

The Minnesota Atheist

March with Us in the Pride Parade

There is currently a hostile attempt to alter our secular state Constitution with a narrow religious amendment to define marriage as between one man and one woman. Consequently, this pride parade and festival could be one of the most active yet. Come show your support for separation of government and religion, and protecting Minnesota's Constitution from religious intolerance. Remember that a victory by any group marginalized by religious dogma is a victory for us all.

Join us as we march in the annual Twin Cities GLBT Pride Parade. We'll meet up around 10:30 a.m. on Sunday, June 26 near 3rd St South and 3rd Ave South in Minneapolis. Come wearing your Minnesota Atheists t-shirt, or march with us to get your own! We welcome members of all freethought groups to march with us (though parade rules will only allow our Minnesota Atheists sign).

We'll be staffing a booth in Loring Park in Minneapolis on Saturday the 25th from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Sunday the 26th from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. If you wouldd like to volunteer, please contact Steve Petersen at achair@mnatheists.org or Eric Jayne at dir2@mnatheists.org.

If you can't make it to the parade or volunteer, stop by the booth to say hello. We are usually located at the southern end of the park, near all of the church booths (but we're much more popular).



Mark your calendars for the upcoming summer freethought potluck picnics. As always, they will take place once a month on Sundays from noon to 3:00 p.m. in Columbia Park in northeast Minneapolis. See the enclosed flyer for more information.

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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.

MNA Meetup members: 899
 Life memberships: 30

Honorary Members

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 Gerald Erickson, PhD
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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

Minnesota Atheists' Day of Reason

by August
Berkshire

When dealing with religious people, I can usually maintain a calm, even friendly, demeanor. This is because I think atheists have already won the intellectual argument (whether religious people acknowledge it or not), and now we need to win the emotional argument and the political argument.

But when it comes to politics, reason is often lost on Religious Right politicians who wish to increase their power and impose a theocracy on the rest of us. This year has been one of the worst in that regard that we have seen for a long time.

And so it was that when it came to our Day of Reason event inside the Minnesota State Capitol, I spoke in terms more harsh than I usually use. I believe it was warranted.

~

America is under attack by Religious Right Christians. They are attacking women, gay people, workers, voters, doctors, our educational system, our healthcare system, nonChristians, and the poor.

Their policies will result in a loss of civil rights, intolerance, ignorance, illness,

suffering, poverty, physical violence, and death.

There seems to be very little they won't do to appease their jealous, bloodthirsty god. There seems to be very little they won't do to desperately try to beat back the tide of knowledge, equality, and freedom that is in the process of relegating their religion to the dustbin of history.

Confronting this assault, we who are celebrating this Day of Reason must stand strong and redouble our efforts to promote health, education, freedom, and equality.

If we are to have faith, it must be faith in our fellow Americans, especially young people, to throw off the shackles of superstition and restore our country to the ideals of the Enlightenment from which it sprang.

To paraphrase the atheist and humanist Bertrand Russell, through science and compassion we can make this world a better place to live in.

Thank you for coming here today. Let us turn a Day of Reason into a Lifetime and a Society of Reason.

Letter from Member

I really enjoyed your talk at the end of the days events at the capitol. It was inspiring and made me feel proud to be a part of the cause. I so appreciate all that you do for Minnesota Atheists. Steve Peterson also needs to be thanked for his organizing efforts and excellent job as a facilitator of the event.

[Eric Jayne's] letter to the editor about the Day of Reason in the St. Paul paper was impressive. (See page 9 for Jayne's letter. -ed.) This means a lot to all of us. I was not aware that we had invited the governor. If I had known he was invited I would have communicated with his office urging him to attend. Perhaps we can make this a part preparing for the event next year; that is, asking our members to contact the governor's office and request that he acknowledge our community by making an appearance.

Thanks Again,
Bob Schmitz

Do You Have a Unique Story to Tell?

Dear Minnesota Atheists,

You are invited to submit a paper for possible inclusion in a new book scheduled to be published in late 2012. The book, with the working title **Atheist Voices of Minnesota**, will be a collection of primarily autobiographical writings from atheists living in or who are from Minnesota. All proceeds from the sale of this book will benefit Minnesota Atheists, a 501c3 nonprofit organization.

Each essay should offer readers a unique perspective. These should be personal narratives from your life or observations which would be a poignant read for others. The account may be humorous, sad, surprising, quirky—whatever works. Possible themes might include, but are by no means limited to:

- A non-traditional atheist experience
- Family relationships
- Coming out
- Your “conversion” to atheism
- Raising atheist children
- An as yet untold story from your life
- Witty analysis about atheism in the world today

These are only examples. We expect to be surprised by what we find in the submissions.

The project has two goals: to create a unique outreach tool for atheism here in Minnesota, and to financially support Minnesota Atheists. As an outreach tool, the book will cast atheism in a positive, personal light, and will be something that anyone, no matter their point of view, will be able to

read and find interesting. What this book will not be is a collection of diatribes against religion, or science writings.

There is enough of that already out there. This will be a volume of positive, personal stories of individual lives. It will be professionally published and widely distributed, including on amazon.com.

Advance copies of this book will be submitted for reviews in newspapers, journals, and other media outlets. We will also seek advance endorsements.

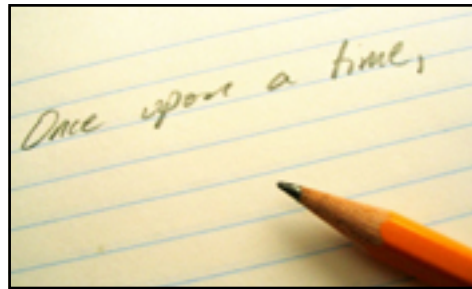
Not all submissions will be accepted for publication. Essay selection will be based on the quality of the

writing and the impact of the story. The book’s editorial board will be looking to include a wide variety stories from a wide variety of people, and so selections will also be made with an eye on diversity.

This is an all volunteer project—a collaborative effort to help advance atheism and to support Minnesota Atheists. No individuals working on this project, including authors, will receive any financial benefit. Although authors of accepted submissions will not be paid, they will receive two complementary copies of the book and will have a 40% author’s discount available for purchasing additional copies.

Here are some additional submission guidelines:

- The deadline for submissions is **September 30, 2011**. Feel free to



Continued on next page.

Do You Have a Unique Story to Tell? (continued)

submit your essay at any time from now until then.

- Maximum length is 4,500 words. There is no minimum length.
- Papers must be submitted electronically, as an attachment, to mnatheistbook@gmail.com.
- You will receive a confirmation email verifying that we received your paper.
- Papers should be submitted in MS Word. If you are unable to use or access MS Word, please contact us at mnatheistbook@gmail.com.
- Include your name and contact information in the email, but not in the Word file. Papers will be read “blind” by the book’s Editorial Board.

We are also seeking volunteers to help with the production and promotion of this book, particularly with copy editing, proofreading, advertising and marketing. If

you are willing to help, and have strength or experience in any of these areas, or if you think you can help with this project in another way, please email us at mnatheistbook@gmail.com. All project volunteers will be thanked in the book.

If you have any question about this project, submitting a paper, or how you can help, please feel free to contact us at mnatheistbook@gmail.com.

Thank you,

Editorial Board

August Berkshire

Jill Carlson

Mike Haubrich

Eric Jayne

Bill Lehto

James Zimmerman

MAY MEETING REVIEW



Loftus offers insight into the minds of Christians. Photos courtesy of Steve Petersen.



On Sunday, May 15th, approximately sixty people gathered at the Southdale Public Library in Edina for our May meeting. There, John Loftus delivered a presentation on The End of Christianity.

Loftus explained that the end of Christianity does not mean that we should expect the religion to disappear and become a historical curiosity any time soon. Instead, he argues that it will lose its place of privilege as more individuals begin to examine rationally the roots and outcomes of their own beliefs. Loftus briefly highlighted the major defenses offered up by Christian apologists and pointed out why it is so difficult to convince a Christian that their belief system is not based on evidence. Loftus noted that “believers must be convinced that their faith is nearly impossible before they will see it as improbable.”



News and Notes



by George Kane

At the end of April, the *Washington Post* published an article by two sociologists that provided many useful facts that argue that atheists are socially well-adjusted by comparison to god-believers.

On numerous respected measures of societal success — rates of poverty, teenage pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, obesity, drug use and crime, as well as economics — high levels of secularity are consistently correlated with positive outcomes in first-world nations. None of the secular advanced democracies suffers from the combined social ills seen here in Christian America.

The article noted that murder rates and rates of imprisonment are far lower in secularized nations such as Japan or Sweden than they are in the much more religious United States. Even within this country, those states with the highest levels of church attendance, such as Louisiana and Mississippi, have significantly higher murder rates than states with far lower church attendance, such as Vermont and Oregon.

As individuals, atheists tend to score high on measures of intelligence, verbal skills and scientific literacy. They tend to raise their children to solve problems rationally, and to evaluate evidence objectively. This is particularly true with respect to critically evaluating supposed authorities on abstract existential questions. They are also more likely to practice safe sex than strongly religious people are, and they are less likely to be nationalistic or ethnocentric. They value freedom of thought from institutional orthodoxy.

By comparison to Western Europe, where religious belief is much lower, we find that the United States compares badly on human happiness. Denmark, which is among the least religious countries in the history of the world, consistently rates as the happiest of nations. And studies of people who were reared to be religious but later rejected their beliefs report that they feel happier in their post-religious lives.

Nevertheless, several studies show that atheists are disliked and distrusted by more Americans than any other minority group. Americans would rather vote for a homosexual for office than a nonbeliever, and more likely to disapprove of their daughter marrying an atheist than a member of any racial or ethnic minority. The authors conclude that this is due to a concerted campaign of slander against atheists by fundamentalist Christians, which they conduct without the mainline denominations ever calling them to task.

I went to St. Peter to see Dan Barker's debate against Southwestern Minnesota Fellowship of Christian Athletes director Jon Kaus, on the question "Can We Be Good Without God?" The debate was at Gustavus Adolphus, a Lutheran college, and was sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, confirming my observation that Christians are fascinated by atheists.

One thing that puzzled me about the debate was that Kaus kept saying that Barker had not been able to explain how there could be moral good without a law-giver god. Dan had repeatedly explained moral reasoning and judgment as a mental process that is purely natural and requires no supernatural intervention, but it seemed that Kaus had never heard him. It reminded me of my debates a couple of years ago against Dr. Arthur Hippler of Providence Academy on the resolution "That a supernatural authority is necessary for obligatory moral claims." I explained that there is no sense in which moral obligation supersedes reasoning and judgment, that "moral obligation" is nothing more than what one "should" do, which can be decided by naturalistic reasoning. Just like Kaus, Hippler kept hammering on the claim that I had not shown how moral good can arise without a declaration by an authoritative god. Is this some blind spot common to even intelligent Christians? It seems to me that their Christian studies have trained them

News and Notes continued on page 11.

Oh God!

Nicole Helget is a writer and teacher from the Mankato area. Here, she offers her witty perspective on Jesus, religion, and belief. -ed.

I like Jesus. I imagine he was the kind of guy I would enjoy hanging out with. And I think he'd probably be happy to chill with me. Honestly, if Jesus descended on a cloud today (or, more likely, emerged out of a spacetime shortcut) was hungry, and needed a place to crash for an evening, I believe he'd choose hanging at my house over hanging with some of the priests or preachers we've got around here. I don't think Jesus would be down with the peacocked nature of their holiness, their sanctimonious robes, the showboating collars, the cries for more and more money and whatnot. Some of these guys should just walk around with floating neon signs above their heads that flash "I'm Here!" and be able to swipe credit cards between their thumb and pointer finger. What would Jesus do if he walked into a church where a bedazzled bishop was holding court? Laugh? Get pissed? Look around and hope he's in the wrong place? Ask, "Seriously? Looks like I'm going to have to do that crucifixion number all over again."

Jesus was humble and was a thinker and socially active in a way that was meant to benefit the lowly. Jesus surrounded himself with like-minded people who could help him. He hung out with the dregs of society, women, and revolutionaries who were sick and tired of Roman taxes and Roman occupation. He hung out with people who were laborers whose last pennies were putting sandals on Roman feet, wigs on Roman heads, tunics on Roman bodies, quills and ink in Roman hands, which wrote the laws that kept Jesus' people low-class and poor. Jesus' people built Roman palaces and Roman roads and Roman sewer



by Nicole
Helget

systems. Jesus' people suckled Roman infants and nannied Roman children while Roman moms and dads ate grapes and drank wine and thought about how to keep the good times rolling for a couple more centuries.

And, then, when Jesus' people got a little time off, they went to temple, where their own religious leaders were supposed to help them, advocate for them, raise them up, relieve their suffering, support their cause. Instead, Jesus' people found a lot of these guys limping under the weight of all the money they collected, some of it from the very Romans mentioned above to keep the people in line, unquestioning, unresisting, and working. Do you know what I'm saying? The religious leaders helped the Romans keep the low class low. They were on the wrong side. Wouldn't that suck? If your own religious leaders were actually working with the elite class to keep you down? Wouldn't that be terrible? Wouldn't you be furious if that were happening now?

Oh wait.

Today Jesus' teachings have been manipulated and, somehow, in what will surely go down as one of the craziest displays of insincerity in history, his teachings have been hijacked by a political party that outwardly reflects nearly zero of his teachings but again and again uses his name to raise money and secure votes from well-meaning people, from hard-working people.

I know most people who practice or participate in a religion are good people. I happen to know a lot of believers. In fact, nearly everyone I know is a believer and practices some type of religion, mostly Christian. And these are people who open their arms to foster kids, who organize care packages for soldiers, who rebuild in disaster zones, who care for the elderly, who volunteer, who donate money to worthy causes, who are good parents, who are dedicated teachers, pillars of their communities, intelligent, hard-working, artistic, musical, poetic, and helpful. And I believe that if their personal religion helps them better do the good things they do, then they should practice it, so long as do so with open eyes. Like, just because your preacher or priest is a horse-

Oh God continued on page 17.

The Day of Reason

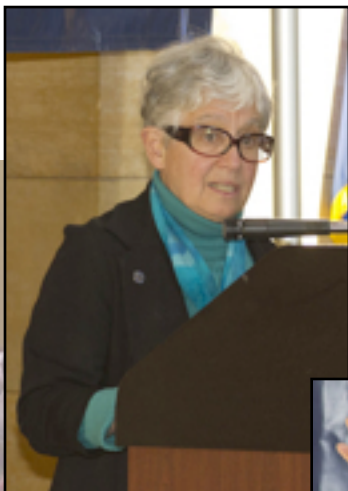


This year, the National Day of Reason was held on Thursday, May fifth. While religious people gathered outside the capitol, Minnesota Atheists hosted the National Day of Reason inside the rotunda. This was the sixth year the Day of Reason was held. It is in

direct contrast and protest of the constitution-violating Day of Prayer. Rational, free thinking citizens spoke out on the importance of state-church separation and the need for elected officials to value logic and fairness above faith and devotion to deities when it comes to matters of legislation.

State representative Phyllis Kahn delivered

brief remarks in support of reason over faith. The featured speaker this year was Sandhya Bathija from Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Other speakers included Humanists of Minnesota President Scott Lohman, Minnesota Atheists President August Berkshire, Minnesota Atheists Chair George Kane, *Atheists Talk* Radio host Mike Haubrich, and Doctor of Theology Grant Steves. Steve Petersen organized and hosted the event.





Above: while Sandhya Bathija spoke about the importance of keeping religion out of government, Christians on the State Capitol steps (below) closed their eyes and brains and displayed their best side to an imaginary being.

Photos courtesy of Brooks Peterson.



Day of Reason Letter

by Eric Jayne

(The following letter to the editor was published in the Sunday, 08 May, issue of The Pioneer Press. -ed.)

It was disappointing that Gov. Dayton chose to celebrate the National Day of Prayer with church pastors on the Capitol's steps instead of celebrating reason with the Minnesota Atheists in the Capitol rotunda on May 5. While the group outside prayed for lawmakers to support the discriminatory ban on same-sex marriage, we spoke of the need to keep ethnocentric myth-based beliefs out of public policy decisions.

I hate to think what America would look like if the Constitution's framers spent the majority of their time praying to God and reading Bible stories instead of studying science and reading John Locke. Thankfully, Benjamin Franklin knew that "lighthouses are more helpful than churches" and John Adams set the record straight when he proclaimed "the government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

Rational thought and reason are what our nation was founded on, and that is what our nation needs now, more than ever. The Minnesota Atheists will continue to hold the National Day of Reason at the Capitol, and we hope Gov. Dayton won't reject our invitation next year.

Eric Jayne, Apple Valley

The writer is director-at-large for Minnesota Atheists.

TUESDAY WITH A SCHOLAR



Photo courtesy of Matthew Richardson.

On May 10th, Minnesota Atheists' President August Berkshire gave a presentation called "Exploring Atheism" to about one hundred people at the Southdale Public Library in Edina. The program was the last in a series of eight lectures called "Tuesdays with a Scholar," organized by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Minnesota. The organizers said that August's presentation was the best attended of all the lectures in the series.

August recently had the honor of being named to the Speakers Bureau for the Center for Inquiry (CFI), the organization that publishes *Free Inquiry* and *Skeptical Inquirer* magazines. He was already on the Speakers Bureau for the Secular Student Alliance. Congrats, August!

HIGHWAY CLEAN-UP IN RICE



Minnesota Atheists members participated in our spring highway clean-up near Rice, Minnesota on Sunday, May 22nd. In the photo from right to left: Richard Trombley, Art Anderson, Shirley Moll, Deb Doucette, Rob Taylor, Tom Stavros. Not in the photo - but still helped - are Jack Richter and Steve Petersen. Thanks to all who volunteered on that wet day!

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

“Xebtb av ji yitks irsadxaij xi rbsabnb cekx av
ljrsabnkrsb kjp yitb xekj xebtb av k yitks
irsadxaij xi qi cekx av ljqikrsb.”

-Hkts Nkj Qitbj

(Answer on page 18)

I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own -- a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. -Albert Einstein, physicist, Nobel laureate (1879-1955)

Find us! We are on the web at mna.theists.org and on Meetup and Facebook:



<http://www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists/>



www.facebook.com/pages/Minnesota-Atheists

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



News and Notes (continued)

to be incapable of hearing or understanding naturalistic answers.

They say, for example, that a consequential ethical system such as utilitarianism can show that the consequences of an action may be beneficial, but it

cannot show that the action is good. But in utilitarianism, the equivalence between ‘beneficial’ and ‘morally good’ is definitional. It would be interesting to find out if this blindness, which seems pandemic among Christian debaters, also afflicts Christian audiences.

Book Review: *Reasonable Atheism*

by James Zimmerman

In *Reasonable Atheism*, authors Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse set

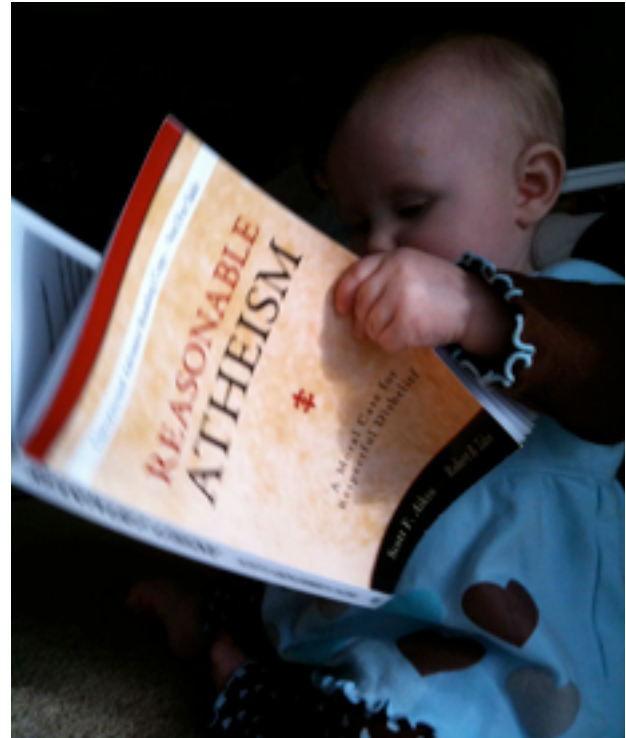
out to present a moral case for atheism. They attempt to "show religious believers that atheism is a morally and intellectually responsible position" (9). They do a rather decent job.

Reasonable Atheism is not a polemic against religion or belief. As they state on page ten, their aim "instead is to show that religious believers' beliefs about atheists are false." The authors make a point of noting that they are not merely trying to champion diversity - a worldview in which citizens respect all belief systems (a viewpoint they discount as nonsense) - but, rather, are presenting a cognitive case that the existence of gods is "entirely irrelevant to morality" (11). Indeed, they go one step further, asserting that atheism is a prerequisite in order to take good and evil seriously. In short, the authors wish to have their readers take atheists as seriously as they regard those who subscribe to different faiths from their own.

As the authors are philosophers, it probably goes without saying that it takes them quite a long time to get to meat of their argument. The first third of the book is taken up with clarifications and stage-setting. As late as chapter four (nearly 100 pages into the book!) the authors declare "our discussion thus far has been mostly preliminary." But perhaps so many pages of caveats and asides are necessary in order to assure the devout Christian reader to continue on, to turn the next page, and not fear for their soul.

During those first hundred pages, Aikin and Talisse address several objections readers may have. Foremost is the objection that religion should not be discussed publicly. The authors respond by asking why there is no corresponding rule against discussing other topics of a controversial nature, such as sports, fashion, and food. They note that religion is such a large part of a person's life that altering one's viewpoint is seen as altering who they are: "one doesn't merely change one's mind about whether Jesus was divine," they state, "one converts to Christianity" (20). Religion,

Reasonable Atheism, by Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse ©2011, Prometheus Press, 220 pages.



Above: Despite Myers' fears, Reasonable Atheism is readily understandable even by those without a degree in philosophy.

therefore, is personal. However, they point out that, as moral beings, humans should strive to minimize false views in our lives. As such, discussing religion should not only be acceptable, but of paramount concern if, for no other reason, than because we care about truth and wish to be competent in responding to criticisms, however personal.

Aikin and Talisse also address the idea, so popular among theists, that there is little point in engaging in a discussion on faith and belief with non-believers because those people are ignorant, unintelligent, wicked, or just plain evil. Again, the authors handily overcome this objection by pointing out that declining to discuss topics with certain people is erroneous. To the contrary, they explain the phenomenon in social dynamics wherein prolonged contact among people who all agree with each other results in the group's members adopting more extreme versions of their initial beliefs (36). Interestingly, the authors point out that such a fallacy can even be found among atheists, and they cite

Reasonable Atheism continued on page 20.

May Day Parade



Twenty people marched with us in the May Day parade and set up and staffed our booth at Powderhorn Park. The turnout was about half of what we usually get, due to temperatures in the 30s and a wind chill below freezing. So thank you to the following hearty people who made our May Day event a success!
 August Berkshire, Dave Bradley, Jack Caravela, Cody Connel, Grant Hermanson, Joseph Homrich, Dan Jensen, George Kane, Chris Matthews, Shirley Moll, David Perry, Steve Petersen, Fabian Rivera, Neyshaliz Rivera, Calla Simms, Will Tanberg, Richard Trombley, Rachel Wilson, and Thomas Winston.



Special thanks to Calla Simms (left) who celebrated her 37th birthday by joining us in the parade. Thanks, Calla!



Photos courtesy of Richard Trombley.



Genuine Atheists and Illegitimate Christians Support Gay Rights



by Eric Jayne

The brutal practice of slavery was arguably the nation's most disturbing human rights disaster in the 19th century. It was a subject that profoundly impacted Mark Twain who grew up in pre-Civil War Missouri. Even though many Christians today credit their religion for the abolitionist movement and the end of slavery, Twain knew better. "There was no place in the land where the seeker could not find some small budding sign of pity for the slave", he wrote. "No place in all the land but one—the pulpit; it yielded at last [as] it always does." Twain went on to say that the Christian pulpit "fought a strong and stubborn fight, and then did what it always does, joined the procession—at the tail end." After slavery was finally abolished Twain observed that the biblical authorization for slavery persists: "The slavery text remained; the practice changed, that was all." His words remain true today as tolerance is on the rise for gays and lesbians thanks to good old fashioned secular values and "illegitimate Christians."

Over 20 states, including California (via Proposition 8), constitutionally banned same-sex marriage from 2004-2008. Campaigns in support of the ban received millions of dollars in every one of those states from Christian-based and Christian-influenced organizations. Additionally, Christian leaders like James Dobson, Billy Graham and his son Franklin, Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed and countless other pastors, who hold sway with their local policy makers and voters, have been staunch opponents of equal marriage rights. After decades of fervent clerical opposition and mob rule tactics it seemed that same-sex marriage would be firmly banned for generations to come.

Recent events, however, have rekindled hope that same-sex couples will receive their due rights far sooner than seemed possible. Since 2008, four states—plus the District of Columbia—have joined Massachusetts in legally providing same-sex marriage certificates, and Proposition 8 is almost certainly headed to the Supreme Court after a Federal judge overturned the California ban last year. Another significant victory for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) tolerance came in 2010 when a federal bill passed to repeal the discriminatory "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

It's also important to note that Minnesota stands a good chance at becoming the first state in the

nation to vote down a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

A May 2011 *Minneapolis Star Tribune* poll indicates

that the majority of Minnesotans (55%) are against the amendment that will likely appear before voters next year.

While it's true that some churches and church leaders actively support LGBT equal rights, as a whole, they are severely behind secularists, humanists, and freethinking atheists. It took until 2005 before the first mainline Christian denomination (United Church of Christ) endorsed same-sex marriage (<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/05/national/05church.html>). In 2004 the Episcopal Church kindly allowed LGBT's to serve as clergy, but not before a contentious election that has divided congregations to this day. Five years later the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) followed suit, but that also caused a split among their congregations. Most recently, the Presbyterian Church made headlines after they also voted for gays and lesbians in the clergy. The United Church of Christ, however, remains the only mainline church to specifically endorse same-sex marriage.

The progressive change of practice within these religious organizations is the result of defiant church members who abandoned the anti-gay texts written in the Bible. Twain affectionately referred to such church members as "illegitimate Christians" because they rose "against a rooted wrong" despite its authorization in the Bible. Other illegitimate Christians from the past, guided by a desire for human decency, chose to ignore the biblical authorization to stone to death disobedient children, adulterers, and Sabbath day laborers. Illegitimate Christians also eventually agreed to stop killing "witches" after massacring innocent victims in puritanical America even though the witch killing texts remain in the Bible. While gays and lesbians aren't necessarily being systematically massacred in America today, they certainly are victims of various hate crimes; and Christian institutions have

Supporting Gay Rights continued on page 15.

Atheists Talk: May Radio Report

by Steve Petersen

Our radio program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 from the KTNF studios in Eden Prairie on AM 950. Minnesota Atheists is the producer and the director is Mike Haubrich. Hosts include Mike Haubrich and Scott Lohman. Original music is composed, played and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. Live streaming is available on 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 donate online at http://mnatheists.org/component/option,com_civicrm/Itemid,55. All past programs can be accessed via web page.

Program # 113 “Day of Prayer or Day of Reason. May 1, 2011: George Kane interviewed Sandhya Bathija, the Communications Associate with Americans United for Separation of Church and State. George and Sandhya discussed both the

Supporting Gay Rights (continued)

unabashedly led inflammatory campaigns against them.

It will be interesting to see how the same-sex marriage debate unfolds in Minnesota as the 2012 election draws near. There’s definitely a shift in

National Day of Prayer and the secular alternative, The National Day of Reason. In addition they discussed the issues of current interest regarding state and church separation. Mike Haubrich hosted.

Program # 114 “Rock Beyond Belief: Sgt. Justin Griffith” May 8, 2011: The brass at Fort Bragg, the largest Army fort in the US, supported a Christian rock event called “Rock the Fort.” This overtly religious production outraged Sgt. Griffith, who in response followed proper protocol to organize an event “for the rest of us” called Rock Beyond Belief. As you might imagine even though Sgt. Griffith did everything by the book, when push came to shove, his counter-event was shoved out of the fort by the commanding brass. However, Sgt. Griffith has not given up. He is adapting, and pressing forward to achieve equal treatment for the non-religious in the foxholes equal to the treatment of religious soldiers. Sgt. Griffith was interviewed by Mike Haubrich, Steve Petersen, hosted.

Program # 115 “The Nature of Existence: with Roger Nygard” May 15, 2011: Roger Nygard produced the film *The Nature of Existence* in order to find the best answers that religion and philosophy can provide to answer age-old questions: “Is there a reason that we are here on Earth at this time? Is there a Grand Purpose to life? How can we know the answer, and if we do find the answer, what can we do in order to fulfill this grand purpose?” Scott Lohman conducted the interview and Mike Haubrich hosted.

tolerance for LGBT rights, but it’s important to remember that the increased tolerance derives from secular humanism, which is completely divorced from the belief in God, acceptance of the Bible, and respect for religious dogma. When Christians reach the ultimate level of illegitimacy in their faith, and become freethinking atheists, human decency will surely thrive and we won’t have to reconcile biblical moral codes with basic human rights.

May Treasurer's Report

Compiled by Chris Matthews

Building Fund

Daniel Norte	\$72
Vernon Young	\$100
In Memory of Iver Shoberg	\$1,000
Total Building Fund	\$1,172

Radio Fund

Jerry Rauser	\$25
Arthur Scearcy	\$40
William Lehto	\$40
Erik Englebretson	\$100
Martin Rockwell	\$100
Paul Gramstad	\$100
Total Radio Fund	\$405

General/Visibility Fund

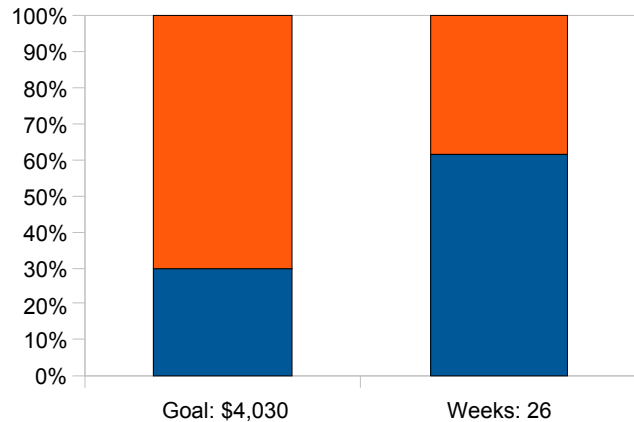
Meghan Kosowski	\$10
Dale Howey	\$10
Anna Hanna	\$10
John McCallum	\$25
Morgan Christian	\$65
Total General/Visibility Fund	\$120

Total Income: \$1,697

Current Building Fund

Total: \$128,560

Radio Show Fundraising Goal for 6 months ending July 31



Amount raised in first 16 weeks: \$1,200
 Amount remaining to Reach Goal: \$2,830

Major Expenses

Radio Show	\$820
Speakers (May meeting and Day of Reason)	\$716
Newsletter Printing	\$468
Printing (non-Newsletter)	\$359
Logo Merchandise	\$323
Juneteenth Booth	\$200

Board Game Night at Java Train

Come join up with other Godless Gamers on Thursday, July 14th! We'll have an assortment of games, including casual jump-right-in games and more hardcore strategy offerings, and everything in between. Don't be shy about bringing games you'd like to play.

Java Train, at 1341 Pascal Street in St. Paul, has penciled us in for the 2nd Thursday of the month for the next 6 months. They don't charge us for the space, so let's continue to give them plenty of business with dinner, coffee drink, and whoopee pie orders (and tips!). The room can comfortably accommodate up to 20, so if you enjoy fun games and good coffee, RSVP, ASAP, on meetup.com so you won't be left out.

Hope to see you there!

Your Turn: COEXIST without Religion

by August Berkshire

As I pondered the April 28 *Times*' Writers Group column "Religion gives adherents guide," I came up with my own list of meanings for the letters that form the word COEXIST.

"C" stands for the rejection of Crusades that religious people have conducted to force their belief in an invisible being on other people who have believed in a different invisible being or in no invisible being at all.

"C" also stands for the Compassion we can have for one another once we abandon the religious beliefs that divide us.

And "C" stands for the Courage we should have to face death squarely and still enjoy and find meaning in life, without the psychological need to invent a heaven to live in after we die.

"O" stands for the Optimism that, through curiosity and compassion (both of which are ingrained in us by evolution), we can solve problems and improve society without inventing invisible beings with conflicting messages.

"E" stands for the Egotism that we need to overcome in order to abandon the fiction that we are the special creation of a supernatural god, rather than the product of another "E" – natural Evolution.

"X" stands for the X-factor in life – the unknown – and the fact that we have to learn to accept it and

search for real answers, instead of giving up too soon and inserting a god-of-the-gaps "God did it." Because we are never given a tangible definition of what a god is, nor a description of what mechanism a god uses to accomplish anything, "God" is never an answer but is merely a more complicated and unnecessary question.

"I" stands for the Integrity we should have to not bow down to superstitions and prejudices of the past.

And "I" stands for our rejection of religious Intolerance that prevents all citizens from having equal civil rights.

"S" stands for our ability to Save ourselves, rather than believe that a half-man/half-god will save us from the wrath of his god father.

"S" is for the Satisfaction we can gain from thinking for ourselves and helping one another, because there are no supernatural forces that will do it for us.

"T" stands for Tolerance and Together.

The god characters of the three big monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – are demonstrably intolerant, and this is reflected in many of their followers. Yet it is only through Tolerance that we can COEXIST Together in relative peace.

(This rebuttal opinion was printed in the St. Cloud Times on May 14, 2011. It was also published in the Asbury Park Press in New Jersey. The opinion that August was responding to can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/SCT-COEXIST> -ed.)



Oh God! (continued)

toothed grinner (Joel Osteen) doesn't mean you shouldn't call him out when he says gay couples are a threat to heterosexual marriage or Muslims are terrorists or conditions you on how to vote. Don't be afraid to ask, "How do you know that?" Ask him, "How many gays or Muslims do you personally know?" Ask him, "Would Jesus really vote for a candidate against public health care? I mean, wasn't Jesus, above all, a healer?" Or, say to him, "I don't see why I should vote for the anti-abortion guy who has no problem waging unjust wars that kill children or votes against access to

lifesaving medical procedures that save the lives of children? If I vote for that guy, wouldn't it just be a wash?" It's okay to say to your preacher, "I like your fire. I like your sermon-style, but I find your suggestions deeply incongruous." Your priest. Your preacher. He's just a guy. Just a regular guy. Even if he is wearing a funny hat or cardboard collar.

(Nicole's complete essay "Oh God!" can be found at her blog, <http://nicolehelget.blogspot.com/2011/04/oh-god.html>. -ed.)

May Cable Report

For our May cable program George Kane interviewed Sandhya Bathija on Thomas Jefferson's Wall of Separation. Bathija is the Communications Associate for Americans United for Separation of Church and State. She joined the staff in May 2008. Bathija previously worked as a reporter for the legal trade publication *The National Law Journal*, and practiced law for a civil rights firm in Detroit. She holds a law degree from The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, or have an idea for a program please contact Steve Petersen at achair@mnatheists.org or call 651-484-9277.

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

Podcasts: Minnesota Atheists.org. Available via iTunes. Made possible by Grant Hermanson.



by Steve Petersen

Cable Schedule:

Burnsville/Eagan Community Tele-vision: 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

“There is no moral obligation to believe what is unbelievable any more than there is a moral obligation to do what is undoable.”

-Carl Van Doren

Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org

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

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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, 1:00-3:00, Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting. Note: No monthly meetings during the summer months of June, July, or August.

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, 6345 Penn Avenue South, 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.

Reasonable Atheism (continued)

atheists, and they cite Christopher Hitchens' denunciation of theists as "credulous idiots" as an example (71). They lambaste New Atheists such as Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Dawkins for failing to distinguish between being wrong and being stupid. It is also possible, they claim, to hold a correct belief for the wrong reasons (the bizarre example they cite is that it would be wrong to believe that Harrison Ford majored in philosophy - even though he did - simply because he delivers some profound dialogue in the *Star Wars* trilogy). The authors' stance on this issue has already generated a denunciation from PZ Myers, who claimed that this book provides an example of how not to write a book on atheism. (Technically, however, Myers was simply baffled by the authors' response to a post he made at their site. After reading their tedious reply, Myers commented on his blog wondering if their entire book was written with such "preening opacity." Good news, Myers: it's not.)

The meat of the book – their argument for the reasonableness of atheism – is not nearly as

fascinating as their protracted prefatory chapters. On page 130, for example, they argue that a god that was less than all-powerful or all-good “would be a defective God – that is, no God at all,” but given the pantheon of deities over the millennia, it’s difficult to follow this reasoning. As another example, on page 148 they contend that “if there’s nothing that we should worship, then there is no God.” They next assert that “if there is a God, we should worship Him,” but only a few pages later, they make a clear argument that just because there is a God, it doesn’t follow that it is deserving of worship (155).

The book’s cleverest arguments are to be found in the appendices, where they present, first, the problem of Hell (though, admittedly, this is easily dispensed if the reader does not believe in Hell); then offer a “Religion and Morality Test.” The test, designed to show the absurdity and immorality of the Old Testament would be stronger if it weren’t so thinly veiled. Nevertheless, if a theist – particularly a Christian – has read that far, then this final appendix might just provide the push they need to, at the very least, view atheism as a morally conscionable position and, at best, to see and reject the immorality inherent in the monotheism religions of our day.

"I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."

- Stephen Hawking, interview in *The Guardian*, May 15, 2011

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