I join your religion will I be able to leave without being harassed?" Another good question might be: "Are you presently shunning somebody because they dared to question parts of the Bible or Watchtower teachings?" For more ideas of good questions to ask, and for more details about Zimmerman's struggle with the JW faith, check out his recent article—"Questions for Doorknockers"—published in the September/October 2010 issue of *The Humanist* (http://www.thehumanist.org/humanist/10_sept_oct/Zimmerman.html).

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

U mdk i rzhufis i kir tiztwi amz fwdup
 ikilbhmurj un tlinhuris, drs hmdh ai fdr sz
 rzhmurj hz fmdrji uh, wzzc qiyzli hmib
 flznn hmi lzds.

-Nhitmir Mdacurj

(Answer on page 16)



You **WILL** Read This Title!

by James Zimmerman



In novels, plays, and motion pictures, it's always the same. From *Star Wars* to *the Matrix*, *Lord of the Rings* to *Battlestar Galactica* to *Harry Potter* and even *Julius Caesar*, there's a prophecy, and the characters have been holding to it for many years, generations even. The problem is, the prophecy is so vague, no one can agree on its meaning. Even when the prophecy's fulfillment is readily apparent to some of the characters, others balk. In the rare cases there's a general consensus regarding the prophecy's fulfillment, it's only post-fulfillment that such agreement arises, thereby rendering the prophecy sterile.

Why do storytellers resort to such lame devices? Why are the prophecies so unclear as to be left futile, if not completely useless? Probably because the authors of such works grew up being sold on the idea that all prophecies must be cryptic. An idea, no doubt, handed down to them from their religious upbringing.

Indeed, when trying to prove the bible's divine inspiration, a favorite recourse of the fundamentalist is to point to prophecy. Among the more popular examples are: the Old Testament prophesied Jesus' arrival, Daniel predicts the march of world powers, and Revelation predicts the end of days.

But for thinking persons, in order for a prophecy to have any sort of merit, it must meet four basic requirements. Let's consider them one by one:

1. The prophecy must have predictive power

No, this is not a tautology. Many bible-lovers apologetically maintain that some of the prophecies in their book can only be (fully) understood in retrospect. Jehovah's Witnesses claim: "Just as the apostles understood many prophecies concerning the Messiah only after Jesus' death and resurrection, Christians today understand Bible prophecy in its finest detail only after it has been fulfilled" (*The Watchtower*, 15 March 2000, page 13).

If a prophecy is only understood after the fact – or worse: if it is only discovered after the events it was intended to predict, then the skeptic must ask: What good is it? After all, many prophecies can be retrofitted. Even the Nostradamus apologist website Spiritual-Knowledge.net admits, "not all the prophecies are clear" (<<http://www.spiritual-knowledge.net/human/nostradamus.php>>, accessed 11 August 2010).

Let's say that in 1995 I declared: "In the year of great darkness there will be a terrible storm." What year

am I talking about? How will my followers be able to identify and measure greatness? And what about that storm? What qualifies it as terrible? Is it literal, or does it reference some sort of disease, war, or economic disaster?

Returning to 2010, let's suppose further that my followers argued: "Oh, obviously James was speaking of the year 2004. See, the storm in question was the Indian Ocean tsunami, and he called it 'the year of great darkness' because there were two partial solar eclipses that year." But this only raises more questions. Why did I make the prophecy if it didn't do any good? Why did I make it so vague? If I could 'see' the future, then why didn't I say something more along the lines of: "In December 2004, there will be a massive tsunami in the Indian Ocean." See? That would actually have some value. That would have some predictive power.

Prophecies that only become clear after the events do not predict, they 'postdict.' And that, as anyone with any cognitive powers can tell you, is easy ("I, writing in the year 2010, postdict that the Minnesota Twins will win the 1991 World Series").

2. The prophecy must be specific

This is the most important of the four.

When Isaiah predicted "he will be called Wonderful Counselor..." (Isaiah 9:6, New International Version) he was making an essentially useless prophecy (if, indeed it was even Isaiah that was making the prophecy). Just as someone was sure to challenge the Matrix and henceforth be retrofitted as "The One," any dynamic leader that would one day rise up to lead Israel could, in retrospect, be termed a Wonderful Counselor. It's akin to that famed prophecy of the one who will bring balance to the Force. Sure...someone will probably do that someday, and then we can just apply the prophecy to him, her, or it. There were, likewise, several prophecies in the Sacred Scrolls of *Battlestar Galactica* that, tragically, never seemed to help anyone figure anything out. To the contrary, the squabbling and infighting they caused served to mute any benefit they may have held, such as the oft-cited passage that a dying leader would lead humanity to the promised land. Again...great...will the people who are not dying

You Will Read This Title (Continued)

please sit down so that we can figure out who the leader is? And what about the soothsayer's ominous admonition to Caesar to "beware the Ides of March?" At least Gaius had the advantage of knowing which day warranted special caution, but in retrospect, he probably would've appreciated a little more specificity. And then there's the book of Revelation. Nearly the entire book is so vague and cryptic that only an acid-dropper or self-proclaimed mouthpiece of Yahweh could dare hazard a guess as to its interpretations. For example, Revelation 8:7 says: "The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth." One book claims this

prophecy was fulfilled "in a notable way at the second historic gathering of God's people at Cedar Point, Ohio, September 10, 1922." (*Revelation-It's Grand Climax at Hand*, page 134). Um...okay. Why not? Maybe it was also fulfilled by the events of September 11th, or by my recent visit to the dentist's office. Who's to know?

And, of course, anytime a prophecy does happen to be so specific that its flaws are obvious, its devotees can (and do) argue that the passage was figurative.

Requirements #3 and 4 will be considered in next month's issue. Stay tuned.

La Crosse Gay Pride Festival Participation

Members of the La Crosse Area Freethought Society (LCAFS) (from left, Jan Contreras and Hank Zumach) and Minnesota Atheists (August Berkshire and Matthew Richardson) took turns staffing a booth at the La Crosse Gay Pride festival on August 28. The weather was sunny, hot, and windy. Speaking of hot wind, outside the festival gates a handful of evangelical Christians held a peaceful, though misguided, counter-demonstration. August confronted them and was told that one reason they could "prove" homosexuality was "unnatural" was that gay people, on average, didn't live as long as straight people. August pointed out that the higher level of suicides for gay youth was attributable to Christian persecution. The Christians also pointed to AIDS as a consequence of "sin." August countered that lesbians have the fewest STDs of all sexual

orientations, so they must be "god's chosen people." In the end, it is impossible to argue with fundamentalists who are convinced that even the worst god-ordained atrocities of the Bible can be "properly interpreted" (i.e. spin-doctored) so as not to reflect badly on their god or their religion.



Fifty Years Ago...

John Fitzgerald Kennedy delivered the following address (reprinted below is a portion) to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, on September 12, 1960. He was campaigning for president, and many conservative Protestants opposed him because he was a Catholic. This speech is considered a classic exposition of American separation of church and state.

Reverend Meza, Reverend Reck, I'm grateful for your generous invitation to speak my views.

While the so-called religious issue is necessarily and properly the chief topic here tonight, I want to emphasize from the outset that we have far more critical issues to face in the 1960 election; the spread of Communist influence, until it now festers 90 miles off the coast of Florida--the humiliating treatment of our President and Vice President by those who no longer respect our power--the hungry children I saw in West Virginia, the old people who cannot pay their doctor bills, the families forced to give up their farms--an America with too many slums, with too few schools, and too late to the moon and outer space.

These are the real issues which should decide this campaign. And they are not religious issues--for war and hunger and ignorance and despair know no religious barriers.

But because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected President, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured--perhaps deliberately, in some quarters less responsible than this. So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again--not what kind of church I believe in, for that should be important only to me--but what kind of America I believe in.

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute--where no

Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote--where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference--and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish--where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source--where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials--and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.

For while this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed, in other years it has been, and may someday be again, a Jew--or a Quaker--or a Unitarian--or a Baptist. It was Virginia's harassment of Baptist preachers, for example, that helped lead to Jefferson's statute of religious freedom. Today I may be the victim--but tomorrow it may be you--until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped at a time of great national peril.

Finally, I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end--where all men and all churches are treated as equal--where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice--where there is no Catholic vote, no anti-Catholic vote, no bloc voting of any kind--and where Catholics, Protestants and Jews, at both the lay and pastoral level, will refrain from those attitudes of disdain and division which have so often marred their works in the past, and promote instead the American ideal of brotherhood.

Thanks for Helping Keep Minnesota Clean!

**Adopt-a-Highway
Cleanup and Lunch,
Sept. 12, 11:30 a.m.,
Lakeville, MN**

Pictured:

Standing from right to left:
Nadya, Dawn MacDonald,
Rhonda Arkley, Vanita
Mishra, Sanjay Mishra, Art
Anderson, Shirley Moll
Kneeling: Brian Foster and
Richard Trombley

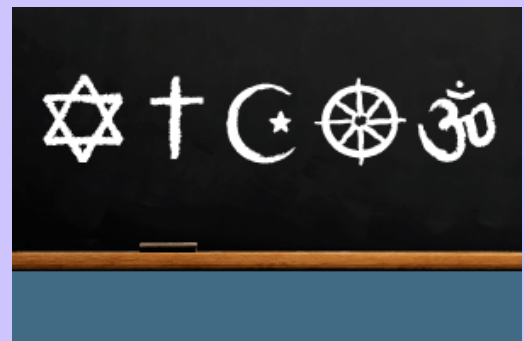
Photo by Steve Petersen



The Pew Forum’s U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey

On Tuesday, September 28th, the Pew Forum reported in an executive summary that “atheists agnostics, Jews and Mormons are among the highest-scoring groups on a new survey of religious knowledge, outperforming evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics on questions about the core teachings, history and leading figures of major world religions.” Out of 32 questions asked to a random sampling of people via landline and cellular phone, those who identified as atheist or agnostic correctly answered an average of 20.9 questions. Jews were not far behind at 20.5. Hispanic Catholics averaged the lowest, at 11.6. The summary also reported that atheists and agnostics “do particularly well on questions about the role of religion in public life, including a question about what the U.S. Constitution says about religion.”

Read the full report at pewforum.com. At their site, you can also test yourself against your fellow Americans by taking an abbreviated version of the quiz.



Book Review

by James
Zimmerman

In *Disproving Christianity*, author David McAfee sets out to deftly, succinctly point out all the reasons why the Holy Bible can't possibly be the word of a loving, all-knowing deity. And he does a respectable job.

McAfee begins right off (in the acknowledgments section, where it's likely to be missed) by encouraging "everyone to question the things around them, even those they take for granted as being true, and never end the search for evidence." Such a statement is likely to be well-received by even the dyed-in-the-wool variety of Christians. But no sooner does McAfee lure them in than he hits them with this next sentence: "No religion is worth killing or dying for." That's the style McAfee takes throughout his short text; he draws in his readers with reasonable, rational arguments, then points out why this leads, ultimately, to the conclusion that Christianity can't possibly be 'the truth.'

McAfee's target audience is what he terms 'cultural Christians,' a term McAfee devised when he met a man who self-identified as 'half Christian and half agnostic.' This large group of individuals (McAfee claims) make up the bulk of Americans are those who neither know what it means to be Christians nor bother to follow the religion. They've simply been raised in a Christian tradition and, thus, as a matter of cultural association, identify as Christians.

McAfee spends the next four chapters offering brief, quick overviews of Christianity's major failings, even breaking a few down into a step-by-step logical problem. For example, he breaks down the contradiction inherent in being in God's

love when another family member has been condemned by that same God. Then there are the bible's many contradictions and absurd practices, a topic that covers two chapters.

Some of the arguments only work on certain denominations, however. When McAfee argues that the earth is older than the bible claims, many Christians would likely respond that the events of Genesis 1:1 transpired billions of years ago, and are thus in full agreement with modern science. Page 30 begins a discussion of the inconsistency of miracles today, but some denominations teach that their god performs no miracles today. And on page 35, McAfee notes that, while the bible claims man can not live more than 120 years, some people undoubtedly do. But, again, some Christians will reason that the scripture in question (Genesis 6:3) was referring, not to a limit on humans' lifespan, but to the time remaining before god brought the Great Flood. Such arguments may be sufficient to cause some cultural Christians to close the book and feel that McAfee doesn't disprove their religion. But it's a credit to the author that he includes as many points as he can in his short text so as to find something that will get Christians of every flavor to stop and rethink their 'cultural' identity.

Disproving Christianity doesn't go into much detail on any of its dozens of arguments. But neither is it meant to. At \$14.99 (on Amazon.com) and a mere 81 pages of print, it is, as the final paragraph says, a

"pocket guide to the refutation of Christianity." McAfee closes with a plea to only believe in things which we first properly understand, and his little book is ideally suited to help cultural Christians. After all, a Christian who is turned off by the sarcasm of William Hopper's *Heathen's Guide to World Religions*, the passion of Dawkins' *The God Delusion* or the exhaustive depth of Mike Davis' *Atheist's Bible Companion to the New Testament* (all books reviewed in previous issues of *the Minnesota Atheist*), are more likely to pick up *Disproving Christianity*, which makes a point of being polite and respectful. I suggest leaving it out on your table when your culturally Christian relatives stop by.



Disproving Christianity: Refuting the World's Most Followed Religion, by David McAfee
96 pages, CreateSpace, ©2010

News and Notes (continued)

would die in the Muslim backlash. But I believe that both of these arguments are weak. Even though Pastor Jones cancelled the book burning in a farcical confusion over whether there was an agreement to move the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque,” riots broke out in Punjab and Kashmir, resulting in at least 15 deaths. The riots were sparked by twitter rumors that a burned Qur’an was found at a mosque in Michigan.

The lesson is that we cannot abridge rights in the United States because we fear offending Muslims abroad. There are those who want to foment Muslim anger against the U.S., and they have shown that they can do so even over fictitious events. And while government suppression would undermine our commitment to human rights, self-censorship is equally corrosive to our free marketplace of ideas.



Volunteer Opportunity

Minnesota Atheists is currently searching for an Assistant Treasurer to assist in the managing of the organization's books. The Treasurer's responsibilities take no more than an hour to an hour and a half a week, and no more computer skills are necessary than knowledge of the Quicken Financial Software. If you are interested in filling this position, please contact the MNA Board of Directors at board@mnatheists.org.

September Treasurer's Report

<u>General/Visibility Fund</u>	<u>\$30</u>
Andrea Berger	\$5
Daniel Hansen	\$15
Anna Hanna	\$10
<u>Building Fund</u>	<u>\$141</u>
Andrea Berger	\$5
Daniel Norte	\$35
Ioannis Roussos	\$100
<u>Radio Fund</u>	<u>\$313</u>
Andrea Berger	\$5
Steve Petersen	\$25
Anonymous	\$23
Karen Blackie	\$5
Vernon Young	\$100
James Wright	\$25
Nancy Ruhland	\$20
James Barri	\$10
George Kane	\$100
TOTAL INCOME:	\$484



Donation amounts may not sum exactly to total due to rounding.

September Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

We taped one program in September. August Berkshire interviewed George Kane on MNA Policies. They discussed how these policies relate to government decisions, religion, and our members. Programs can be viewed on cable television (see schedule) or on our podcast via iTunes.

If you are interested in having our program played on your local cable access station, please contact steve.petersen@mnatheists.org or 651-484-9277.

Cable Crew: George Kane, Brett Stenbridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, Brian Knoblock, Art Anderson, and Gretchen Anderson.

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

Cable Schedule

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

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

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

I have noticed even people who claim everything is predestined, and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road.

-Stephen Hawking



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

Rochester: Ch. 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Moundsview, New Brighton: Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

St. Cloud: A new sponsor is needed.

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

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

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais

Heights: Ch. 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

VOTE!

Exercise your right as a Minnesotan and make sure your voice as an atheist is heard!

Election day will be Tuesday, November 2nd. At the Federal level, elections are being held for U.S. Representatives. Elections are also being held for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor, Attorney General, and many State Legislatures. In addition, some county, city, town and school board offices will be up for election.

Remember: If you choose to vote by absentee ballot, your ballot must be returned to your county auditor on or before Election Day (at 3:00 pm) or it will not be counted.

Visit vote411.org to register to vote, locate your nearest polling place, or learn which candidates will appear on your ballot.



Membership Report

by Steve Petersen

As of August 16, 2010...

Individual Members: 173

Household Memberships: 35 and members 53

Lifetime Members: 27

Student Members: 4

Sustaining Memberships: 14 and members 16

Donors: 11

Newsletter Subscribers: 253

The total number of paid memberships is 233 with 273 current paid members plus the addition of the donors and newsletter subscribers for a total of 297 individuals in a current paid

category. In our past mailing we sent out via paper newsletter to 160 people and via email newsletter to 93 people.

Our MailChimp email subscriber list which includes the Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE) and electronic newsletter has 1,371 recipients and our Meet Up page has 720 recipients. Our last email newsletter went to 1,372 subscribers on MailChimp and of that number, 297 opened the message for 21.6% which is above the industry average of 19.5%. Our total Giftworks mailing for people who give us all their contact information is 2,211.

Project 42

by Jason Schoenack



The Red River Freethinkers held an enthusiastic conference in Fargo on September 18. The conference, called “Project 42”, attracted an overflow crowd at the downtown Hotel Radisson. The name was taken from the novel *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*, where 42 was the ultimate answer to everything. Attendees came from six states and two Canadian provinces.

The conference planners set out to book speakers that atheists in this region that people would know and enjoy. One was Minnesota Atheists’ own, August Berkshire. Along with August was Minnesota’s best known atheist blogger, PZ Myers. From Wisconsin came Annie-Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The list of speakers was topped off with “Mr. Deity”, Brian Keith Dalton. “Mr. Deity”, of course, is the God-like character seen on MrDeity.com. and Youtube.

Also present was Fred Edwards, Director of the United Coalition for Reason. Fred presented a seminar on “How to get media attention for your group.”

Media attention was what Project 42 received. August Berkshire’s observation, “If going from belief in many gods to one god was an improvement, what’s the next logical step?” was quoted in the *Fargo Forum*. The *Forum* also made note of Annie-Laurie Gaylor’s remark that every freedom women have earned, whether wearing bloomers, riding a bicycle or voting, has been opposed by the church.

PZ Myers discussed the ongoing clash between the rationality of science and the mythology of religion. Several attendees are regular followers of his blog, “Pharyngula.” Dan Barker told the story of leaving his religious faith and moving on to become a leader in the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

Brian Keith Dalton, that “Mr. Deity” guy, was a delightful addition to the conference. He and some other speakers stayed over for the Red River Freethinkers’ equinox potluck on Sunday.



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 school ID)
- _____ \$600 - Lifetime Membership
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- \$_____ Building Fund
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All memberships include the newsletter. To pay by credit card or PayPal, please visit our website.

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

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>> 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. South, #55 (Men's Center, in the basement), Minneapolis. Open to men and women. Contact: tcAgnostic@gmail.com.

Third Sunday, 1:00-3:30, Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting. See front cover for details.

Fifth Sunday, Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund. Price: ~\$7.00. (November 2010.)

1st and 3rd Monday, 6:00p.m. Freethought Toastmasters Club. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. West, St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to party room.) George Kane, nup@minn.net.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 p.m. Dinner Social. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W. 66th Street,

Richfield. Bob and Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

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

3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., Lunch Social. Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Ave., Columbia Heights. Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420

4th Wednesday, Meal and a Reel. Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin and Lake). 6:00 meal, 7:00 movie. Details in Atheists Weekly Email.

Thursdays, 7:00, Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) meeting. See cashumn.org for details.

1st Thursday, 6:00 p.m., Atheists Talk TV Show taping. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

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

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Minnesota Atheists board meeting. Location varies. Contact George Kane, nup@minn.net.

To sign up for the Atheists Weekly Email (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.

To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit atheists.meetup.com/493.



Minnesota Atheists
P.O. Box 120304
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"[Moses] knowledge of the universe would embarrass that of even a 3rd grader. This suggests that religious believers today spend their years on earth in worship of enlightenment and understanding of the same knowledge that an eight year old could provide."

– CJ Werleman (from his book *God Hates You, Hate Him Back*, page 2)

**Check us out on the radio!
AM950 on Sundays at 9:00 a.m.**