

NOVEMBER/  
DECEMBER 2013  
VOLUME 23  
NUMBER 10

SPECIAL SUPER  
COLOSSAL SIZE  
ISSUE



# The Minnesota Atheist

## New Discussion Format Planned for November Minnesota Atheists Meeting

For our November meeting we've decided to try something new, ambitious, and hopefully rewarding. We want a program which will engage our members more than usual, which will address some of the questions we all have, and which might give us a hint as to who our future leaders will be. The program will be led by Bernadette Chlebeck and Phil Cunliffe.



### **Questioned Proposal by Ethan Lofton**

We'll start by posting on the wall issues from three categories:

1. Religious Apologetics: Arguments from religious people directed at atheists.
2. Atheist Apologetics: Arguments from atheists directed at religious people.
3. Atheist Lifestyle: Questions and attitudes about how we live our lives that we are often asked by religious people and the general public, and which we ask ourselves as well.

Members will gather around the posting of their choice, and the most popular ones will be taken back to tables for group discussions of six to eight people. After a period of discussion these small groups will make presentations to the whole group. We hope to have a panel of experts to bounce our ideas off of. Not only should these discussions provide answers we can all use, but we

anticipate that a by-product will be to bring our attention to talented new leaders.

Following is a sample list of issues. We may add to the list later, and any questions we don't get to this time could be used for a future session if members tell us they like this type of program.

#### Religious Apologetics

- The Argument from Design
- The Fine-Tuned Universe
- Intelligent Design in Biology
- The Origin and Maintenance of Morality
- The Meaning of Life

#### Atheist Apologetics

- The Problem of Evil
- The Problem of Conflicting Revelations
- The Problem of an All-Knowing God and Human Free Will
- Unintelligent Design

#### Atheist Lifestyle

- Grief, Dying, and Death
- Religious Events with Family such as Baptisms, Confirmations, Bar Mitzvahs, and Weddings
- Family Holiday Gatherings: Prayers, Religious Traditions
- Being Treated as Untrustworthy by Society

The November Minnesota Atheists meeting will be held at the Rondo Public Library, 461 Dale Street North, Saint Paul on November 17th. The meeting will follow our usual schedule:

- 1:00-1:15 p.m. Informal Gathering Time
- 1:15-1:45 p.m. Business Meeting
- 1:45-2:00 p.m. Break
- 2:00-3:30 p.m. Program

You may attend any part of the meeting you wish. At 4:00 p.m. there will be an optional dinner at Little Szechuan, 422 University Avenue West, Saint Paul.

**President's Column 2**  
**Board Report 2**  
**News and Notes 3**  
**Cryptogram 3**  
**A Scottish View 4**  
**October Meeting 5**  
**Why Volunteering 5**  
**Debate Opening 6**  
**Religious Freedom 8**  
**Thoreau 9**  
**New England Primer 10**  
**George Bush 11**  
**Treasury Report 12**  
**Upcoming Events 12**  
**Television Report 13**  
**Radio Report 14**



President's Column • Eric Jayne

## Giving Thanks for the Blessings of Atheism

I love Thanksgiving. The overindulgence of food, time off from work, and televised football are traditions that remain hallowed with me. One of the rituals we partake in at my home before our Thanksgiving dinner is for each person at the table to list one thing that they are thankful for. It can be ordinary or extraordinary, recent or ancient. Whatever the thing is, it must be something we are genuinely thankful for. In that spirit, I'd like to take a moment to review some things that I am thankful for in regards to Minnesota Atheists.

I'm thankful for an established Minnesota Atheists history, carefully constructed by leaders who are still active after nearly thirty years of service.

I'm thankful for a well-balanced board consisting of men and women featuring a healthy mix of ambitious enthusiasm and important steady caution.

I'm thankful for our wonderful group of engaged members and sup-

porters who continue to demonstrate positive atheism in action through our community outreach events and regular social activities.

I'm thankful for our ever larger and stronger member base, without which Minnesota Atheists would be nothing more than a website and a Facebook page.

I'm thankful for the business partnership we've made with the Saint Paul Saints minor league baseball team. Without their enthusiastic interest in our organization, we would not have been able to create one of the most unique atheist promotions ever—the atheist-themed Night of Unbelievable Fun. This event features the Saint Paul Saints as the Mr. Paul Aints and is now in its second year.

I'm thankful for our freethinking partner organizations, locally and nationally.

I'm thankful for our continued

support of our radio show and cable show and the variety of talent featured in each.

I'm thankful for our dedicated volunteers and organizers who help make our events fun, safe, organized, and memorable.

I'm thankful for all of this and more.

When I find myself in a situation where I'm asked to defend secularism or atheism, or I'm asked to explain what the Minnesota Atheists organization is all about, I consider all of these fantastic elements that make up Minnesota Atheists, as well as all of the wonderful people that contribute to our efforts—whether by financial donations or simply attending an event.

As president of Minnesota Atheists, I offer my humble gratitude to everyone (including you, dear reader) involved with our organization. I wish you and your loved ones a satisfying Thanksgiving and Happy Holidays!

Board Report • Jill Carlson

## Minnesota Atheists Board Discusses Goals, Finances, and the Summer Picnic Schedule

For October, the Minnesota Atheists Board of Directors was involved in both the 2014 Goals Setting Meeting and the regular board meeting.

Thirteen people attended the October 12th Goals Setting Meeting, and most committees presented reports. At the meeting a hotly debated topic was the future of the Minnesota Atheists building fund and whether to purchase or lease a building. Thoughts were shared about Minnesota Atheists encouraging more collaboration with other like-minded organizations like the Humanists of Minnesota. The overall theme of the session was a desire to foster more volunteerism within the

membership to serve with on-going Minnesota Atheists projects like the radio and television show and general publicity.

At the regular board meeting, finances were the main topic. Our current financial situation was a topic of concern due to the significant expenses of both the Saints game and the KTNF radio show. Our funds are low at this time, but no major expenses are planned for the upcoming months. Brief brainstorming occurred related to fund raising and member recruitment.

Eric Jayne said that next month he will present his analysis in support of

Minnesota Atheists sponsoring another Saints game in 2014.

The summer schedule of freethought picnics was set. This year Camp Quest will be cosponsoring the June picnic along with Campus Atheists and Skeptics (CASH).

Finally, the board agreed to announce a donation opportunity at the October monthly meeting to support local humanist Ben "SweaterVest" Blanchard. Through the Pathfinders Project, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, Blanchard will carry out service projects in several developing countries and work toward developing a Humanist Service Corps network.



News and Notes • Commentary by George Kane

## Looming Supreme Court Decision in *Greece v. Galloway* Could Eviscerate the Establishment Clause

I'm scared. I'm really scared. I'm afraid that when the Supreme Court decides *Town of Greece v. Galloway* this term, it will overturn the endorsement standard of Establishment Clause jurisprudence, leaving nothing of the wall of separation between church and state but scattered rubble.

This was not regarded as a particularly important case. The Town of Greece, New York, is located just eight miles east of Rochester, and has a population just below 100,000. Since 1999, the town council has opened its meetings with a prayer. The town's policy does not dictate the content of the prayer; but in nearly fourteen years of monthly meetings, only four of those who have presented it were not Christians.

The last time the US Supreme Court ruled on prayer at public meetings was in *Marsh v. Chambers* in 1983. That case decided that it was constitutional for the Nebraska legislature to open each session with a prayer from a state-employed chaplain. The Court ruled that the practice did not violate the First Amendment, and justified the decision by citing the long history of opening public and legislative meetings with prayer.

Minnesota Atheists contends that Establishment Clause violations should be adjudicated by applying the Lemon Test, according to which a government practice must have a secular purpose, must have a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion, and must avoid excessive government entanglement with religion. While Lemon has never been overturned, it has been largely ignored in more recent cases.

George Kane

### Freethought Cryptogram

Xoxfoyt ma mdy tgojqot tqxgrp yogolv kilv viop lyo vmrz, lsz fojmxo dgtov qa viop lyo oegmtoz vm lsp zqaayosv bqok.

Vio jilylvoyqtvqj idxls vylqv qt smv lklyosott fdv jmsamyxqvp, lsz vio jilylvoyqtvqj yotdrv qt yorquqmdt klyalyo.

—Xqjilor Jyqjivms, *Vio Rmtv Kmyrz* (Answer on page twelve.)

In the 1984 case *Lynch v. Donnelly*, concerning a nativity scene on government-owned property, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor advanced a new standard, that government violates the Establishment Clause if a reasonable observer would conclude that the practice demonstrates government endorsement of religion.

In *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the council prayer was challenged by two local residents for violating the Establishment Clause because it showed that the town was favoring Christianity. The suit lost in District Court, but won when the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision in favor of the plaintiffs. The town appealed this verdict to the Supreme Court, which granted certiorari. Hearings will begin on November 6th.

In *Marsh*, the prayers at the Nebraska legislature were non-sectarian and not coercive, since most visitors were in attendance only as sight-seers. In *Greece*, the prayers have consistently been expressly Christian and also coercive, since citizens who bring business before the town council have no alternative but to attend the opening prayer.

Why did the Court accept this case? Doing so requires the vote of four of the nine Justices. I am afraid that the conservative majority sees it as a vehicle to strike down the Endorsement Test. Last term the Roberts Court already knocked holes in Jefferson's wall in the *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn* case, in which it ruled that being a taxpayer does not confer standing to sue government over an Establishment Clause violation.

That ruling has left us in the preposterous situation that governments may flagrantly violate the First Amendment, yet there is no way to bring them to account because no one is eligible to sue them. Conservatives are calling for the Court to throw out the Endorsement Test and decide Establishment Clause cases based on a coercion test and historical practice. Of course, the history they want to count is the David Barton-filtered, mythicized Christian America, from a time when the nation was less culturally diverse, when it was scientifically illiterate, and when it had not yet been exposed to modern atheist analysis. The courts have only been reviewing Establishment Clause violations since the middle of the 20th Century. That history they want forgotten.

Minnesota Atheist Notes

### The Establishment Clause

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the US Constitution reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The Supreme Court has used the Establishment Clause to place limits on financial assistance to religious organizations, to prohibit some types of religious displays, and to eliminate most forms of prayer in public schools. So far, however, none of these restrictions has been unequivocal.



Commentary by Charles Coventry

# A Scottish View of the Minnesota Atheists Conference and Religion in America

As part of my third holiday to Stillwater, Minnesota, to visit Ken Moses, we attended the Minnesota Atheists conference this past August.

At the conference, my Humanist Society of Scotland T-shirt aroused interest because of our motto “We’re A Jock Tamson’s Bairns.” This is an old proverb meaning that everybody is the same. Supposedly in a certain village the entire population had been fathered by Jock Tamson, the blacksmith.

I am always amused on these visits to see the response when I am introduced as being from Scotland—people seem to react as if I were from some other planet. Somebody at the conference did detect “an accent,” presumably not North American. This doesn’t cause me any offence; as a linguist I just see it as a topic to investigate. Perhaps our preoccupation with differences is a survival from an earlier period in our development. Ken remarked that at the conference people showed no concern regarding disabilities. I have mild cerebral palsy and there was somebody at the conference with spina bifida. I just took this acceptance as normal in an atheist group, but I think fundamentalists from any religion would have been frightened or curious.

The conference started with a talk on “How Archaeology Killed Biblical History.” This talk demonstrated that modern archeology is in conflict with the historical stories of the Bible. Yet we know how common it still is for tourists to visit the purported locations of Biblical stories.

For the first workshop, I chose “Answering Your Child’s Difficult Questions and How to Teach Religious Literacy.” I chose this workshop because on my three visits to America I have been struck by just how much religion, or at least Christianity, dominates large parts of the United States, much as it did in Britain in the nineteenth century. In the workshop, the question was raised of what to tell children when they ask why they don’t go to church. I told the group that in Britain today it’s more likely that children in religious families will ask why they have to

attend public worship when other children are out at sports.

For the second workshop, I chose “Dealing with Religious Relatives while Raising Freethinking Children.” In Britain, dealing with religious relatives is probably much less of a problem now than it would have been even when I was growing up in the 1950’s and 1960’s. If there was to be any problem now, it would most likely be with grandparents.

Nevertheless, many religious parents and grandparents still have many sectarian prejudices, particularly if they support certain football teams. (In Scotland, some teams are distinctly denominational.) While such parents and grandparents probably have no more than a vague superstition about the Bible and other cult objects, their attitudes can certainly affect how they treat children.

I bought a copy of *Atheist Voices of Minnesota* and found the same outdated religious ideas criticized there as at the conference, especially in the authors’ childhood memories. It’s hard to believe that some of the authors were writing about the 1980’s and not the 1920’s or even the 1950’s. Only two old-fashioned religious ideas seem to be missing. One is temperance meetings. The other is Sabbatarianism, the practice of observing the sabbath very strictly, such as using the car or public transport during the week, but walking to church on Sunday no matter how far away it is.

People who attended the workshops on science reported that many people in the US still believe the Genesis creation story. Later on, Ken and I visited Como Zoo, where we noted that the information about the apes made no reference to *Homo sapiens*. When we pointed this out to another visitor, she went into hysterics, insisting that God created man before the animals. When we reported the mistake to Visitor Information, the reply was that they couldn’t have anything so controversial in Minnesota! That man is an ape should be common knowledge in the US as it is to any educated person in Europe.

Even what remains of religious belief

in the United Kingdom is quickly declining. An email I received recently from the British Humanist Association reports that in the last census, conducted in 2011, there was a large drop since 2001 of people claiming to be religious. The drop was bigger in Scotland than in England and Wales. The building of churches reflects this too. The last great period of church building was in the 1950’s. In Edinburgh, the only surviving synagogue dates from the 1930’s and the Sikh temple is a former church. Only the relatively small Central Mosque is recent, from the 1980’s, and if immigration from Afghanistan and Pakistan stops, it will probably close.

Things are looking better for nonbelievers all the time.

*Charles Coventry lives in Edinburgh, Scotland.*

## Minnesota Atheist Notes Religion in Scotland

Scotland has an established church, The Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland is Presbyterian and subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith, based on Calvinist doctrine, but repudiates some aspects of the Confession.

Religious instruction and religious observance are compulsory in all public schools. The Education and Lifelong Learning Department of the Scottish Parliament operates and funds all public schools, which include both non-denominational and denominational schools. The denominational schools are primarily Roman Catholic.

According to the Scots Census of 2011, 32% of Scots belong to the Church of Scotland, 16% belong to the Roman Catholic Church, and 37% do not belong to any religion. *The Scotsman* reports that church attendance has been declining steadily except among independent denominations, where attendance is increasing, especially for evangelical denominations.

Mike Haubrich

## Deliverance at Hand! Author Delivers an Impressive Talk at October Minnesota Atheists Meeting

For our October meeting at the Apple Valley Community Center, James Zimmerman gave us an informative and witty presentation. Zimmerman started speaking in front of audiences when he was just eight years old, and a few years of experience have made him into an entertaining and accomplished presenter. It does make a difference, too, to have a good book to present. Zimmerman's autobiographical tale of growing up in, living in, and finally leaving the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society is *Deliverance at Hand!: The Redemption of a Devout Jehovah's Witness*. I don't want to give away too much of the story, because I strongly encourage people to purchase and read the book.

One of the puzzles that atheists who grew up without religion struggle with is the question of why theists don't leave their religion as soon as they no longer have the faith necessary to believe that

what their religion teaches is true. Zimmerman explained that he had been an agnostic for approximately seven years before he and his spouse both decided that the time had come to leave the only church and community he had known. They had to leave their friends, and they had the dreadful knowledge that if their church disfellowshipped them then they would soon become nonpersons to many of those friends and family members. It was a fearful prospect, but ultimately one that they chose together, and the book explains what led to their desire to be honest with themselves and reject the lies around which they had built their lives.

For more on Zimmerman's book, listen to the podcast of the October 27th *Atheists Talk*, available to download at [mnaatheists.org](http://mnaatheists.org).

*Deliverance at Hand!* is available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).



**James Zimmerman at the October Minnesota Atheists Meeting**

Bernadette Chlebeck and Phil Cunliffe

## Why Volunteering as an Atheist Matters

We have all heard the stereotypes: atheists are angry, arrogant, and amoral. Some people fear us. There are atheists who fit the stereotype, just as there are religious people who steal, cheat, and act as if their wants are more important than others people's needs. But people of faith have something that atheists lack: a large number of people who feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and visit the sick. Their true reasons for doing charitable deeds is irrelevant when the results of their actions present people of faith as trustworthy and honorable. Nonbelievers are rarely seen volunteering, and so they miss the opportunity to present themselves in this light.

Recently at the Family Place homeless shelter, someone asked a Minnesota Atheist volunteer what church our group was from.

That question did not surprise me; people who attend church are more likely to be volunteers. The Minnesota Atheist volunteer explained who we were and what our beliefs or lack of beliefs are. The conversation was friendly and respectful on both sides, and curiosity and questions led to understanding. In that moment, a person who had never met an admitted atheist broke bread with us and discovered we are trustworthy and honorable. When atheists volunteer, we do more than provide service and help to someone in need, we diminish people's fear of us and begin to dispel the stereotypes. I encourage each and every one of you to find a cause and show up in your atheist T-shirt. One conversation at a time, the atheist stereotype can be changed from angry, arrogant, and amoral to happy, caring, and trustworthy.

Volunteer Opportunity

## Remove Snow for Seniors

The Neighborhood Involvement Program (NIP) of Minneapolis invites you to take part in their snow clearing program for seniors. NIP serves all of Minneapolis with the exception of the south-southwest area, south of West 36th Street and west of 35W; and the far north, north of 44th Avenue North.

Snow removal volunteers adopt one yard for the entire season. Family teams and small groups are welcome; children must be seven or older and supervised by an adult. Exact locations depend on need.

For more information, please contact Jeanne Tramel Rasmussen, the NIP Seniors Program Volunteer Coordinator, at [srvolunteer@neighborhoodinvolve.org](mailto:srvolunteer@neighborhoodinvolve.org) or 612-746-8549. The NIP website is [www.neighborhoodinvolve.org](http://www.neighborhoodinvolve.org).

August Berkshire

## Opening Statement from the Recent *Can We Be Good without God?* Debate

*On October 20, 2013, I debated Rev. Scott McMurray on the topic of “Can We Be Good without God?” at the University of Wisconsin in La Crosse. The debate was sponsored by the La Crosse Secular Student Society and the La Crosse Area Freethought Society.*

*Following is my fifteen-minute opening statement. As I always do in debates like this, I open with a “prebuttal.” I argue what is wrong with the religious point of view before I say what’s better about the atheist point of view. I do this for three reasons:*

*First, in rebuttals a person is only supposed to address what the other person raised in their opening statement. There are often anti-religion points I want to make but I can’t count on my opponent raising these issues in their opening statements, so I do so myself in my opening statement. Second, the default in this country is religious belief, so if I can discredit religion right away it should make people more open to the atheist viewpoint, if only out of curiosity. Third, I like to put my opponent on the defensive right away.*

We are all concerned with morality. Without it, we might not even be here. And I understand the fears of some religious people that, without a god to create or enforce morality, we would degenerate into a lawless species, torturing and murdering each other with nothing to hold us back. But we don’t get our morality from the gods, we create it ourselves, and then ascribe it to the gods as sort of an invisible policeman. But the thing is, you don’t need the gods to justify good behavior, you only need the gods to justify bad behavior.

When we’re talking about gods we can start with one simple question: “How do you tell the difference between a revelation and a hallucination?” For thousands of years, we have had all kinds of people who have claimed to speak for all kinds of gods: loving gods, petty gods, jealous gods, intolerant gods, vengeful gods, forgiving gods and unforgiving gods. We have created all of these

gods in our own image, and, just like we humans, these gods can be loving one moment and spiteful the next moment.

In addition, the various gods we have created can’t seem to agree on the morality of the following things: the use of alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine; eating pork; eating any type of meat; gambling; dancing; the prosperity gospel; masturbation; premarital sex; contraception; abortion; artificial insemination; in



**August Berkshire**

vitro fertilization; embryonic stem cell research; polygamy; divorce; voluntary euthanasia; the death penalty; the equality of women and gays with straight men; honor killings; female genital mutilation; slavery; suicide bombings; the use of force; and when and if we should go to war. How can we follow the moral plan of a god when the gods themselves can’t seem to make up their minds? By the way, if you believe your god knows the future then there’s no free will and Christian and Muslim moralities collapse.

I don’t have time tonight to examine all the gods, so let’s pick a popular god: the god of the Bible. In the Bible it states in three different places that God creates calamities: Isaiah 45:6-7: “I am the LORD...causing well-being and creating calamity.” Lamentations 3:38: “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?” And Amos 3:6: “If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?” Clearly, we are dealing with an immoral god. Have you ever noticed that in insurance policies “Acts of God” are always disasters?

The Bible opens with a huge act of injustice that becomes the basis for Christianity: the entire human race is condemned by God because of the actions of two people. Later, in the New Testament, God sacrifices himself to himself to save us from himself.

Now let’s take a look at something we would all agree is immoral: the killing of innocent children. The Biblical god engages in the mass murder of innocent children at least three times: a Worldwide Flood, the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Killing of the Firstborn Children of Egypt. In fact, the Biblical god has quite a hit list of people that we’re supposed to kill: people who curse or blaspheme the Lord, people who worship another god, witches and wizards, non-virgin brides, gay men, disobedient sons, people who curse their father or mother, and people who work on the Sabbath.

I have heard Christians say that Jesus is different than Yahweh. But if Christianity is a monotheistic religion, then there must be some sense in which Jesus is the same god as Yahweh. Furthermore, we are told that God is unchanging. The fact that any god at any time committed and ordered these immoral acts means that he is an immoral god. And, if God keeps changing his mind, how are we supposed to keep track of whom we’re supposed to kill?

By the way—for fans of the Ten Commandments—most of them would be unconstitutional if we tried to enact

them into law. They violate such things as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and freedom of assembly. So you can have the First Amendment or you can have the Bible, but you can't have both.

As Jules Renard said: "I don't know if god exists, but it would be better for his reputation if he didn't." As Susan B. Anthony said, "I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do, because I notice it always coincides with their own desires." Indeed, the six most frightening words in the English language may well be: "God told me to do it."

If you're a religious person that follows the Bible or the Qur'an then you're probably following the good parts and ignoring the bad parts. But since both parts are supposedly the word of a god, then on what basis are you deciding what is acceptable and what is not acceptable? It's because you're bringing your own outside-of-the-Bible, outside-of-the-Qur'an, sense of human decency to bear upon your holy book: picking the good God parts and ignoring the bad God parts.

God-belief doesn't even work very well as a placebo. The countries of the world and the states in the United States that are the least religious also tend to have the least crime. As Richard Dawkins wrote in *The God Delusion*: "If you agree that, in the absence of God, you would commit robbery, rape, and murder, you reveal yourself as an immoral person, and we would be well advised to steer a wide course around you. If, on the other hand, you admit that you would continue to be a good person even when not under divine surveillance, you have fatally undermined your claim that God is necessary for us to be good."

So where does our sense of human decency really come from? The following example gives us our first clue: Imagine a mother with two children, a girl and a boy. Now, imagine that the girl starts hitting the boy. Does the mother say "Stop hitting your brother because it says not to in the Bible, the Qur'an, or the Vedas?" No. At that point god and religion are the furthest things from her mind. Instead, doesn't the mother say something like: "Stop hitting your

brother, you're hurting him.?" That's consequences. Or, she might also say: "Stop hitting your brother; how would you like it if someone hit you.?" That's empathy. Consequences and empathy are the beginning of where our ethics really come from.

Let's focus first on consequences. Instead of talking about "moral" vs. "immoral" or "ethical" vs. "unethical" or "right" vs. "wrong" it makes more sense to talk about "helpful" vs. "harmful" because we can often objectively say whether an action is helpful or harmful. An action can be helpful or harmful to yourself, to the person or people directly affected by your actions, or to society as a whole. Sometimes an action is helpful or harmful on all three levels, and then we have no problem saying it's ethical or unethical. When an action might be helpful to you, but harmful to someone else and harmful to society, such as theft, we almost always say it's unethical. Disputes arise depending upon how we define helpful and harmful and how we prioritize self, immediate others, and society as a whole.

Now let's talk about empathy. Why do we care about each other? After all, doesn't evolution reward selfishness? Well, yes it does. But it turns out that in a social species like humans, it benefits us as individuals to cooperate with each other. As E.O. Wilson points out in his book *The Social Conquest of Earth*: "Colonies of cheaters lose to colonies of cooperators." In their book *Wild Justice* Bekoff & Pierce state: "In cooperative groups, deception is always a successful strategy, but it is less successful, on the whole, than cooperation."

When we help someone, we're rewarded by feeling good; we get a good reputation, and people are more likely to help us in return. When we don't cooperate, people tend to ignore us. And when we're anti-social, we get shunned. And when we harm another person or society, we get arrested and put in jail to protect society from us. It's really that simple. It's all about empathy, cooperation, and consequences,

Humans and some other animals have evolved empathy circuits in our brains. Probably the most well-known feature is mirror neurons. If you bang your elbow and hurt it, there's a part of

your brain that will become active and generate pain signals. This will cause you to wince, cry out in pain, and to clutch your elbow so you do no further damage and to start the healing process. If I observe all of this happening to you, the same parts of your brain that caused you to feel pain will also become active in my brain, though not as strongly, allowing me to "feel your pain" This is the beginning of empathy, and it motivates me to come to your aid. Notice that your wincing and crying out in pain do nothing directly to protect your elbow or to help it to heal. Those actions are only helpful to you as signals to me to motivate me to come to your aid. If you doubt that we're all connected to each other, see what happens when you yawn. Even the very word can cause us to yawn.

As we all know, empathy works with other species as well. If our pet is in pain, we will do what we can to help it. Other animals also help each other, not only within a species but between species. Other animals also possess a sense of justice. Let me give you some examples: A female bat helped another female bat who was trying to give birth by showing her the proper way to hang. A rat in a cage refused to push a lever for food when it saw that another rat in another cage received an electric shock as a result. A cat led her elderly, deaf, and blind dog friend away from obstacles and towards food. A group of elephants rescued a group of caged antelopes by undoing all the latches on a gate. And a group of chimpanzees in a zoo punished a chimp who arrived late for dinner because the rules were that no one eats until everyone is present.

A final problem with basing morality on god-belief is that if you lose your belief in a god then you've lost your basis for morality. But we notice that atheists are easily able to be "good without god." That's because morality is really based on evolution—empathy, cooperation, and consequences, using the standards of helpfulness and harmfulness. I hope that our debate tonight has been helpful.

*August Berkshire is a former president of Minnesota Atheists and currently serves as a director-at-large.*

Commentary by Lewis Campbell

# The Minnesota Religious Freedom Forum and the Right of Conscience

When I was a child, my father always told me to just skip the words *under God* in the Pledge of Allegiance. I always did, but it was always with a vague sense of uneasiness. As atheists, we are all too familiar with public policies engendered by religious beliefs and the uncomfortable accommodations we must often make to such policies.

As our society has become more secular and more liberal, conservative religious people have been faced with some uncomfortable accommodations of their own. How do they see this situation, and how do they hope to respond?

The Minnesota Religious Freedom Forum, a conference I attended recently in Saint Paul, addressed this exact issue. The Forum was sponsored by a coalition of four religious groups: the Minnesota Family Council, the Minnesota Catholic Conference, the Alliance Defending Freedom, and Transform Minnesota.

Joseph Infranco, senior legal counsel with the Alliance Defending Freedom, was the keynote speaker. He argued that there are absolute truths and that a society that values only tolerance becomes a society without any values. We are becoming a society, he said, that elevates personal autonomy above social responsibility.

Moreover, Infranco said, it is primarily religious values that are under attack. He noted that in *Elane Photography v. Willock*, photographer Elaine Huguenin was fined by the New Mexico Civil Rights Commission for refusing to photograph a same-sex commitment ceremony because

of her religious convictions. But, Infranco said, it is unlikely that the Human Rights Commission would levy a fine against an African American photographer who refused to photograph a Ku Klux Klan rally.

Infranco also cited the case of Julea Ward, a graduate student in counseling at Eastern Michigan University. In a practicum, Ward attempted to refer a homosexual client to another counselor because the client's counseling goals were



**Richard C. Bosson**



**Chai Feldblum**

in conflict with Ward's religious beliefs. Eastern Michigan University refused to approve the referral and told Ward she could only stay in the counseling program if she agreed to undergo a remediation program to change her attitudes regarding homosexuality. Ward refused and was expelled from the program. Infranco pointed out that referrals are a common practice in counseling when the beliefs of a counselor and client are in conflict. For example, a holocaust survivor would not be required to counsel a neo-Nazi. In Ward's case, the district court sided with the University, but the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision.

Michael McAfee also spoke at the opening session. McAfee is the Director for Faith Initiatives for Hobby Lobby, a large chain of craft stores founded and owned by his family. McAfee explained that under the Affordable Care Act, Hobby Lobby is required to purchase health insurance that includes coverage for abortifacient contraceptives. Because this requirement is in conflict with the religious beliefs of McAfee's family, they

decided to purchase health care without this provision, even though the potential government fine could amount to \$1.5 million per day. McAfee said that the case is especially difficult to defend because current law does not recognize a corporation as having First Amendment rights, even though the owners of the corporation are legally responsible for the corporation's actions. At present, the United States District Court has

issued a preliminary injunction against the government in the Hobby Lobby case.

The most powerful speaker of the conference was Jordan Lorence, Vice-President for Strategic Initiatives at the Alliance Defending Freedom and legal counsel for Elane Photography in its ongoing case. Lorence said that the New Mexico Supreme Court upheld the Human Rights Commission finding in the case, and in a concurring opinion Justice Richard C. Bosson wrote:

The Huguenins...now are compelled by law to compromise the very religious beliefs that inspire their lives....



At its heart, this case teaches that at some point in our lives all of us must compromise... I would say to the Huguenins, with the utmost respect: it is the price of citizenship.

Lorence argues that the *Elane* case is really about compelled speech, since photography as an expressive medium is a form of speech, and in light of previous rulings, he expects the US Supreme Court to accept the case and overturn the New Mexico Supreme Court ruling.

Lorence thinks that the *Elane* case may be applicable to nonreligious beliefs as well. For example, hairdresser Antonio Darden has refused to provide further salon services to his former client Susana Martinez, the governor of New Mexico, because of her opposition to same-sex marriage. Under the current *Elane* ruling, Darden might be required to accept Martinez as a client. Lorence pointed out that there has been no outrage over Darden's actions, however.

Lorence also argued that the recent appointment of Chai Feldblum to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) suggests eroding support for the First Amendment. Feldblum, he says, has been an outspoken supporter of anti-discrimination laws and has even argued that they must take precedence over constitutional rights to religious liberty. In a Georgetown Law School faculty publication Feldblum writes:

I use the category belief liberty to refer to one's liberty to possess deeply held personal beliefs without coercion or penalty by the State....

I believe it will rarely be the case that a court should...insert an exemption to an LGBT equality law in order to accommodate the belief liberty of those who are regulated by the law...I find it difficult to envision any circumstance in which a court could legitimately conclude that a legislature that has passed a LGBT equality law, with no exceptions for individual religious people based on belief liberty, has acted arbitrarily or pointlessly.

In a final presentation, Aaron Van Oort, a partner in the law firm of Faegre Baker Daniels said that while cases like *Elane* are worrisome, there is some hope in

Minnesota since the Minnesota constitution provides much broader protections for religious liberty than either the New Mexico constitution or the federal constitution. In particular, the Minnesota constitution protects the right of conscience explicitly. Article I, Paragraph 16 reads in part:

The right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience shall never be infringed...nor shall any control of or interference with the rights of conscience be permitted.

The message of every speaker at the Minnesota Religious Freedom Forum was that religious liberty is under attack to an unprecedented extent in America, and that many First Amendment protections may soon be lost.

Strikingly, at no time did any speaker make any disparaging comments about the people they disagree with, and everyone at the conference treated me with the greatest courtesy and respect, even though I made no secret of my atheism.

We may feel that the laws and practices conservative religious people are concerned about are really triumphs for secularism, and if some religious people are troubled by them it is not our concern. But when anyone's right of conscience is threatened, everyone's right of conscience is threatened. Martin Niemöller, a Lutheran minister who spent seven years in concentration camps for speaking out against the Nazis, reflected on his experience in these famous words:

First they came for the communists,  
and I didn't speak out because  
I wasn't a communist.  
Then they came for the trade unionists,  
and I didn't speak out because  
I wasn't a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews,  
and I didn't speak out because  
I wasn't a Jew.  
Then they came for me,  
and there was no one left to speak  
for me.

If we speak out now about the violation of conscience these laws and practices entail, we may find that we have someone to speak out for us when the time comes.

## Minnesota Atheist Notes

# Thoreau on the Right of Conscience

From "Civil Disobedience" (1849).

A government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?—in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right....

It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support....

How can a man be satisfied to entertain an opinion merely, and enjoy it...? Action from principle—the perception and the performance of right—changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. It not only divides states and churches, it divides families; ay, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine....

Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at least which can afford to be just to all men,...A State which bore this kind of fruit...would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.

## History for Atheists

## The New England Primer

While we atheists may regret the prominent place that religion holds in our society, the advance of secularism since the founding of our country is quite amazing.

At the time of the American Revolution, one of the most widely read books in the former colonies was *The New England Primer* (figure 1). The *Primer* was used to teach generations of children to read, starting with its first printing in 1687 and continuing through the middle of the nineteenth century. It underwent very few changes in this time, and the pages from the 1777 edition reproduced here are representative of the *Primer* throughout its life in print.

Virtually every page of the *Primer* is infused with religious ideas and admonitions. The *Primer* begins with “A Divine Song of Praise to God, for a Child” from a hymn by Isaac Watts (figure 2). The hymn emphasizes humans’ utter inadequacy before God.

Following the “Song,” the *Primer* presents a morning and an evening prayer, a list of letters, a list of words ranging from one to six syllables, and “A Lesson for Children,” which admonishes children to “Fear God.” Even the list of words has a decidedly religious flavor, and it includes some words, such as *fornication* and *fermentation*, that we would not expect to find in a book

for beginning readers (figure 3). Indeed, it seems amazing that children could learn to read from the *Primer* at all.

The *Primer* next provides an illustrated alphabet which begins with the couplet, “In Adam’s Fall, We sinned all” (figure 4). As we reach the end of the alphabet, the couplets become especially grim with “Xerxes did die, and so must I,” and “While youth do cheer, Death may be near” (figure 5).

Continuing in the same religious vein, the *Primer* presents a one-page catechism, an alphabet of quotations from the Bible, the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed, and several pages of religious poems for children. One poem reads:

In the burying place may see  
Graves shorter there than I,  
From death’s arrest no age is free  
Young children too must die.  
My God may such an awful sight,  
Awakening be to me!  
Oh! that by early grace I might  
For death prepared be.

Given the high rate of mortality among children at the time, the preoccupation with death in the *Primer* is understandable, but it is nonetheless chilling.

The *Primer* ends with a short biog-

raphy of John Rogers, “the first martyr in Queen Mary’s reign,” with an accompanying picture of Rogers being burned at the stake (figure 6). The biography includes a long series of religious admonitions in verse which Rogers wrote to his children just before his death.

Most editions of the *Primer* include the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which on the title page of the 1777 edition of the *Primer* is called The Assembly of Devines. It begins with a question familiar to many today:

Quest. What is the chief end of man?  
Ans. Man’s chief end is to glorify  
God and enjoy him forever.

Not surprisingly, the Westminster Catechism has a decidedly Calvinist flavor. Question 20 asks:

Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the state of sin and misery?  
A. God having out of his mere good pleasure from all of eternity selected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of a state of sin and misery, and to bring them into a state of salvation by a Redeemer.

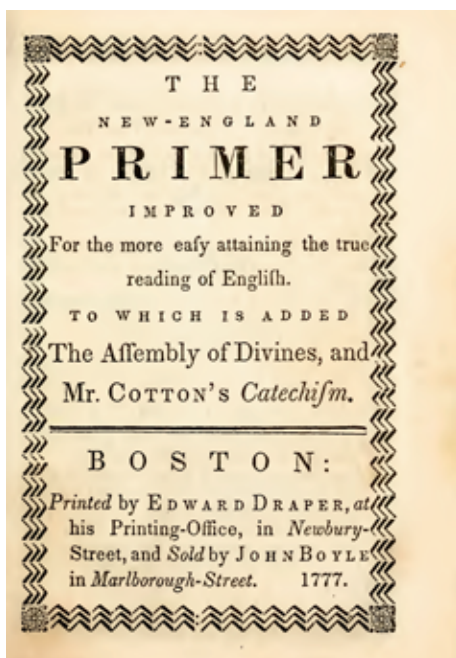


Figure 1

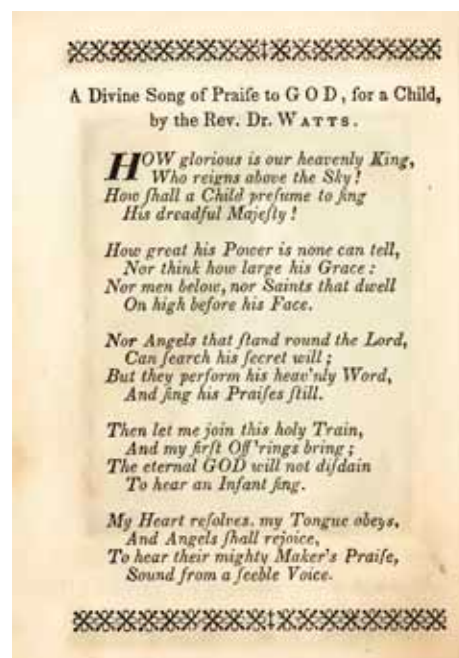


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Later editions of the *Primer* often include John Cotton's catechism, called "Spiritual Milk for American Babes, Drawn out of the Breasts of both Testaments for their Souls Nourishment" (figure 7). We may be a bit surprised by the explicit allusion to nursing in the title, but it was a time when the fundamentals of life lay closer to the surface than they do today.

The preoccupation with religion in the *Primer*, of course, reflects the preoccupation with religion that existed in the

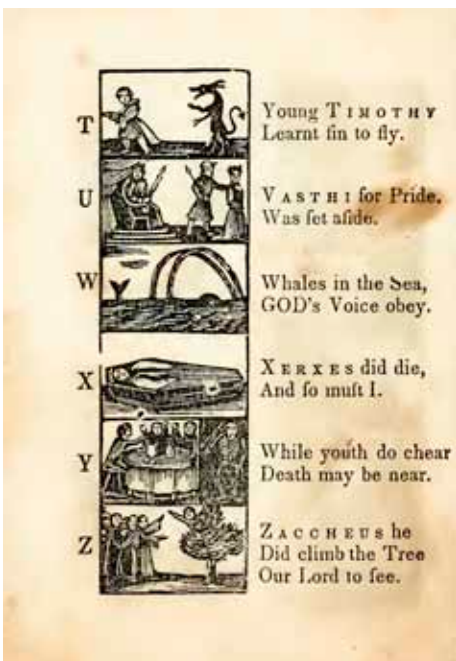


Figure 5



Figure 6

society as a whole. The *Primer* boldly illustrates how very far we have come along the path of secularization. If Dick and Jane were magically transported into the world of the *Primer*, they would probably be frightened out of their wits. Run, Dick, run!

Perhaps in another two hundred years, the religious ideas current today will seem to most people as anachronistic and as frightening as the *Primer* does to most people today. We can certainly hope so.

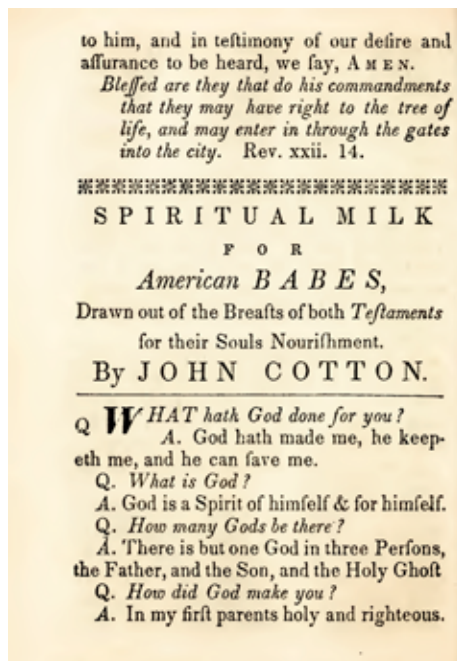


Figure 7

More History for Atheists

# 1987: George Bush Says Atheists are Not Citizens

At a news conference in 1987, vice-president George Bush, who had recently announced his candidacy for the presidency, was asked a series of questions regarding atheism by Rob Sherman, a reporter for *American Atheist Magazine*:

**Sherman:** What are you going to do to win the votes of Americans who are atheists?

**Bush:** I guess I'm pretty weak in the atheist community. Faith in God is important to me.

**Sherman:** Do you support the equal citizenship and patriotism of Americans who are atheists?

**Bush:** I don't know that atheists should be regarded as citizens, nor should they be regarded as patriotic. This is one nation under God.

**Sherman:** Do you support the constitutionality of state/church separation?

**Bush:** I support separation of church and state. I'm just not very high on atheists.

Since the exchange was published, many people have questioned whether Bush actually said the words attributed to him. Sherman says that he did not make a recording of the news conference, and that the radio and television reporters present erased the part of their recordings containing this exchange since it was not considered important.

However, in 2006 Sherman obtained letters and memos from the Bush Library regarding Bush's comments. While there is no outright admission in these documents that Bush said the words attributed to him, the documents do strongly imply that he did.

You can learn more at Sherman's website, [www.robsherman.com/advocacy/060401a.htm](http://www.robsherman.com/advocacy/060401a.htm).

Chris Matthews

# September Treasury Report

## Radio Fund

George Kane .....	\$200
Felicity Kusnitz.....	\$25
James Wright .....	\$25
Richard Ellingsen.....	\$20
Shirley Moll.....	\$20
Steve Petersen.....	\$20
Walt Anderson .....	\$10
Mark Paquette .....	\$10
Other.....	\$137

---

Total Radio Fund ..... \$467

## General/Visibility Fund

Leland Salisbury.....	\$500
Landon Williams .....	\$250
Theodore Nagel.....	\$200
Jeffery Wolfe .....	\$25
Al Seever.....	\$5

---

Total General/Visibility Fund..... \$980

## Building Fund

No contributions for September	
Cumulative Total.....	\$131,764

**Total Income .....** \$1447

## Top Expenses for September

Conference.....	\$1,589
Radio Show.....	\$1,025
Storage .....	\$169

# Cryptogram Answer

Members of our species simply repeat what they are told, and become upset if they are exposed to any different view. The characteristic human trait is not awareness but conformity, and the characteristic result is religious warfare.

—Michael Crichton, *The Lost World*

# Upcoming Events

**Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous.** Sundays, 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Avenue South, Suite 55, Minneapolis. Meets in the basement. Open to all genders.

**Atheists Talk television show recording.** First Thursday, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., MTN Studio A, 125 Southeast Main Street, Minneapolis. Contact Steve Petersen, 651-484-9277.

**Blasphemer's Brunch.** Second Saturday, 10:30 a.m., Pizza Lucé, 800 West 66<sup>th</sup> Street, Richfield.

**Burnsville Book Club.** Wednesday, November 13th. Dinner 6:30 p.m., meeting 7:00 p.m. to about 9:00 p.m., Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville. Meet in the party room. The book for November is *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction* by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein.

**Cook for and Dine with Families at a Local Homeless Shelter.** Saturday, November 16th, 3:00 p.m., Family Place, 499 North Wacouta Street, St. Paul. Space is limited, so sign up on meetup.com to reserve a place.

**Crafty Freethinkers North.** Sunday, November 10th, 12:00 noon to 5:00 p.m., Maple Grove Library, Training Room 133, 8001 Main Street North, Maple Grove. You may attend any part of the time.

**Freethinking Females Evening at Chatterbox Pub.** Fourth Monday, 7:30 p.m., Chatterbox Pub, 800 Cleveland Avenue South, Saint Paul.

**Freethought Dinner Social.** Second and fourth Mondays, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Avenue South, Bloomington. Contact Bob or Marilyn Neinker, 612-866-6200.

**Freethought Lunch.** First Tuesday, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Contact Bob or Marilyn Nienkirk, 612-866-6200.

**Freethought Toastmasters.** First and third Mondays, 6:00 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Contact George Kane, dir2@mnatheists.org.

**Godless Gamers—Board Game Night.** Second Thursday, 6:00 p.m., Java Train, 1341 Pascal Street North, Saint

Paul.

**Godless Gamers II—Board Game Night, the Sequel.** Fourth Thursday, 6:00 p.m., The Source, 2057 Snelling Avenue, Roseville.

**Heathen Helping Hands Happy Hour.** Friday, November 8th, 5:00 p.m., Granite City, 3330 Pilot Knob Road, Eagan and La Casita, 5085 Central Avenue Northeast, Columbia Heights. We will be collecting food and hygiene items for food banks in our communities while enjoying an evening with our atheist friends. For information of what to donate, see [www.2harvest.org/site/PageServer?pagename=howhelp\\_drives\\_needs](http://www.2harvest.org/site/PageServer?pagename=howhelp_drives_needs).

**Lake Superior Freethinkers Monthly Membership Meeting.** First Sundays, social time 9:00 a.m., breakfast 9:30 a.m. (\$13.00), program 10:00 a.m., Duluth Radisson, 505 West Superior Street, Duluth. The November meeting will feature Dan Allosso speaking about his new book *An Infidel Body-Snatcher and the Fruits of His Philosophy*.

**Little Canada Book Club.** Second Sunday, 1:00 p.m., Caribou Coffee, 3354 Rice Street, Little Canada. The book for November is *Rock, Paper, Scissors* by Len Fisher.

**Lunch at the Dragon House Restaurant.** Third Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Avenue, Columbia Heights. Contact Bill Volna, 612-781-1420.

**Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting.** Third Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Open to all members. Contact George Kane, dir2@mnatheists.org.

**Stillwater Critical Thinking Club.** Monday, November 11th, 7:00 p.m., Family Means Building, 1875 Northwestern Avenue, Stillwater. "Ethics for Spies: What Americans Need to Know," presented by Michael Andregg, Ph.D.

For all the latest meeting news, subscribe to Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE) at [mnatheists.org/atheists-weekly/subscribe-to-awe.html](http://mnatheists.org/atheists-weekly/subscribe-to-awe.html). Also visit our Meetup page at [meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://meetup.com/minnesota-atheists).

# Cable Television Schedule

## Podcasts

*Atheists Talk* is available via both iTunes and YouTube. For more information see the Minnesota Atheist website at [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org). Podcasts are made possible by Grant Hermanson.

## Cable

Bloomington Community Access Television, Channel 16. Sundays, 11:00 p.m. Sponsored by David and Joanne Beardsley.

Burnsville Community Television, Channel 14. Broadcast on an erratic schedule. Check [www.burnsville.org/index.aspx?NID=484](http://www.burnsville.org/index.aspx?NID=484) to see if any showtimes are scheduled. Sponsored by Kevin Hardisty.

Eagan Community Television, Channel 15. Broadcast on an erratic schedule. Check [www.eagan-tv.com/index.php/channels/channel-15](http://www.eagan-tv.com/index.php/channels/channel-15) to see if any showtimes are scheduled. Sponsored by Kevin Hardisty.

Minneapolis Television Network, Channel 75. Mondays, 7:00 p.m. Sponsored by Steve Petersen.

North Suburban Access Corporation, Channel 21, serving the Moundsview area. Wednesdays, 10:30 p.m. Sponsored by Shirley Moll.

Rochester Public Access, Channel 10. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 7:30 p.m. Sponsored by Jim Salutz.

Saint Cloud Public Access, Channel 12. Thursdays, 8:30. Sponsored by Tom Stavros.

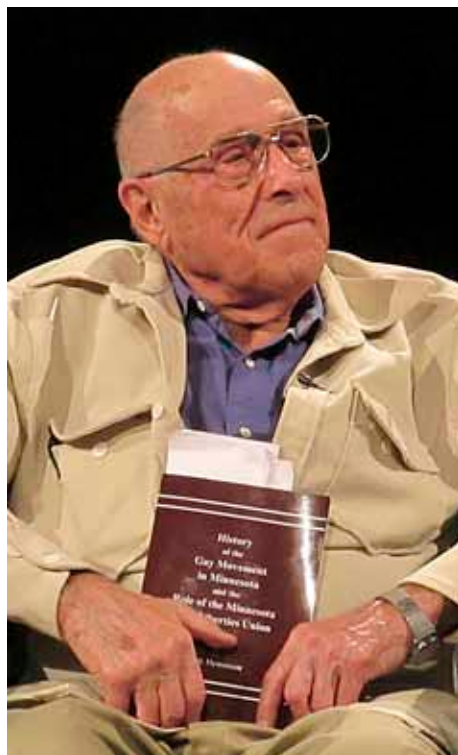
Saint Paul Neighborhood Network, Channel 15. Wednesdays, 5:00 p.m. Sponsored by Jim Wright.

Suburban Community Channels, Channel 15, serving the Maplewood area. Saturdays 8:00 p.m. Sponsored by Michael Seliga.

Valley Access Channels, Channel 18, serving the Stillwater area. Check [valleyaccesschannels.tv](http://valleyaccesschannels.tv) for showtimes. Sponsored by Lee Salisbury.

## Cable Television Report • Steve Petersen

# Matthew Stark Discusses Dick Hewetson's *History of the Gay Movement in Minnesota* at the October Recording of *Atheists Talk*



Matthew Stark on *Atheists Talk*

For the October recording of *Atheists Talk*, August Berkshire interviewed Matthew Stark, past president of the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota. The topic of discussion was the recently released book, *History of the Gay Movement in Minnesota and the Role of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union*, written by Minnesota Atheists honorary member Dick Hewetson. The book covers the struggle for civil rights by gays and lesbians in Minnesota in the 1960's and '70's. *History of the Gay Movement in Minnesota* uses extensive interviews and the archives of the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota to provide a detailed recounting of the history of the early gay and lesbian movement in Minnesota. The book is comprehensive and informative and addresses a frequently overlooked aspect of Minnesota history.

The *Atheist Talk* cable television show is created by George Kane, Brett Stemberge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, and Art Anderson.

## Minnesota Atheist Notes

# Matthew Stark

Matthew Stark served as president of the American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota on and off from the 1960's through the 1990's. Stark was born in 1930 in Brooklyn, New York, and began his career in education. He holds bachelor's degrees in English and education from Ohio University, a master's degree in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota, and a doctoral degree in educational administration and counseling from Case Western Reserve University.

Stark was a professor and coordinator of the humans relations program at the University of Minnesota from 1963 to 1970. He was first elected president of the

American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota (ACLU-MN) in 1966, where he was instrumental in fostering the pursuit of church-state cases in the public schools.

Stark was a controversial leader of the ACLU-MN. Some board members accused him of being domineering and of orchestrating board elections to support a politically motivated agenda at the ACLU-MN, but Stark continued to serve as president in multiple non-consecutive terms through the 1990's.

Stark is now retired but continues to be active in the American Civil Liberties Union and serves on the ACLU national advisory council.

## Radio Report

# Tom Mates, Greg Laden, Steve Wells, Sean B. Carroll, and Grant Steves Featured on *Atheists Talk* Radio for September and October

The *Atheists Talk* radio show is broadcast live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 on KTNE, 950 AM. A live stream and podcasts are available through the Minnesota Atheists website at [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org).

The shows for September and October featured programs on a wide variety of topics, from climate change to theology.

### My Own Church—Tom Mates on *Atheists Talk* #237, September 22, 2013

On this program author Tom Mates joined *Atheists Talk* to discuss his new book, *My Own Church: A Nonbeliever Looks At Post-Christian America*. Instead of trying to answer the question of whether gods exist or arguing for the elimination of religion, Dr. Mates urges believers to recognize that religion is too personal to be applied as a source of moral absolutes.

Dr. Mates is a proponent of respectful, non-adversarial conversation that considers the entire spectrum of belief. In *My Own Church*, he explores the roles that fundamentalism and anti-theism have had in bringing us to the current state of the discourse on religion and belief, and he urges us to do better.

Dr. Mates is an analytical chemist and the author of the 2011 book *A Judeo-Islamic Nation: The Evolution of America's Political Theology*.

### Fifth Report of the IPCC—Greg Laden on *Atheists Talk* #238, September 29, 2013

The fifth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has just come out, and Greg Laden joined us this Sunday to tell us what it means. What do over 800 representatives of 85 countries have to say about the state of consensus in scientific literature? More importantly, what do we need to do about it?

Additionally, various voices deny-

ing the science of climate change have popped up again in anticipation of this report. What might you have been hearing about climate change recently, and why is it wrong?

### Skeptic's Annotated Bible—Steve Wells on *Atheists Talk* #239, October 6, 2013

The Skeptic's Annotated Bible (SAB) is a website dedicated to spreading the Good Word—and the bad word, the violent word, the misogynistic word, the unjust word and the contradictory word. These are a few of the categories that the SAB has created to capture the messages that can be found in the King James Version of the bible. The individual books of the bible are able to be easily searched, and the site offers handy notes which distill and summarize the key messages of each section.

The goal of the SAB is to encourage believers to examine more closely the book that so many of them claim as the cornerstone of their faith and worldview. As the SAB FAQ's state: "I'd like people to look carefully at the Bible and decide if it is worthy of their belief. When, if ever, people stop believing in the Bible, I'll take my site down."

### Brave Genius—Sean B. Carroll on *Atheists Talk* #240, October 13, 2013

If ever a book seemed designed to merge the two cultures of science and the humanities, it would be *Brave Genius: A Scientist, a Philosopher, and Their Daring Adventures from the French Resistance to the Nobel Prize*, written by molecular biologist Sean B. Carroll. Nominally the story of the friendship between biologist Jacques Monod and philosopher Albert Camus, the book is also a history of World War II from the French perspective, as well as an exploration of the work and ideas of two men who were profoundly affected by the war. Coming out of one of the most dismal periods of

recent times, these two men exhibited a humanism that pushed them to accomplishments deemed to be among the highest of our species.

### A Diverse Nation—Grant Steves on *Atheists Talk* #241, October 20, 2013

This program covered the diversity of our nation's Founders. It also addressed the religious diversity of colonial citizens, a group with multiple competing interests who came together to form a secular constitutional republic. Our European past and colonial history was one of religious persecution and conflict that had a major influence in separating government from religion.

As our country continues to evolve and becomes both more religiously diverse and less religious overall, the wisdom of our nation's Founders in establishing a secular government becomes more apparent.

Grant Steves explored this theme with interviewer George Kane and host Brianne Bilyeu. Steves holds a doctorate in theology and is a retired public school teacher and a cofounder of Secular Bible Study.

The *Atheists Talk* radio show is produced by Minnesota Atheists. The September and October shows were created by Brianne Bilyeu, Carl Hancock, George Kane, Scott Lohman, and Stephanie Zvan. Original music was composed and performed by Brent Michael Davids.

If you would like to participate in the creation of the show, please contact us at [radio@mnatheists.org](mailto:radio@mnatheists.org).

To learn more about *Atheists Talk*, visit us on Facebook and at [twitter.com/atheiststalk](http://twitter.com/atheiststalk).

*Atheists Talk* radio costs about \$900 per month to produce. Please consider making a denotation by using the coupon on page fifteen or by visiting [mnatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund](http://mnatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund).

**Friends,  
they may  
think it's a  
movement.  
Join  
Minnesota  
Atheists,  
renew your  
membership,  
or make a  
donation.**




---

#### Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year student membership \$10      | <input type="checkbox"/> Three-year sustaining membership \$200 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year individual membership \$35   | <input type="checkbox"/> Life membership \$600                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three-year individual membership \$90 |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year household membership \$45    | <input type="checkbox"/> General fund \$ _____                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three-year household membership \$115 | <input type="checkbox"/> Building fund \$ _____                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year sustaining membership \$75   | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio fund \$ _____                    |

Donations are tax deductible. Membership fees are deductible for the amount beyond their fair market value.

Student memberships include a subscription to the PDF version of *The Minnesota Atheist* delivered by email. All other memberships include a subscription to the printed version delivered by postal mail. If you would prefer the PDF version delivered by email, please check the box and provide your email address.

- Please send my subscription by email.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (required for student memberships and email subscriptions): \_\_\_\_\_

**Minnesota Atheists, PO Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112. Please make checks payable to Minnesota Atheists. Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.**

# Minnesota Atheists

## Positive atheism in action<sup>sm</sup> since 1991

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.

### MINNESOTA ATHEISTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD EMAIL  
board@mnatheists.org

PRESIDENT  
Eric Jayne  
pres@mnatheists.org

ASSOCIATE PRESIDENT  
Stephanie Zvan  
apres@mnatheists.org

CHAIR  
Heather Hegi  
chair@mnatheists.org

ASSOCIATE CHAIR  
Andy Flamm  
achair@mnatheists.org

SECRETARY  
Jill Carlson  
sec@mnatheists.org

TREASURER  
Chris Matthews  
treas@mnatheists.org  
763-428-3424

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE  
August Berkshire  
dir1@mnatheists.org  
612-868-2267  
George Kane  
dir2@mnatheists.org  
651-488-8225  
Phil Cunliffe  
dir3@mnatheists.org

### THE MINNESOTA ATHEIST NEWSLETTER

EDITORIAL BOARD EMAIL  
editor@mnatheists.org

EDITORIAL BOARD  
George Kane  
nup@minn.net  
651-488-8225  
Shirley Moll  
srmoll@comcast.net  
Christopher Matthews  
c03m13@bluebottle.com  
James Zimmerman  
zgoatee@gmail.com

EDITOR  
Lewis Campbell  
lfc-813@sevenpathswebdesign.com  
507-645-5217

CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER  
Richard Trombley

MEMBERSHIP/CHANGE OF ADDRESS  
Steve Petersen  
address@mnatheists.org  
651-484-9277

Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnatheists.org. Submissions may be edited.

THE MINNESOTA ATHEIST, November/December 2013, Published by Minnesota Atheists, PO Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112, 612-588-7031, info@mnatheists.org, mnatheists.org. Copyright © 2013 by Minnesota Atheists. All rights reserved.

### CREATIVE COMMONS COPYRIGHT NOTICE

The image on page one is reproduced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share-Alike 3.0 Unported license (creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en). Attribution to the author is required in a prominent location near the image.

### MINNESOTA ATHEISTS MEDIA

PUBLIC RELATIONS CHAIR  
Emily Matejcek,  
pr@mnatheists.org

ATHEISTS WEEKLY EMAIL (AWE)  
Christopher Matthews  
awe@mnatheists.org

CABLE TV CHAIR  
Steve Petersen,  
cable@mnatheists.org  
651-484-9277

WEBMASTER  
Grant Hermanson  
web@mnatheists.org

PODCASTS CHAIR  
Grant Hermanson  
podcast@mnatheists.org

### MINNESOTA ATHEISTS GOALS

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 AFFILIATIONS

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

### MINNESOTA ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP

Regular members: 215  
Life members: 34  
Meetup members: 1,486

### MINNESOTA ATHEISTS HONORARY MEMBERS

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