

The Minnesota Atheist

The Day of Games

The Day of Reason

Our public meeting on Sunday, April 17th, will be a Game Day at the Roseville Library. Game Day is a fun opportunity for families and people of all ages. It has been a couple of years since we have held this event, and it was always a lot of fun. Test your knowledge of atheist history in *Atheist Jeopardy*, or enter the second Fern Wodtke Memorial Chinese Checker Tournament, in honor of our undefeated champion. Or sit down at a board in a simultaneous exhibition by chess master George Kane. Or bring your own favorite card or board game, and teach others to play.



Or sit down at a board in a simultaneous exhibition by chess master George Kane. Or bring your own favorite card or board game, and teach others to play.

There will be prizes galore. All prizes have not yet been decided, but if you win a game, you will likely win something.

There will be a business meeting at 1:15. Following the meeting, socialize and enjoy the games until the cleanup. The festivities will continue until 4:00.

That evening, our good friends at the Humanists of Minnesota will be holding their banquet, headlined by Brian Keith Dalton, best known as “Mr. Deity.” We want to encourage attendance at their banquet, and so will forego our customary practice of going out to eat after the meeting.

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From noon to 1:00 on Thursday, May 5th, Minnesota Atheists will once again hold a Day of Reason rally in the State Capitol Rotunda. This is the sixth year that we have held this celebration of the separation of church and state to protest the “Day of Prayer” event held at the same time outside on the Capitol steps.

The featured speaker this year is Sandhya Bathija (pictured), who conducts communications and outreach for Americans United for Separation of Church and State. She joined the AU staff in May 2008 and writes for *Church & State* magazine, contributes to AU’s blog, “The Wall of Separation,” and educates the media and public on church-state issues. Bathija previously worked as a reporter for the legal trade publication *The National Law Journal* and practiced law for a small civil rights firm in Detroit.

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**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 atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

PRESIDENT'S
COLUMN

Defeating an Old Religious Blue Law



by August
Berkshire

Currently, liquor stores in Minnesota are not allowed to sell intoxicating liquor on Sundays, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day, and they must close two hours earlier than normal on Christmas Eve. This law (Statute 340A.504) is clearly an old blue law enacted for religious reasons.

This year, identical bills were introduced in the House (HF 0375) and Senate (SF 0197) that would treat Sundays, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Eve like any other day as far as liquor sales at liquor stores go. Liquor stores could sell liquor on those days, though no store would be forced to be open on any day. Sales would still be banned on Christmas Day.

Although the arguments for and against this are today framed in terms of economics, it doesn't change the past religious motivation for the current law.

Almost every bill introduced into the state legislature gets referred to one or more committees before it goes to the floor for a final vote. If a bill doesn't pass out of a committee, it is usually dead, though there are still parliamentary ways to bring it to a vote of the full House or Senate.

Senate bill SF 0197 was referred to the Senate's Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee and a public hearing was held on March 16, 2011. I attended that hearing to testify on behalf of Minnesota Atheists.

Various witnesses were called, for and against the bill. The arguments were primarily on the grounds of economics and safety. The bill's sponsor, Senator Roger Reinert from Duluth, noted that Sunday was the second busiest shopping day of the week and that all four states that surround Minnesota allow liquor stores to be open on Sundays. He noted Duluth liquor sales that were lost to nearby Superior, Wisconsin on Sundays.

One witness stated that if the economic issue was not wishing to spread six days of business into seven days, that it made more sense for liquor stores to voluntarily close on a low-volume day like Tuesday than on Sunday.

Committee member Senator Michael Jungbauer noted that although TCF Bank chooses to be open on Sundays, not all other banks feel obliged to follow suit. Thus liquor stores that would wish to voluntarily close on Sundays may not feel as much pressure to stay open as they think. (Nevertheless, Senator Jungbauer, who said he could go either way with the bill, eventually voted against it.)

Committee member Senator Ann Rest noted the inconsistency of arguing in favor of freedom of economic choice but still banning sales on Christmas

Day. She announced that she would move to amend the bill to allow Christmas Day sales as well. Another senator spoke out in favor of this amendment, but said he was nevertheless going to vote against the entire bill. Senator Rest herself also eventually voted against the entire bill, even after it was amended to her liking.

This made me wonder if Senator Rest was ultimately trying to "poison pill" the legislation by amending it to make it unpopular (i.e., "Liquor stores being open on Christmas – oh, no!"). However, her argument to include Christmas was logical.

I had not testified yet, but we agreed with Senator Rest, for slightly different reasons: that banning sales on Christmas Day favored a particular religion.

I finally gave my testimony (which can be found on page 11). Then Senator Rest moved to amend the bill so that liquor sales at liquor stores would be allowed 365 days a year. The amendment passed on a close voice vote.

In his closing remarks, Senator Reinert had noted that there was one witness that had not been heard from in the testimony: the overwhelming number of Minnesotans who want liquor stores open on Sundays.

Then it was time for a vote on the entire bill, as amended. A role call was asked for by a committee member. I sat in my chair anxiously making hatch marks by the words Yes and No on a piece of scratch paper. The bill passed by an 8-7 vote.

We'll never know if our testimony swayed any votes, but the victory felt good. We got everything we wanted. The bill now moves to the Senate Finance Committee.

After the hearing I went to the two press offices in the basement of the Capitol to hand reporters written copies of my testimony. Most said they had watched the testimony on closed circuit TV and had seen me.

Our testimony was reported in the *Duluth News Tribune*, the *Fargo Forum* and its sister paper the *Grand Forks Herald*, and MinnPost.com (see page 13).

The companion bill in the Minnesota House (HF 0375), sponsored by Representative Phyllis Kahn, was referred to the House Commerce and Regulatory Reform Committee. Like the original wording of the Senate's version, this version does not include Christmas.

We will continue to follow this issue and to testify as we are able.

March Meeting Review

by George Kane

Teresa Nelson, the Legal Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota, spoke to our March meeting about the ACLU's suit against a charter school for impermissible endorsement and promotion of religion. The ongoing suit is the most expensive, time-consuming and resource-intensive case the ACLU of Minnesota has ever handled.

The Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy (TiZA) chartered in Minnesota as a specialty school providing intensive instruction in Arabic language. As a charter school, TiZA receives state funding, falls under the supervision of the Minnesota Department of Education, and is subject to the First Amendment prohibition against government endorsement of religion. Many of the parents who chose to enroll their children in this curriculum welcomed the promotion of Islam, however. This put concerted community pressure on the witnesses the ACLU was able to line up to testify to religious practices at the school. The ACLU obtained a court order of protection for the witnesses.

This suit has been so difficult because of TiZA's aggressive defense. Among the many motions filed by TiZA in attempts to cripple the ACLU was one to bar attorneys from Dorsey & Whitney from the case, claiming a conflict because that firm had previously done work for the Muslim-American Society of Minnesota. The motion, which was dismissed, would have made it impossible for the ACLU to continue the suit. So far, Dorsey & Whitney has donated two million dollars worth of pro-bono work on the case.

The suit originally named the Minnesota Department of Education as a defendant, but they were dropped from the case because they are a government agency. The problems brought to light in this case were really due, nevertheless, to a failure of oversight by the MDE. When numerous instances of promotion of Islam were revealed in newspaper articles, MDE



Southdale Public Library. Photo courtesy of Matthew Richardson.

conducted a review that uncovered only minor violations. The case proceeded against the directors and charter sponsor of TiZA.

TiZA filed another counterclaim against the ACLU for defamation and tortious interference with contracts, based on public statements by Chuck Samuelson. The claim was dismissed because TiZA was standing as a government entity, and as such is not entitled to sue.

Settlement talks have failed, so the case will proceed to trial in June.

Nelson said that the ACLU is aware that there are other cases of impermissible endorsement of religion by charter schools promoting Christianity. One school advertised a parochial school education for free. It is, however, difficult to collect information on these violations, as the parents of the children enrolled at these schools generally favor the promotion of religion. People who can testify to these violations are urged to take their information to the ACLU.

The event at the Southdale Library was attended by about 35 people. Afterwards, about 15 went to dinner at Q.Cumbers.

The Supreme Court of the United States

took a sledge hammer to the separation of Church and State in March when it refused to hear an appeal by the University of Wisconsin of a suit brought by Badger Catholic, a student organization. While the university provided routine funding for the student group, it declined to pay for explicitly religious activities, including Catholic Mass and proselytizing campaigns. Last September, in a truly horrible decision, a three judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit ruled that the university's refusal to fund religious activities violated Badger Catholic's First Amendment right to free speech.

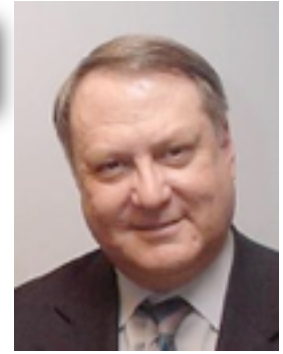
By rejecting the appeal, the Supreme Court does not endorse the lower court's ruling, but ensures that it remains binding precedent in the Seventh Circuit — Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin.

The university argued that its rules were reasonable, intended to protect the separation of church and state, and did not enforce any restriction on the free speech rights of the students or their organization. The Alliance Defense Fund, conducting the litigation for Badger Catholic, asserted that the university was discriminating against that group's religious activities when it refused to fund them. The panel of the Seventh Circuit ruled that the university must not discriminate on the basis of content, and must fund religious activities according to the same rules used to decide funding for secular activities. Once a state university supports student activities that involve leadership development or counseling, it can't refuse to fund similar activities solely because they are religious in nature.

The activities in question included summer training camps with Roman Catholic Masses, a program to bring nuns to campus to help students determine if they have the calling to be priests, and the distribution of Rosary booklets.

A state university that doesn't want to provide student fee funds to support religious activities could stop all funding for student activities, but that would be an extreme measure. Most state universities have large projects for funding student groups, and encourage these groups to provide activities and clubs for students.

News and Notes



by George Kane

Ada Meloy, general counsel for the American Council on Education which supported the University of Wisconsin, said that public colleges and universities affected by the decision would probably come up with a range of steps to comply with the ruling. She added that the ruling "is not binding in areas other than the Seventh Circuit."

Here in Minnesota, a Baptist pastor ignited a furor when he opened the state Senate's legislative session with a stridently sectarian invocation. Baptist pastor Dennis Campbell repeatedly referred to Jesus, concluding his invocation with, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our savior, we pray."

This drew a quick rebuke from Sen. Terri Bonoff and other Democrats, who pointed to a Senate policy that prayers in the Senate chamber should be non-denominational. She lodged her objection with President of the Senate Michelle Fischbach and the Senate's Majority Leader, Amy Koch, but it quickly became clear that complaints about sectarian invocations would go nowhere in the Republican Party-dominated State Senate.

Koch responded that the invitation sent to pastors already requests that they keep their invocations non-sectarian, but that she would not change this request into a requirement. She joined other Senate Republicans in asserting that they do not have the right to censor prayers delivered by guest pastors.

However, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in the 1983 case *Marsh v. Chambers* that prayers in legislative sessions are permissible only when they do not favor any particular religion. Minnesota Atheists contends that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment can only be served by ending the practice of legislative prayer, but that if allowed it must be compatible with the views of the entire community, including the non-religious. Our public policy position,

News and Notes continued on page 6.

Day of Reason (continued)

She holds a law degree from The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and a bachelor's degree in journalism from Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

Other speakers will include George Kane, Chair of Minnesota Atheists; Mike Haubrich, host of Atheist Talk Radio; Grant Steves, one of our most popular speakers at past Day of Reason rallies; and Scott Lohman, president of the Humanists of Minnesota. We have also extended an invitation to Representative Phyllis Kahn, who has demonstrated long-standing support for the separation of church and state.

The National Day of Reason was instituted as a protest against the National Day of Prayer, which was established by an act of Congress in 1952, and fixed as the first Thursday in May by a law enacted in 1988. A judge in Wisconsin has declared the National Day of Prayer to be an unconstitutional endorsement of religion by government, but the Obama administration has filed an appeal. Enforcement of the ban on the event is stayed pending the outcome of that appeal. The National Day of Reason, to the contrary, is supported by secular groups across the country in support of separation of church and state.

News and Notes (continued)

available on our web site, states "If a representative of Minnesota Atheists should ever have an opportunity to provide the invocation for a government meeting, the invocation should be respectful of the body and its members, and appeal for sound judgment and to universal values such as justice and human rights."

"**Creeping Shariah**" is the latest source of panic on Jay Sekulow's radio show dedicated to the eradication of the wall separating church and state. He claims that liberals are all soft on Islam because they hate Christianity, and so they are seizing every opportunity to inject Shariah into the deliberations of American courts.

The latest case to draw Sekulow's ire involves the Islamic Education Center of Tampa, Florida. Two members who claim that they were improperly removed from the board of trustees have sued, claiming that the requirement in the mosque's charter document that such disputes be settled by an independent arbiter according to Islamic law was not followed.

There are many issues in the case, which were all resolved according to the laws of the State of Florida. However, interpreting this clause of the charter document, the court found in favor of the plaintiffs, that the dispute over removing them from the board of trustees must be settled according to Islamic law. The court is merely enforcing the terms of a contract.

Sekulow is also incensed at objections to **Rep. Peter King's hearings in the House Homeland Security Committee** into efforts to recruit American Muslims into acts of terrorist violence. In fact, I hope that law enforcement is seriously exploring this on a case-by-case basis. But what is the point of holding public hearings? They serve no law-enforcement objective, but are intended instead to rouse public sentiment against Muslims in general. I cannot think of these hearings without the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings of the 1950s coming to mind. In both cases, the conclusions of the hearings have been decided before calling the first witness.

Why the Impending Rapture is Good News for Atheists

by James Zimmerman

In case you haven't heard, the Rapture is slated to occur on May 21st of this year. On that Saturday, Jesus will call his faithful and true followers up to heaven to spend eternity with Him. Left on the Earth will be the evil souls who have willfully rejected Jesus and hatefully lived against His righteous standards.

Of course, the Rapture has been predicted before. In fact, Harold Camping, who initially announced this latest date and is currently spearheading a rapture-awareness campaign, made a previous prediction for September 6, 1994. He was wrong. Math can be so confusing sometimes.

And that really is the tricky part: 'God's Word' doesn't explicitly record the rapture's date anywhere. To the contrary, Matthew 24:26 even says "of that day and hour knoweth no man" (King James Version). Yet according to wecanknow.com, the Rapture's date can be ascertained using sound, adept calculations; calculations that, apparently, had escaped the notice of all prior prognosticators.

Really, though, anyone can arrive at any date they would like thanks to the bible's use of many numbers and cryptic passages. There are three rules that all bible interpreters use to calculate the arrival of any supposedly important date, from Armageddon, to the Last Days, to the Rapture.

The first rule is to keep in mind that any number found in the bible can be declared special or sacred. Twelve is an easy one; Jacob had twelve sons, there were twelve tribes of Israel, and there were twelve apostles, so clearly twelve is an important number. But there's no need to limit interpretations to such obvious numbers. Three, for example, isn't as conspicuous, but a little digging will reveal 'support' for that number, too. Let's see...oh, yes, there were three Hebrews before Nebuchadnezzar's idol in



Image courtesy of Ryan Sutter.

Daniel chapter three. Bingo! If you still can't locate the number you need, try multiplying or adding any other numbers you can find.

The second rule is that any unit can be applied to any number. If, for example, you wish to use the number 40, you can go with 40 years (as found at Exodus 16:35) or 40 days (as found at Genesis 7:12). If that's too limiting, feel free to swap the units with one more suitable for your ultimate goal.

Thirdly, any starting date can be used. If you are trying to ascertain Armageddon's arrival, feel free to take the numbers you have on hand,

and add them to any date. Of course, since religious leaders vary wildly in their claimed dates for biblical events, you can choose any of them. Of, better yet, just claim that you have evidence for a better date. If you add your number to the date of Adam's creation, for example, you can begin by claiming he was created in 4001 BC, or 4004 BC, or 4026 BC, or 6111 BC. If that doesn't give you the date you want, try any of the dozens of dates offered for Noah's Flood, or Abraham's birth, or the Exodus, or Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians, or Jesus birthday, or his crucifixion.

But let's just assume that Camping's date is the one the bible authors intended when they penned their words. This leaves humanity with two possible scenarios: either the Rapture will transpire on May the twenty-first, or it will not. For the atheist community, either development is good news. Allow me to explain.

Should Camping be correct in his calculations, the Rapture will result in the transferring of millions of Christian fundamentalists to another dimension. Suddenly, and without violence or suffering, the very people who oppose and deny history, evolution, and large chunks of geology will no longer be standing in the way. Science

Rapture continued on page 14.

Book Review: *Revolutionary Deists*

In the latter half of the 18th century, America was in the throes of revolution. In the midst of the better-known political revolution, there was also a revolution of thought. Kerry Walters, in his latest book *Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels*, takes readers on a cogent journey that explores the roots and major icons of the deism movement.



by James Zimmerman

Revolutionary Deists begins with an introduction to deism in 18th century America. Walters deftly explains the foundations of deism laid by Bacon, Newton, and Locke, and dissects the factors for deism's apparent sudden popularity at the time. Culling from a wealth of first-hand and scholarly sources, Walters argues that the American flavor of deism was a reaction against the Calvinist tradition, combined with "the steady infiltration of French Enlightenment ideals" and the newfound national independence (page 35). What's more, Walters argues that the Great Awakening itself may have nurtured the growth of American deism. Walters also looks into possible reasons why the deists did not always trumpet their views, and argues that American deism occupied a precarious middle ground between the more radical French atheism and the staid British sensibilities of the time.

Walters claims that the deists of colonial America essentially agreed that "reality is rational, defined by immutable and absolute natural laws, that these laws were set in motion by a supreme architect whose nature is essentially reflected in creation; that humans are likewise imbued with a spark of divine reason that permeates reality, and hence are capable of understanding that reality" (page 46). Working from this de facto agreed-upon definition of deism, Walters devotes the next six chapters (the majority of the book) to six influential deists: two that every schoolchild knows, two that every high school graduate knows, and two that only history majors would know: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Ethan Allen, Thomas Paine, Elihu Palmer, and Philip Freneau.

His selection of these six deists is apt. In discussing the more well-known figures, Walters skips on the

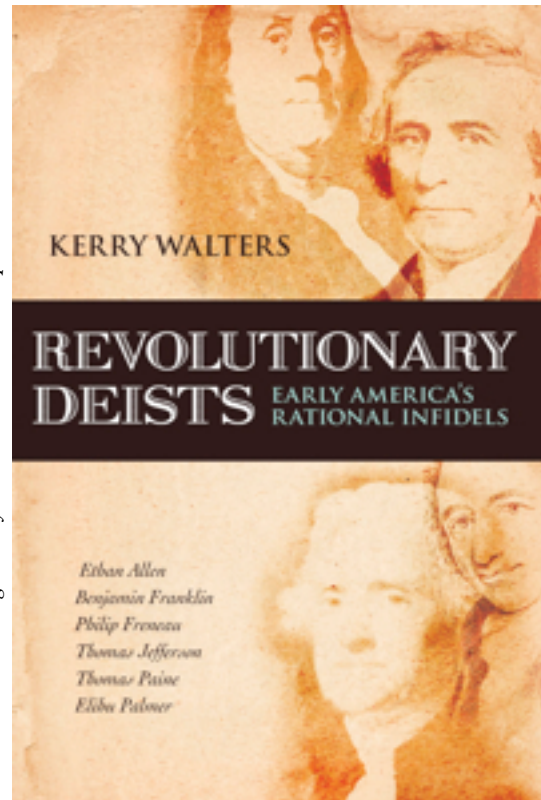


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Revolutionary Deists
by Kerry Walters
©2011, Prometheus Books
280 pages

biographical sketches and delves right in to an examination of their beliefs. He details how such beliefs were acquired, modified, and explained during the figures' lives. In exploring Franklin's turn from his Christian upbringing, for example, Walters quotes the influential American - whom he terms "the ambivalent deist" - as having discerned: "the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutation; in short, I soon became a thorough Deist" (page 52).

Walters spends more time familiarizing readers with the less-familiar deists. Liberal quoting from their writings allows them to speak for themselves while simultaneously making readers acquainted with these

Revolutionary Deists continued on page 9.

Revolutionary Deists (continued)

relatively obscure figures. In the case of Elihu Palmer, for instance, we learn that Palmer determined the doctrine of original sin violated every “standard of distributive justice” and discover that though Palmer admitted the scriptures had “some good moral maxims,” he concluded that they were not unique to the Christian view. They had been routinely defended by pagans antedating Jesus – and more systematically... Normative passages are thinly interspersed in the scriptures and are inaccurate, incomplete, trifling and often without utility” (page 191). And it is in exploring the life of Philip Freneau, upon whom Walters bestows the moniker ‘Deism’s Poet,’ that we uncover the crux of deists rationale for a creator: “God’s presence is obvious in all creation, not because the divine is identical to creation, but because he manifests himself in his works” (page 231).

In the concluding chapter, Walters delineates the reasons for deism’s waning. He expounds on his earlier claim that deism’s “failure to sustain itself as a widespread popular movement is that it succeeded so well in ameliorating the dogmatic supernaturalism of orthodox Christianity” (page 11). Oddly, Walters next makes the claim that because the deists did not have the forethought to look at the scriptures as allegorical, their arguments were cast aside as pedantic. Church leaders were able to initiate a revival (the “Great Awakening”) that, in part, relied upon the reinterpretation of specific holy texts – such as the Genesis accounts – as figurative. Walters then counters his own argument by excusing the deists, noting “that a literal reading of the bible was the usual mode of interpretation” by their Christian contemporaries. Their insistence on pointing out scriptural contradictions and absurdities was understandable in their time, Walters says, even though our modern minds may find such strategies irrelevant (page 258). With all due deference to Walters and his impressive historical research, a quick look at modern American religiosity exposes a continued insistence by many denominations of biblical literalism an inerrancy.

Still, I am quick to point out that Walters unusual argument in the concluding pages does not negate the superb insights Walters has brought to our nation’s history. Indeed, his closing case will give readers much to ponder and debate, even if they do not find themselves fully convinced by Walters’ conclusions.

Atheists Seek to Stop Damage Gods Cause

by August Berkshire,
President of Minnesota Atheists

(The following letter was published in the St. Cloud Times on March 28, 2011. It was a response to a letter that can be found at: tinyurl.com/SCT-3-16-2011)

The recent letter “Atheists’ obsession with God is a phenomenon” uses convoluted logic to imply that the denial of the existence of a god is actually proof of the existence of one.

If I were to ask you whether you are 15 feet tall and you denied it, would that prove you really are 15 feet tall?

While it may seem that atheists are “obsessed with God,” what we’re really concerned with is god-belief – namely, the damage to society it causes.

From inquisitions to jihads, from denial of equal rights to women and gays to opposition to life-saving condoms and embryonic stem cell research, from denial of evolution to prohibiting comprehensive sex education, god-belief has outlived whatever usefulness it may have had in our primitive past.

The best way to eliminate a problem is to strike at its root. In this case, that means examining and exposing the fictional character called “God.”

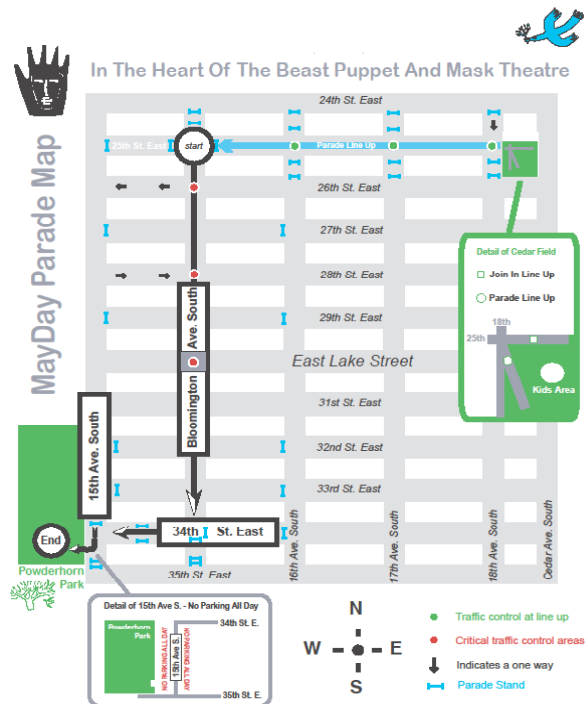
May Day Parade and Festival: Sunday, May First

The May Day Parade and Festival in South Minneapolis is one of the most fun events Minnesota Atheists participates in during the year. We gather at Cedar Field at noon to march down Bloomington Avenue from Cedar Field to Powderhorn Park. We carry signs as we march to educate the public about us.

After the parade, which starts at 1:00, we join together at our booth. It's a great chance to talk to people who are supporters of our causes, even if they are not atheists. Many people who identify as wicca, pagan, or neo-spiritualist support the separation of church and state just as much as we do. So, join in the parade or stop on by the booth to show your support!

For more information, visit The Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater's web page: <http://www.hobt.org/m...>, or contact Steve Petersen at spetersen175@comcast.net or 651-484-9277. We are looking for volunteers to help with the booth. Let Steve know if you are willing to assist in set up, staffing, or to take down the booth.

Cedar Field is on 18th Ave and 25th Street. Bus routes 22, 14, and 27 will get you close, so will the Franklin Light Rail Station. Remember, we are headed to Powderhorn Park, so if you park near Cedar Field, you need to walk back from Powderhorn Park.



Parade starts at 1:00 pm

How to find us: Look for the MNA banner and all the MNA t-shirts. You can't miss us!
See you at noon on May first!

High on God, or High on Dope?

by Peter Holste

In the February issue of The Minnesota Atheist, life member Matthew Richardson argued that our organization should support the legalization of drugs. Referring not to prescription medicines but to now-illegal recreational drugs, he likens this to a “humanitarian effort.” Yikes—there are so many things wrong with that, it’s hard to know where to begin to respond.

I hoped that other members would express their dismay with the idea, and Steve Petersen (March newsletter) offered many of the arguments against it that occurred to me, particularly that the concept is not consistent with Minnesota Atheists’ mission. Whatever Constitutional issues are involved in drug legalization are not our fight.

Minnesota Atheists should not support the legalization of mood/mind-altering chemicals. Although they may be helpful in psychiatric applications, their recreational use is beneficial to neither the user’s health nor his community. They alter people’s perception of what is real and what is true.

To direct the argument back to something that *is* within Minnesota Atheists’ purview, there is no difference between mind-altering drugs and the other-world beliefs of religion. We know that nothing fails like prayer. Minnesota Atheists does not go to bat for faith, except incidentally as it benefits from our First Amendment defense along with secularists, and we must not for illegal drugs.

Our reality is in the here-and-now, in the Constitutional separation of state from church, and in reality—not in the altered mental states of religion and drug abuse.

**March 16, 2011 - Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
S.F. 197: Sunday, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Eve Liquor Sales
Authorization**

**Testimony by August Berkshire, President of
Minnesota Atheists.**

Minnesota Atheists takes no position as to whether or not people should drink alcohol. Furthermore, we take no position, in general, on when stores should be open. However, we oppose government laws that favor one religion over other religions, as well as government laws that favor religion over non-religion. It is for this reason that I am here today.

The banning of alcohol sales on certain days comes from old blue laws, whose impetus was to favor Christianity. Sunday is the Christian Sabbath day, and Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day are viewed by Christians as days when their god should receive special attention.

The idea and purpose behind the blue law in question today was to take away a choice from citizens to purchase alcohol in certain locations on certain days, in hopes that people would be less distracted by “demon rum” and more motivated to attend Christian churches on those days.

In his book, *Blue Laws: The History, Economics and Politics of Sunday-Closing Law*,

author David Laband notes that blue laws also protected the business interests of Christians by eliminating competition on their day of worship.

So these days were hardly selected at random when the ban was first put into place. The fact that today the argument seems to revolve mostly around economics should not obscure the original religious intent of the law. In other words, this law should never have been passed in the first place.

Another way to look at this is: If no ban currently existed, would the legislature consider instituting one today?

This proposed bill is a good start towards ending government favoritism toward a particular religion. However, it doesn't go quite far enough. Under this bill, Christmas remains singled out as the one day each year that liquor stores would not be allowed to sell liquor. This favors a Christian holiday over Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other religious holidays, and over atheism, which has no official holidays at all.

We therefore ask that the legislature treat alcohol evenhandedly and not maintain a law that favors one specific religion.

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

“Lqkmyw tijsrh cmchnny xnyhqkmnr ptr hpn inwti nrhtvimrpjnyh sc
Xpkmrhmtymhe vnny sy hkmti. Gpth ptbn vnny mhr ckqmrh? Jskn sk inrr my tii
fitxnr, fkmln tyl mylsinyxn my hpn Xinkwe, mwysktyxn tyl rnkbmimhe my hpn
itmhe, my vshp, rqnkrhmsy, vmwshke tyl fnkrnxqhmsy.”

-Utjnr Jtlmrsy, *Jnjskmti tyl Knjsyrhktyxn Twtmyrh Knimwmsqr Trrrrrjnyhr*

(Answer on page 18)

Book Review: *Jesus Lied, He Was Only Human*



by Grant Steves

The label found on the cover of CJ Werleman's new book states "Explicit Content – WARNING – Harmful to Faith." A plethora of similar books has been released in the last few years. Books from significant New Testament scholars with the ability to reach the general reading audience are among those

published. These include:

- Biblical Errancy* (2000, by C. Dennis McKinsey)
- Secret Origins of the Bible* (2002, by Tim Cahahan)
- Misquoting Jesus* (2005, by Bart Ehrman)
- The Empty Tomb* (2005, by Robert Price)
- The Bible Against Itself* (2006, by Randel Helms)

Writers who have drawn on the scholarship of the above authors have released other books on the subject that are less scholarly, such as Dan Barker's *Godless* (2008) and Ruth Hurmence Green's *The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible* (1999). It is encouraging to see so many different books with a similar mission: to expose the Bible and its inaccuracies.

Most of these inconsistencies and errors have been known for hundreds of years. Whether it is the story of the adulterous woman (see John 8: 1-11) or the ending of the Gospel of Mark, we know the oldest manuscripts do not accept them. We know that some books attributed to Paul were not written by him. Only scholars studying the developments in the field might have new information or insights.

Werleman is not a scholar, but he is a writer who is repackaging these criticisms with humor and a strong negative bias. His humor is displayed at the start of most of the chapters under a section called 'The Joke.' One example of such a joke include:

A burglar sneaks in a dark bar (after hours) and goes right for the cash register.

A voice calls out, "GOD IS WATCHING YOU."

He looks all around and sees nothing so returns to jimmying the cash drawer. Again, the voice says, "GOD IS WATCHING YOU."

The burglar looks around and finally sees a parrot in a cage and says, "Oh, Hi Polly. You startled me."

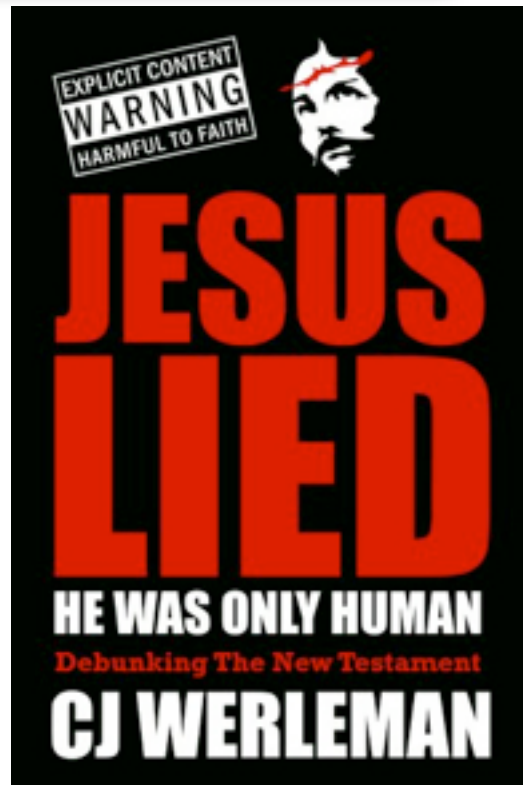


Image courtesy Dangerous Little Book. Used with permission.

Jesus Lied, He Was Only Human, by CJ Werleman
©2010, Dangerous Little Books, 224 pages.

"Hey" said the parrot. "My name ain't Polly. It's John the Baptist."

The burglar snorted, "Who in the world named you John the Baptist?"

Parrot says, "The same guy who named that Rottweiler over there, God!"

These jokes are material that most of the potential readers have heard before, and therefore add little to the investigation.

The other form of humor is the frequent use of the f-word. His use of this kind of language gives us a clue that he cares, not about the general audience, but only those already converted to his way of thinking. Humor is a great device to create interest

Jesus Lied, continued on page 13.

Sunday Liquor Sales: Who is Fighting Them and Why?

The following is an excerpt from the above-named MinnPost article by Jeff Stevens Guntzel. Published Thursday, March 24, 2011. -ed.

Where are the atheists in all of this?

I'm glad you asked. They're right in the middle of it. August Berkshire, president of **Minnesota Atheists**, spoke at the committee hearing and submitted a written statement. Here's some of what he had to say:

"The fact that today the argument seems to revolve mostly around economics should not obscure the original religious intent of the law ... we oppose government laws that favor religion over non-religion. This proposed bill is a good start towards ending government favoritism toward a particular religion. However, it doesn't go quite far enough. Under this bill, Christmas remains singled out as the one day each year that liquor stores would not be allowed to sell liquor. This favors a Christian holiday over Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other religious holidays, and over atheism, which has no official holidays at all."

Book Review: *Jesus Lied* (continued)

interest and promote a remembrance of things said. However, it can be a jarring distraction from the flow of the reading. Perhaps that is what the explicit content label refers to. With this style of writing, it is no surprise that the book lacks formal footnotes or references to the Bible translations used in the book. Werleman does list the books he references at the end of the book. But even in the list of books for the individual chapters, he does not follow a correct entry form.

At one point, Werleman makes the following comment about Paul's writing; "Didn't they have editors back in those days?" Perhaps. But someone should tell Werleman that there are editors today, and he needs to get one to guide him away from the errors he made.

However, the book is perhaps written more for entertainment than any serious attempt at addressing an audience about the failures of the New Testament. His humor and breezy style might be

summed up in the following paragraph taken from his book:

... Where did Erasmus get his manuscript copies of the gospels and epistles? Did they fall from heaven? Of course they didn't. The simple truth, the clog wearing Erasmus threw both legs over the back of his pony and galloped to Basel, Switzerland, the land of dark chocolate, the home of Roman Polanski, and even darker porn.

As it is, Werleman offers us questionable humor, diluted content, poor scholarship, and numerous errors at a price that could easily pay for Bart Ehrman's *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. Buy that book instead.



Atheists Talk: February/March Radio Report

by Steve Petersen

Our radio program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 at the KTNF studios in Eden Prairie on AM 950. Minnesota Atheists is the producer and the director is Mike Haubrich. Channel Hosts include Mike Haubrich and Scott Lohman. Original music is composed, played and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. Live steaming can be done through our web page www.mnatheists.org. The six month cost is \$5,320.00, each donation to support the program is greatly appreciated. To donate just send in a donation to our post office box or online at http://mnatheists.org/component/option,com_civicrm/Itemid,55. All past programs can be accessed via web page.

February 27 AHA Conference with Maggie Ardiente (program #105). Maggie Ardiente is the director of development at the American Humanist Association, where she coordinates the AHA's fundraising programs and serves as editor of the AHA's membership newsletter, *Free Mind*. She graduated with a B.S. in sociology and second major in religion from James Madison University. She has served as Vice President of the JMU Freethinkers, a student group for atheists, agnostics, and humanists. She is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Secular Student Alliance and is a current member of Class 15 of the Humanist Institute. The interview was conducted by Scott Lohman

March 6 Humanism, with Scott Lohman (program #106). Scott Lohman has been President of the Humanists of Minnesota for a number of years. He has acted as an interviewer and as a backup host for our radio program, but he has never been personally interviewed about his journey from small town Minnesota to the leader of the oldest and largest humanist organization in Minnesota. That changed this week we asked Scott about his life and activities as a humanist. Scott is especially attracted to the humanism found in the *Star Trek* series. Minnesota Atheists President August Berkshire conducted the interview.



March 13 God's Lady Problem, with Jen McCreight (program # 107). Jen McCreight was on a speaking tour in Minnesota in March, and in advance of her visit she was our guest on *Atheists Talk*. Jen writes the popular blog *Blag Hag*, and in 2010 popularized the idea that a little bit of cleavage isn't to blame for earthquakes. 'Boobquake,' although misinterpreted by some who thought it was just another concession to reducing women by focusing on breasts, was actually a test to see if God would be so upset with women dressing a bit more provocatively than normal that he would show his displeasure by making the earth move. It didn't seem to work the way that an Iranian cleric had predicted.

The Impending Rapture (continued)

will again flourish in the classroom and the research laboratory, unencumbered by dogma, will be revitalized. Additionally, the very communities that stood at odds with women's rights and same-sex marriage and who showed a peculiar fetish for little boys' foreskins will no longer be there to infringe on the rights of others.

Of course, the careful reader will note that the Rapture will likely give many non-believers the evidence that thus far had been sorely lacking in arguments for support of a god. However, the point still remains that no such evidence existed prior to the

Rapture and thus, the Christian god's bizarre desire to spend eternity with only those who found the bible to be a coherent argument will simply confirm that such a god is unworthy of respect, much less worship.

Conversely (and with far, far better odds), Camping's prediction could prove as erroneous as his previous one. Once the freethought community comes to grips with the reality that they're still surrounded by Christian fundamentalists, they can take solace in the thought that yet another religious prophecy has proved completely inept.

Either way, I say we party.

Welcome to Pig's Eye, Minnesota!

There's a Birdseye in Colorado, Frogeye in Maryland, Hogeye in Texas, and even a Pigeeye in both Alabama and Ohio. For a long time there was a Pig's Eye in Minnesota until a Catholic missionary by the name of Lucien Galtier arrived on the muddy banks of the Mississippi River in 1840 to establish a Christian community. The following year, in 1841, Galtier successfully renamed Pig's Eye to its current name of Saint Paul after he began the construction of the *Church of Saint Paul*. Sixty-six years later construction began on the *Cathedral of Saint Paul*—recently commissioned as the “National Shrine of the Apostle Paul” by the Vatican—which would finally be completed in 1958. If we take a moment to consider the Apostle Paul's misogynistic teachings, the Catholic Church's chronic issue with priestly pedophilia, and the adulation for American entrepreneurial small business ownership, we might want to consider restoring the name of the capitol city back to Pig's Eye—or something more appropriate.

The big problem Galtier had with Pierre “Pig's Eye” Parrant (the city's original namesake) is that Parrant made his success by selling whiskey at his popular tavern to local residents, travelers, riverboat workers, and soldiers at Fort Snelling. He stored and manufactured the distilled spirits at *Fountain Cave* in St. Paul (where Shepherd Road and Randolph Avenue intersect) before he was forced out of town shortly after Galtier's arrival. Granted, Parrant may not have been peddling a wholesome product but it was arguably less toxic than the mind-controlling teachings of the Apostle Paul



by Eric Jayne

that Galtier proselytized.

In his epistle to the Corinthians, Saint Paul the Apostle taught that every woman was created for man while “man is the glory of God”; therefore, only women must cover their head while praying to God (1 Corinthians 11:3-9). He also commanded that women must remain silent in church and remain dutifully submissive to their husbands at all times. Paul reiterates this message of wifely obedience, sprinkled with warnings of sinful female treachery, to his apprentice Timothy (1 Timothy 2:11-14). Perhaps the most bloodthirsty and tyrannical teaching Paul sold to his followers came in his second epistle to the Thessalonians: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on

Pig's Eye continued on page 16.



Pig's Eye (continued)

them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

When compared to Saint Paul the Apostle’s apocalyptic fear mongering and misogynistic narrative, Parrant’s tavern seems quite commendable and righteous! Regardless, Galtier joined the long list of missionary settlers throughout human history to label a geographic location after a religious character. While it’s not clear what happened to Parrant after he left the city, some accounts suggest he ventured off into Canada where he died several years later. Meanwhile, Galtier went back to France for a couple of years before returning to the U.S. and serving at a church in Wisconsin where he died in 1866.

It’s important to note that the city’s name of “Pig’s Eye” was attributed informally by travelers and traders because Parrant’s tavern was so popular. The area was of course inhabited long before Parrant and other Europeans settled the area. The name “Minnesota” (which means *sky-tinted water* in the Dakota language) and many of the geographical domains within the state’s borders derive from Dakota and Ojibwe words. It’s hard to ignore the American Indian roots in Minnesota especially when one drives from Shakopee to ride the Hiawatha light rail into Minneapolis (*minne* is *water* in Dakota and *polis* is *city* in Greek) and visit Minnehaha Falls.

By following the American Indian theme, and borrowing the unique name of the local suburb *White Bear Lake*, maybe the city of St. Paul could be officially designated *Sapamotowi*—which is Dakota for *Black Bear Water*. Or maybe the best way to combat the 170 years of the Saint Paul moniker is to rename the city after the great Charles Darwin. Wouldn’t it be fun to live in “Darwin, Minnesota”?

(All bible references are to the King James version. -ed.)

March Treasurer’s Report

Compiled by Chris Matthews

Building Fund

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| Val Miller | \$25 |
| Daniel Norte | \$36 |
| Thomas Dooley | \$100 |
| Vernon Young | \$100 |
| Total Building Fund | \$261 |

Radio Fund

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Christopher Matthews | \$25 |
| Arthur Scearcy | \$25 |
| David Post | \$50 |
| Total Radio Fund | \$100 |

General/Visibility Fund

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Anne Hanna | \$10 |
| Miles Johnson | \$15 |
| Gale and Elliott James | \$25 |
| Meghan Kosowski | \$35 |
| Total General/Visibility Fund | \$85 |

Total Income \$446

You Might Not Know...

In 2011, the Minnesota Atheists weekly radio program is expected to cost \$10,660. So far this year, we have received \$360. Our goal is to raise an additional \$10,300 by the end of 2011.

Planning your estate?
Don't forget to include
Minnesota Atheists.

Once Upon a Time...

BY A MINNESOTA
ATHEISTS MEMBER.
NAME WITHHELD.

Once upon a time, there was this White Knight of the Ku Klux Klan who wrote a book 35 years after the high point of lynching in the United States (circa 1912). His book *Celebration of Christian White Society; Why the Klan Needs Your Support* glorified the activities of the Klan from its inception. Our White Knight was one of the directors of his local chapter.

He published his book just four months before President Harry Truman integrated the U.S. Armed Forces by executive order 9810 on July 26, 1948. Our White Knight saw the writing on the wall, racial integration was coming. Still, he strongly believed in the Klan because his parents were also members. He approved of segregation, but now had second thoughts about the lynching of blacks. So, while pushing his book calling for resistance to integration, he also taught civic groups that he was opposed to lynching.

Some of his listeners publicly suggested that our White Knight simply leave the Ku Klux Klan and admit that his book was filled with ugly stories and dubious claims that were bad for their children. He should abandon his book, and learn a trade to support himself by other means. One white woman in Baltimore, Maryland said, "Either leave the KKK and stop distributing your book, or don't come to our town

again!"

The more progressive saw him as a hypocrite; a confused man who lost one of the most important possessions one has: Credibility.

On the other hand, most people liked his book, and paid more attention to the traditional segregationists. Sales of *Celebration of Christian White Society* continued as well as his salary from his local KKK organization. Eventually, he became the Grand Wizard of the South Carolina Ku Klux Klan.

Similarly, there was this lay minister of the Roman Catholic Church, one of the most homophobic, sexist, and anti-Semitic organizations of the 20th Century. The Roman Catholic Church is presently struggling with its sordid relations with Jews and Muslims, but the institution's homophobia and sexism continue as strong today as ever.

Nonetheless, this RCC lay minister, pushing his book of hatred and violence, is preaching that maybe homosexuals should have equal rights, even though the book and his institution are rabidly against same-sex relationships as well as the equal rights of women.

He defends his holy book by always saying that what we read is nothing but misinterpretation. But that's his interpretation. This implies that all other parts of the Bible are fine until it comes to passages pertaining to homosexuality. Passages in the Bible that view

women as pieces of property to be enslaved and sold like cattle are just fine, thank you. Other passages that uphold the virtues of slavery – as any Ku Klux Klansman will tell you – are also properly translated with the "divine guidance of the Holy Spirit."

Recently, one of his comrades, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi said "people are being attacked for taking positions that do not support sexual behavior between people of the same sex." Speaking to the Human Rights Council, he continued, "When they express their moral beliefs or beliefs about human nature ... they are stigmatized, and worse – they are vilified, and prosecuted."

Ahhh, poor Catholics, victims of persecution always.

So, the average Good Christian is going to pay much more attention to authorities like Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, than they are some silly homosexual wearing the same lace and black robes of his superiors. Most will say that the gay Christians are making false claims about the "Word of God" because they have an evil agenda to promote sexual deviation. Instead of being guided by the Holy Spirit, these people are really being guided by Satan himself.

This won't happen, but may I suggest that these gay preachers approach directly their superiors and convince them that the bible is misinterpreted, instead of trying to tell me that the bible is 'misinterpreted.'

March Cable Report



by Steve Petersen

For our March cable program Eric Jayne interviewed August Berkshire on Atheist Conventions. August is a prolific atheist conventioneer, speaker, and organizer. They reviewed the importance of conventions, the access attendees have to the speakers, and the fact that many of the speakers use the events to break new ground in atheist thinking.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, please contact achair@mnatheists.org or call 651-484-9277.

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

Podcasts: Minnesota Atheists.org. Available via iTunes. 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. and Tuesday 5:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

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

Rochester: Channel

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

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

St. Cloud: Channel 12. Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. Sponsor Jack Richter.

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

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



FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

“During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.”

-James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*

Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org

P.O. Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112

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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.

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, 5:00-7:00 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

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

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: Rochester Area Freethinkers book club meeting. Visit meetup.com/raftmn 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 meeting at public library. Visit meetup.com/raftmn for details.

3rd Thursday: Rochester Area Freethinkers happy hour. Visit meetup.com/raftmn for details.

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.



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"Sacred texts are usually taken literally until secular sources prove them to be either a scientific or an ethical embarrassment. At that point religious leaders either have a new revelation or they 'reinterpret' the old revelation. Either way, it strikes an outsider as being an act of convenience, not conviction."

- August Berkshire, President of Minnesota Atheists

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