

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists Established 1991 Positive Atheism in ActionSM

Volume 19 Number 9

October 2009

October Meeting: Can Science Prove Prayer Works?

At the Sunday, October 18, 2009 membership meeting, we will once again welcome Hector Avalos as our guest speaker. Dr. Avalos is an associate professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University. In the past, Dr. Avalos has spoken on Intelligent Design and the end of biblical studies. His books include *The End of Biblical*

Studies and *Fighting Words: The Origin of Religious Violence*. This month, he will be speaking on the topic: "Can Science Prove Prayer Works?" Dr. Avalos always delivers a memorable presentation. He is an outstanding communicator of ideas that concern the atheist community. Please join us!



**Where: Southdale
Public Library, Edina**

**When: Sunday,
October 18th**

**Business Meeting at 1:00
p.m.**

**Avalos lecture from 2:00
to 4:00 p.m.**

**Various social breaks in
between.**

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**MNA Meetup members: 559
Life memberships: 31**

Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

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

The Minnesota Atheist

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Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnatheists.org. Submissions may be edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly neighborhood atheism in order to:

- Provide a community for atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

President's Column by Bjorn Watland



An Evolution Solution

A majority of American's reject evolution. You may have read the Gallup poll from this past February which counted only 39 percent of respondents as holding a belief in evolution. However, this problem is not new. While researching this problem, I have run into many polls from other organizations which constantly place a belief in evolution in the minority. The majority opinion is that God created humans in their current form. What can be done to better educate the public?

Are our teachers failing us? Is there is an organized opposition to the theory of evolution which is simply more compelling than the evidence which supports a gradual change over millions of years? I will admit, creatures popping into existence, fully formed, makes for a great story, but when I want to learn about how things really are, I have to rely in science and empirical evidence, even if the story isn't as fanciful. Richard Dawkins continues the fight to educate the public about evolution with his book, *The Greatest Show On Earth*. Will his book work? Will the people who buy it be those who already reject the Christian creation myth?

I would say that it isn't a wasted effort. As I walked through a local book store, I saw

the atheist books tucked in with science books, mostly about Darwin and evolution. While you can be religious and believe in evolution, I won't deny that there have been many who read about how evolution really works – not how they were taught in church – and found that uncovering the one lie of creation unraveled the web of lies their church, family, and friends had been telling them their whole life. Science has evidence, the comfort of predictability, while faith is an empty guessing game.

What else did I see in the book store? In the religion section, I found a few books about



evolution, but more books about how to either reject evolution or how religion and evolution are compatible. I'd like to see some of those science books sneak their way into the religion section. Would that have worked for you? I know many atheists who decided that the evidence for

a god was lacking after reading *The God Delusion*, which was more about evolution than it was in rejecting faith.

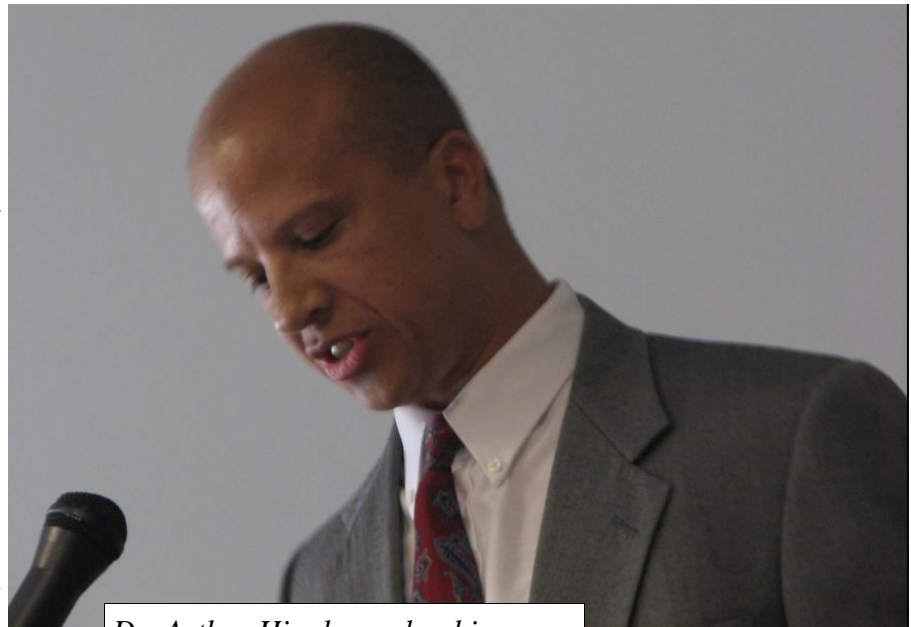
Last month, I attended "Atheist Coming Out Day" hosted by Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists at the University of Minnesota. Here, people sat in a circle and told their coming out story. What shocked me, was how many people were so new to calling themselves "atheists," and felt comfortable going to a group meeting to tell everyone about it. Out of the sixty people who "came out," more than a few were raised in conservative Christian families, including one child of missionaries, one child of Salvation Army parents, and one who was a Bible Quiz champion. All of these people strongly rejected evolution, until college. All it took was a freshman biology course with a brief introduction to evolution to realize they had been actively deceived by the people who cared about them. For some, the process of leaving faith behind took a few years, others left more quickly.

What is important, is that there is a community of like minded people who are there, if only to "come out" to, to share our experiences and to make it easier for the next wave of people to throw off life according to mythology and embrace reality.

Debate at September MNA Meeting

by Grant Steves

MNA opened the membership meeting series by hosting a debate between our own Board Member George Kane and Dr. Arthur Hippler. They debated the resolution: That a supernatural authority is necessary for obligatory moral claims. They started the debate with ten minutes opening speeches. Dr. Hippler, as the affirmative, presented a case that stated why we have obligatory moral claims; those things a person must do. We must go from *ought* statements to *is* statements. In establishing this use, he made reference to Euclid's geometry and the proofs made up of postulates or moral statements. He wanted us to agree that morality is not a choice but is necessary. Dr. Hippler maintained throughout the debate the belief that humanity was created



Dr. Arthur Hippler makes his case for supernatural agencies.

with a freedom of choice, and that we have this freedom because of a supernatural source.

George Kane maintained that we have moral *should* but not moral *must*. He stated we need to consider the definitions, rational analysis, and the consequences of actions when discussing moral claims. George Kane argued for ethical choices that evolve. Natural selection and speciation, he claimed, help to develop the morals we adopt.

The debate allowed for over thirty minutes of questions from the audience and concluding comments by both debate participants. We look forward to more debates at our monthly meetings.

See page 5 to read George Kane's Opening Statement. – ed.



George Kane, left, awaits his turn while Grant Steves, right, moderates.

Opening Statement

by George Kane

The feature of our September public meeting was a debate in which I opposed Dr. Arthur Hippler, the Director of Religious Studies at Providence Academy, on the resolution "That a supernatural authority is necessary for obligatory moral claims." This repeated a debate we first held in January at St. Augustine's Church in South St. Paul.

Following is my opening statement.



Thank you, Mr. Moderator, Minnesota Atheists and honored guests.

As you know, this is the second occasion on which Dr.

Hippler and I have met to debate the resolution, "That a supernatural authority is necessary for obligatory moral claims." My opening statement in that earlier debate was published in our newsletter, so I hope that there are not a lot of people who are intentionally arriving late, expecting me to read what they have already read. But then we were debating before a very different audience. There were 370 men in attendance, and I know of only five who were atheists. Today I can suggest that there is no god without worry that everyone will retort "now you are just being ridiculous!"

Stated simply, the proposition is that if there is no God, then there is no moral obligation. Rather than being merely an esoteric question of axiological reduction, I think that this is a very practical question,

which will force us to speak more clearly about the nature of moral obligation.

So what do we mean by "moral obligation?" A moral obligation is simply what we *should do*. Now, there are all sorts of conditions under which we use this term "should," such as "If water is leaking through my living room ceiling I should fix the roof, or if I need some vegetables I should go to the grocery.

So is moral obligation this same sort of *conditional should*, that in which the determining conditions vary for each person, according to conditions like where or when he lives, or what she wants or finds pleasing? If this is the case, then moral obligation is *subjective*, rather than an *objective* fact in the world. The question that then arises is whether moral obligation is ever anything more than "do whatever feels good" or "follow the rules that the people in power set down for you." This is the conclusion that this debate requires me to disprove. If at the end of this debate we conclude that what we *should* do is nothing more than what we *want* to do or what *we are told* to do, then Dr. Hippler has won the argument. If there is no god, then the entire enterprise of social ethics evaporates into a mist. We find ourselves embarrassed to criticize anyone for genocide or torture if we realize that we are really saying nothing more than "I don't like what you did."

Moral obligation is usually posited as true without reference to any conditions. But any ethical system presents an underlying foundation on which moral obligation is conditioned. Dr. Hippler proposes that moral obligation can only be created by God, so his "should" statements are conditional to the existence and decisions of a particular god. In the

same way, a non-theistic ethical system can provide the condition for moral obligation, but we have to show how that condition is universal and objective rather than personal preference.

I contend that there are three ways that statements of moral obligation can be objective facts of the world. These are *definitional*, *rational* and *consequential*.

First, some moral obligations are created by the definitions of the words that we use, by our agreement on a common vocabulary. Let us say, for example, that I *borrow* \$5 from you. It is then an objective fact that I *owe* you this money. It follows from the definitions of the words 'borrow' and 'owe' that I should pay you back \$5. Objective moral obligation in this case follows necessarily from our stated premise, that I borrowed the money.

Another type of objective moral obligation results from rational analysis. The idea here is that if I can show that a statement is self-contradicting, then it must be false. For example, if I torture someone, or steal from her, or slander him, I am asserting by that action that under certain circumstances, it must be acceptable for someone to torture me, or to steal from me, or to slander me. The underlying assumption here is that through self-interest I must conclude that I should not commit any of these offenses against others. The reciprocity demonstrated in this reasoning is reflected in a wide range of ethical reasoning, from the Golden Rule to Kantian claims that moral obligations apply to all rational beings. While this approach appeals to common sense, it also admits of exceptions that can be narrowly defined. Thus we hear people argue that if I can save many lives by tor-

(Continued on page 10)

Africa: Hall of Horrors

*By Kirumira Mpagi Michael
Former missionary, now Public
Relations Officer for Atheist As-
sociation of Uganda*

Africa is perhaps the most miserable place the world has ever known. This fact is all but ignored by the media in western Countries. Most of the governments here, although calling themselves promoters of democracies, are ruthless dictatorships, ruled by greed and callous disregard for human life and dignity. They are supported by religious institutions that desire a share in the power, and they are supported by the "Western World" because they can still exploit them for profit. That's Africa, for you friends in Minnesota.

The misery of Africa and poor Africans should make the rest of the world hang their heads in shame. In my country Uganda and Africa in general, we are in the same social position that Europe was for two thousand years until the early nineteen hundreds.

The poor were slaves, exploited on farms and in factories. There was no care for their health or well-being, children were sent to the mines or to slave for 14 hours a day in terrible factories. That was the system the colonizers brought to our lovely Africa when they colonized us.

In Europe they got rid of tribal differences, got rid of religion in government through instituting separation of religion from government and only then could they move on and create a decent society. Until we do this, change and civilization is still decades away from us here in Africa. Tribalism

and nepotism are far worse than racism.

Uganda and most African countries will have to embrace strong atheist activism if we are to smell the waves of change that we are currently observing in countries like Ghana and Tanzania which are offering much hope to their citizens. But again religion is influencing them from hitting that "red button" of reality within secular and atheist principles. Our arms should always be unfolded for them too.

Nothing on this continent can



Kirumira Mpagi Michael

change until nepotism and tribal differences are rendered a non-issue, religion is made powerless, and dictators, rulers, and kings think of their people before themselves. This shouldn't discourage us from doing everything we can to change this state of affairs.

We should not let religionists determine our fate, or mark our boundaries. We should lay the foundation of which other future generations will continue when we are tired or transformed in immortals humans (this is my wish to be enhanced to become more useful

even when I no longer hold this life which I have now).

The recent extravaganza by the king in Swaziland is a criminal offence to human dignity. The majority of citizens of Swaziland survive on next to nothing, they suffer the highest AIDS rate in Africa, and last year King Mswati allowed his wives to go on an expensive shopping trip in Europe. His 14 wives each own and drive a BMW, heavy security guards paid by taxpayer's money belonging to the poor citizens of Swaziland. Christianity is the dominant religion in Swaziland, but traditional myth still carries more influence in the lives of Swazi people.

The kingdom of Swaziland is one of the world's last remaining absolute monarchies. King Mswati III rules by decree over his million subjects, most of whom live in the countryside and follow traditional ways of life and very poor indeed. Nonetheless, the waves of change are blowing weakly there too, even though State control of the media is strong. The government controls all radio and TV stations with the exception of a Christian radio station. The freedom of expression in the press is seriously restricted.

Some of these issues are very hard to talk about here in Africa; so when we skip them for a while, just understand that it's because of Church and State oppression. For example, free-thinkers would love to tackle the issue of GLBT rights, but because homosexuality is illegal, and because even the discussion of homosexuality is illegal, it's too dangerous to discuss it, it's the same thing with overpopulation, abortion and many more issues.



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

by Jerry Rauser

The Freethought Winter Solstice Celebration is on December 20 this year (hosted by Humanists of Minnesota) and planning is underway for the highlight of the evening, the Freethought Follies!



Actors and Singers Wanted!

We have some great wacky comedy skits and opportunities to sing with a vocal ensemble and professional backup band. We are looking for actors and singers of any skill level who are members of the Freethought Community and would like to participate. Please contact Jerry Rauser at jrauser@comcast.net or (763) 535-7637.



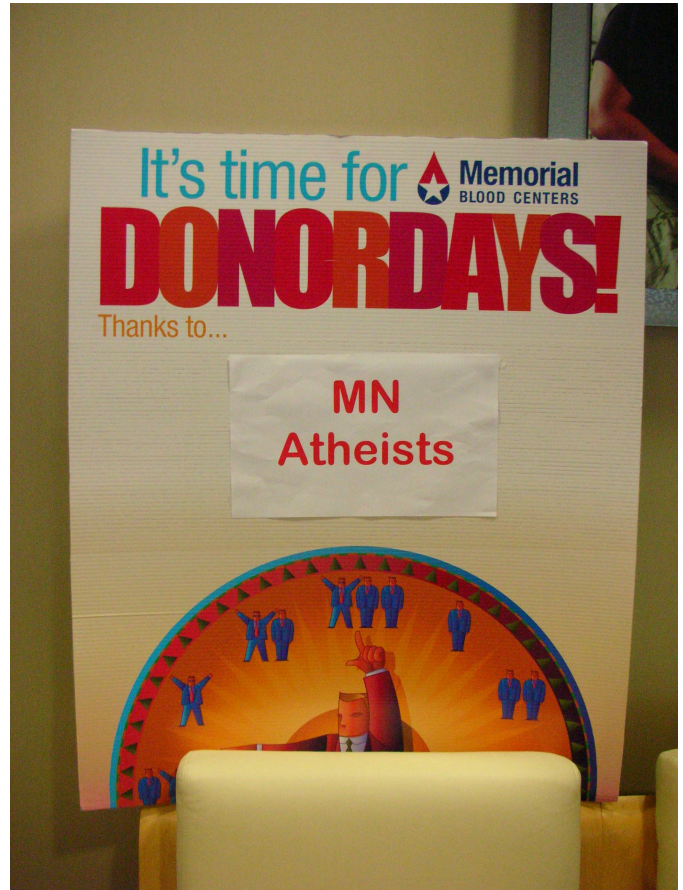
Minnesota Atheists Donor Days at Memorial Blood Center

by Crystal Dervetski

On Saturday,
September

19th, thirteen atheists attended Minnesota Atheists Donor Days. We were treated to special Oreo and peanut butter cakes by the director of Memorial Blood Centers. We also met someone in the lobby scheduled to donate right before us who is also an atheist. He was surprised that Minnesota Atheists did a donor days, and left with some MNA information and swag. The staff have told me that Minnesota Atheists is one of the largest donor groups in the metro area! Let's keep it up!

Our grand total of blood given by atheists since the start of our Donor Days is 70 liters. You are all bloody brilliant!



Freethought Cryptogram

Sk xpfpn vp aupe kupl agtyw bgenkhds nbspebp rl kup dtkughskl gq
kup Nbhsmkthpn, dew lpk wg egk bgenswph kupvnpyxpn rgtew kg
denaph hpdnge dew pfmphsvpek.

-Odysypg Odysyps, "Kup dtkughskl gq Nbhsmkthp se Musyngngmus-
bdy Bgekhgxpnsn"

(For answer, see page 16)

Unholy Trinity



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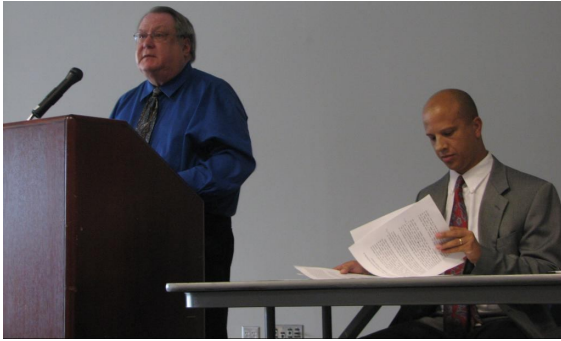
After TSM...



What do atheists do after the Third Sunday Meetings (TSM)? They keep the great conversations rolling by going out to eat! Thanks to Matthew Richardson for the photos of the most recent TSM dinner.

Opening Statement (continued)

turing a terrorist to disclose information that would allow police to stop a bombing, then torture is justified. Whatever you conclude about this example, it shows that while the ra-



tionalist approach may produce *objective* conclusions, they are not *absolute* ones.

But I contend that the most important demonstration of the objectivity of moral obligation is based upon the *consequences* of actions. This derives from the origin of ethics as an evolutionary product. In order to promote the survival and flourishing of our very social species, evolution has fashioned for us a repertoire of emotions and behaviors that favor social harmony. Wherever people get together into any social unit, there is norming of behavior, a determination of what behaviors are accepted and which are not. Ethics must be understood within this evolutionary context. Without our personal awareness, evolution has provided a species imperative to interact in ways that promote the survival and flourishing of humanity. This is not a choice by humanity, but is imposed by evolution upon humanity.

If an individual acts in a way that violates this species imperative, that is harmful to the flourishing of his community, he is antisocial, certainly. We cannot all act as he does, or humankind would not flourish, and may not even survive. But natu-

ral selection has created us with a social disposition and emotional tropisms to ensure our species survival. It is this species imperative that defines our ultimate moral obligation, that conditions in every instance what we *should* do.

There are different formulations of the relationship between moral obligation and consequences, but the most familiar is the Utilitarian Principle, that the correct action is one that promotes the greatest good for the greatest number. This gives us an objective measure of the moral value of an act, the consequences in harm and benefit that results in peoples' lives.

The utilitarian value of an action is dependent upon future results which we can only rarely know with certainty. By this understanding of moral obligation as contingent upon future consequences, moral uncertainty is an inescapable feature of the human condition. Moral obligation is *objective*, but it is also *uncertain* and after the single Utilitarian Principle that is *definitional* of morality, cannot be formulated as *absolutes*.

It is a commonplace observation that political policies, such as health care or the decision to invade another country, are in part moral questions, but we recognize that their correctness is determined by consequences that we cannot know. And I propose to you that that is the nature of all moral obligations. I should always act in the way that produces the greatest good for the greatest number, but I cannot know with certainty what those consequences will be. No matter how good my will, how much I want to do the right thing, I can always be wrong. This recognition compels us to be circumspect in our moral reasoning, and forces upon us

considerable moral humility.

In conclusion, I contend that objective statements of moral obligation are possible without any law-giving god, rooted in the evolutionary imperative of species survival. A believer in god-based morality will contend that god's existence and intent are the universal condition for moral obligation. But I contend that our species-imperative to promote the flourishing of humankind is the *only* basis for moral obligation that can be demonstrated. Postulating a 'god' adds *nothing* to moral obligation but a fictitious authority who supposedly knows better than we do. But just as every child learns that right and wrong are not just what their parents tell them, if moral obligation is objective it must be more than what any god wants or commands.

If a consequential moral analysis concludes that you should do 'x', but you believe that god opposes 'x',



you should still do it. As moral agents we are all responsible for the consequences of our actions. If some course of action works out badly, it is no justification to say that it is what god wanted. It is still wrong. For reaching a moral decision it is important *only* to study *consequences*, and *not at all* the supposed word or intent of any god.

ACORN: The Latest Casualty in the Culture War

In midsummer 2008, as the presidential campaign intensified, a community organization by the name of ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) gained a lot of notoriety. Like the poor hapless kid in middle school constantly ridiculed by the popular clique, ACORN had been castigated by famous partisan instigators on cable news and talk radio. These media demagogues and their allied politicians promoted dubious claims of voter registration fraud and election fraud which have convinced millions of people that ACORN is, at its very core, a corrupt organization. While it is true that a few ACORN employees were caught submitting false voter registration cards—some with ridiculous names like “Mickey Mouse” and “Donald Duck”—in order to meet required quotas, they were caught by internal audits within the organization and subsequently fired. On the heels of a freshly manufactured controversy in which counselors at ACORN Housing Corporation—an offshoot organization of ACORN—were caught on a hidden camera condoning prostitution, human trafficking, and tax fraud, both chambers of Congress voted to halt government funding for all ACORN services. If the president were to sign such a bill ACORN would essentially be destroyed. Could this be the first of many secular nonprofit organizations socially conservative *culture warriors* attempt to dismantle in their quest to expand the power of faith-based initiatives?

Social conservatives laud former President George W. Bush—the self identified “compassionate conservative”—for his lead in fueling faith-based programs at the expense of government and secular nonprofit agencies. A faith based program is,



by Eric Jayne

incidentally, basically a social welfare program administered by a religious organization that that misinforms and confuses their clients while giving Jesus a shout out. By 2007, five years after the initiative began, \$10.6 billion went exclusively to these programs. What’s worse is that the Bush Justice Department exempted these faith based nonprofits from employment discrimination laws by issuing a 2007 memorandum—citing the 1993 religious freedom law—that allowed faith based organizations receiving government funds to hire only people of a particular religious faith. Unfortunately, the inundated Obama Justice Department has yet to address this issue.

Everyone should be troubled that partisan tools on cable news and talk radio shape public opinion with their defense of corrupt policies like Bush’s faith-based initiative and condemnation of valuable low-income community institutions like ACORN. Even policymakers like Senators Al

Franken and Amy Klobuchar, who voted to cut-off ACORN’s government funding, seem unable to filter out the propaganda. With all of the vitriolic anti-ACORN rhetoric buzzing around, it is important to realize that the employees caught on the infamous video were immediately fired. Other ACORN Housing Corporation (AHC) offices kicked the camera operatives out, and one filed a police report on the incident

. There’s no argument that the organization has had its problems with a few bad employees and one particular executive. But the talented, smart and altruistic community advocates at ACORN and AHC far outweigh the unscrupulous behavior demonstrated on the video.

The pedophilia that proliferated in Catholic churches around the globe, including the numerous cases of clergymen actively molesting little boys and girls here in the United States, is a far worse crime than anything the AHC housing counselors were caught doing. If ACORN loses its government funding because of the actions of a few bad employees, Catholic churches and their nonprofit organizations should lose their government funding too, along with their tax subsidies, because of the despicable pedophilia committed by many reverend clergymen. Should we start equipping altar boys with hidden cameras under their surplices and cassocks?

Electronic MNA Newsletters

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

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

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

Comments from the Whip

Grant Steves

Book Review:

The Family

from membership.

Some of them stay in a residence on C Street for \$600.00 a month. This provides them with a comfortable living circumstance and a close religious relationship with other members. In turn they are used by the Family to promote their agenda. Millions of dollars were appropriated by these senators for the building of mega-church-chapels on military bases. Senator Ensign traveled on the Family expense account to Asia and the Middle East. Senator Coburn traveled to Beirut to promote the Family's interests in developing Lebanese prayer groups. These various trips are not to promote American political interests but to promote the "Jesus plus nothing" philosophy of the Family.

Their focus is on "Reclaiming Seven Mountains of Culture." These seven areas were declared essential for power over the minds of humanity. The theologian, Francis Shaeffer helped to draft this position. They are determined to reclaim the Mountains of 1) Government, 2) Education, 3) Media, 4) Arts and entertainment, 5) Religion, 6) Family, and 7) Business.

More important is the foundation of this organization. They embrace the theological teachings of Rousas Rushdoony. Sometimes they are referred to as

Dominionists. This is based on the biblical reference to Genesis 1:28 (King James Version) that says man is to have dominion over every living thing. This is an organization that is motivated by power and religion. Their concern is control and not democratic humanistic values. Taking the word of Paul in Romans 13:1, they believe even the bloodiest dictators, Suharto of Indonesia, Said Barre of Somalia, or Museveni of Uganda are anointed by their god as worldly authorities to whom we must be in subjection. The Family would cooperate with these dictators to expand the power of the Christian religion.

They view themselves as the 'Chosen', anointed elite that has replaced the Jews in their god's esteem. This arrogant belief of being chosen gives them the permission to do whatever they want. Their hypocrisy is excused because of their 'Chosen' status.

The Family explores the power and influence of this group and the people who founded the group. It exposes the thinking of its leadership, e.g., Doug Coe advises members:

"I've seen pictures of the young men in the Red Guard. They would bring in this young man's mother. He would take an ax and cut her head off. They have to

(Continued on page 16)

Complacency is a luxury given to the comfortable. To paraphrase M. Niemöller, 'First they came for the gays, and I didn't speak up, because I was not gay. Then they came for the Humanists, and I didn't speak up, because I was an atheist. Then they came for me, and by that time, there was no one left to speak up for me.' The luxury of complacency toward the political forces in our country may result in the loss of comfort for those not allied with powerful.

The Family is an account of a powerful political force in our society. The documents of their existence, the public exposure of their members, and the very real extent of their power is well known now. Doug Coe, one of the leaders of the group, has said that being invisible and secret was their source of power and influence.

The Senators who are presently known to be members are Grassley of Iowa, Inhofe of Oklahoma, Coburn of Oklahoma, Thune of South Dakota, Enzi of Wyoming, Ensign of Nevada, Nelson of Florida, Pryor of Arkansas, Brownback of Kansas, and DeMint of South Carolina. They benefit in various ways

The Family, Jeff Sharlet, Harper Collins Publishing, 2008, 454 pages

Trick or Threat: Fundamentalist Christianity's Aversion to Halloween



by Vic Tanner

Halloween is undoubtedly my favorite holiday. It just has an attitude about it that other holidays could only hope to have. For many Fundamentalist Christians, however, Halloween is seen as an unholy celebration of all that is evil. This fear of Halloween is known as Samhainophobia, and it isn't just a trivial matter to them; it is deeply rooted in the core belief of their faith.

Halloween is a Christian holiday. Or, more precisely, a Christian adoption of an ancient pagan holiday, very much like Christmas. It is the evening before All Saints' Day and there is even an "Eve of All Saints' Prayer" in the *Book of Occasional Services*. Halloween began at least 2,500 years ago as the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, a celebration of summer's end and a remembrance of the dead. When the Roman Empire conquered Western Europe, a Roman-Celtic syncretism occurred that mixed language and culture. Samhain proved to be popular and, in 835 CE, Pope Gregory IV moved the Catholic holiday of "All Hallow's Eve", which served much the same purpose as Samhain, to November 1st to coincide

with it.

As mundane as any of that sounds, fundamentalist Christian sects often see Halloween as a dangerous holiday that could damage their souls. Examples of Christian commentary on Halloween can be found on many places on the Inter-



net: On iSawTheLightMinistries.com, a Halloween page says that parents should "refuse to allow your kid to take part in this evil holiday of Satan." Demonbuster.com warns the faithful: "Don't even open your doors to pass out 'tracts.' If you do, then you are celebrating this unholy day." Sabbatarian.com also has a page dedicated to the fear of Halloween, but it was so incoherent that I found it difficult to find a quote.

Why do some fundamentalists consider Halloween evil? The aversion to Halloween seems to be an extension of an extreme xenophobic fear of other religions. Strict fundamentalist thought holds that all things outside of Christianity – outside of *their* Christianity – are the work of devils and demons and are designed for the sole purpose of tricking the unwary into eternal damnation. If they take part in Halloween, in any

way, they will be inadvertently celebrating a pagan holiday and thereby worshiping Satan. One minute they'll be walking down the street in a Batman mask, the next, *BAM!*, they're possessed. Nothing they can do about it.

In their world, devils and demons actually exist. They are not symbols, signs, or personifications of abstract threats. They are real supernatural beings looking for any chance they can get to cast magic spells on the unsuspecting. And any non-pious act can invite them in.

Unfortunately, more liberal churches that do not hold such superstitious beliefs can give credence to the fears of the fundamentalists by shunning the holiday and holding church sponsored harvest or fall festivals on October 31st as an alternative for Halloween. This makes it appear that Halloween is a holiday to be avoided.

On Halloween night, as the faithful are cowering inside, painting crosses on their doors to keep the specter of death out, I'm going to be hauling out the buckets of (fake) blood for my homemade skull fountain and scaring the few children that will be allowed to take candy from strangers. Halloween is one of the few holidays that actually encourages people to go outside and stop by their neighbors' houses, if even for a piece of candy. I'm going to enjoy it.

"I think we ought to close Halloween down. Do you want your children to dress up as witches? The Druids used to dress up like this when they were doing human sacrifice...[The children] are acting out Satanic rituals and participating in it, and don't even realize it."--Pat Robertson

Highway Clean-Up

On Sunday, September 27th, volunteers from Minnesota Atheists cleaned up one of our state's highways near the town of Rice. Litter included a large cardboard sign (below, left), and the remnants of truck tires (below, center). One participant explained: "I went onto the highway to kick off some tire pieces so they wouldn't cause motorists any problems. The steel wires that reinforce the tires are difficult and the rusty ends quickly go through gloves



Pictured (left to right): Steve, Art, Deb, Todd, August, Karen, Jack, Kathy, Brian, Rachel, Dan, Anna, Michelle, Matthew.

(Photo credit: Steve Petersen.)

and into the skin. Thank goodness I had a reinforcement of tetanus vaccine recently."

The litter was placed in bags and set alongside the highway for the department of transportation to dispose of properly.

The volunteers rested from their work by paying a visit to the Old Creamery



Café (below, right). If you'd like to participate in a highway clean-up, Minnesota Atheists is organizing another effort— Saturday, October 17th at 11:00 a.m. in Lakeville. Visit the Meet-Up page, or contact board



member Crystal Dervetski for further details.

(Photo credit: Matthew Richardson)



Film Review

James Zimmerman

Film Review: *Into Temptation*

Into Temptation, the new film written

and directed by Patrick Coyle, takes its viewers on a trip through guilt, sin, and redemption. The film explores the causes and effects in a person's life that lead, ultimately, to desperate decisions.

If it sounds like heavy subject matter, it is. But the film manages to not get bogged down in pity for its characters, though it relies heavily on religious motivations and traditions. Those who have never been Catholic, and particularly those who have never been religious, may find it difficult to sympathize with Linda's desire for absolution.

Linda, played by Kristin Chenoweth (better known as Olive from *Pushing Daisies*) is a prostitute seeking to get all her affairs – please excuse the pun – in order before she ends her existence. Though her actions belie it – it's been 19 years since her last confession – she's apparently never mentally left the Catholic Church, and she looks for solace by visiting a confessional booth just as the priest is hoping to end his shift.

The tale of her life, frustratingly excised from the scene, coupled with his impending need to

perform mass, leave the priest at a loss for words – so much, in fact, that he neglects his duty to the wayward soul. Linda leaves, without being forgiven, and Father Buerlein (played by Jeremy Sisto) spends the rest of the film searching out this fallen Catholic.

Buerlein's search is a maddening race against the clock. He knows only Linda's birthday (she intends to take her life on her

***Into Temptation*, 95 minutes,
released (in Minnesota)
August 27, 2009
Directed by Patrick Doyle**

birthday) and the sound of her voice. He tries to sketch her appearance, but seeing her only obliquely through the screen of a confessional booth, he knows only the shape of her mouth, her neck, and her chest (donned, appropriately, with a cross nestled in a plunging neckline). Buerlein seeks out the assistance of



neighbors, taxicab drivers, bartenders, and fellow priest Father O'Brien, played by Brian Baumgartner (better known as Kevin from *the Office*), whose cynicism and greed paint

a striking juxtaposition between the two religious leaders. In time, Buerlein has no other choice but to go literally into temptation, and our hapless hero soon finds himself hobnobbing with pimps,

prostitutes, and criminals as he visits night clubs, adult stores, and seedy back alleys.

Again, for non-believers, the character's challenges may seem a little trite and his difficulties unfounded. But without the limitations and structure imposed by his religion, the film would have little to go on. As it is, Buerlein openly expresses his own doubts and his unease with the religion's rigidity; in one scene, he tells a parishioner he isn't sure if prayer even works. In another, he appalls his congregation by using unsavory words. "Let's say a prayer for the bastard who mugged me," he says from the pulpit.

Into Temptation transpires in Minneapolis, and it offers many scenes and shots of places familiar to Twin Cities residents. The film is beautifully bookended with flashbacks to Linda's childhood, both of which shed light on the story that unfolds in between. Apart from a pointless subplot featuring the return of Buerlein's former lover, the story is tight and the pacing adequate. Go see this film before it leaves the few theaters it's in.

Depiction, where explicit or implicit, of deities: 4/5

Depiction, whether explicit or implicit, of religion: 3/5

View of valuing this life as opposed to an afterlife: 2/5

Positive view of self-reliance: 1/5

Championship of reason: 2/5

Bottom line: 4/5

The Family (continued)

put the purposes of the Red Guard ahead of their father, mother, brother, sister, and their own life. That was a covenant, a pledge. That's what Jesus said." This blind dedication is motivated by faith in a power structure that is derived from a Ouija Board interpretation of the bible.

The importance for atheists and all nonbelievers is to be

aware of the political vicissitudes in our society. We may be neutral and wait for them to come for us, or we may engage in the political system to keep people free of groups like the Family.

It is my strongly held belief that we must engage. We realize that life is not a rehearsal for a heavenly performance, but it is a reality of now. We now have the opportunity to stand up and help

expose groups that would abuse power.

We have the responsibility to be informed, to inform, and to participate actively in our political system. Our participation is not coerced for fear of punishment in some hereafter but is encouraged because of the ethical consequence of not acting.

The Economist and Camp Quest

by Bob Schmitz

The July 18th issue of The Economist has a very positive article (p 32) about Camp Quest. It describes the activities of the campers and offers some commentary on the status of atheists in America. Despite the fact that atheists are broadly disliked there has been some improvement according to the writer, who reports that "the proportion who say they might vote for an atheist has doubled in the past half-century." Although five percent admitted they would not vote for a qualified black candidate in a recent poll, 53% still say they would "shun" a qualified atheist candidate. The poll source was not cited.

"The kids are taught to question everything," the article states. "They also learn about the scientific method while examining bugs in a pond. Many of the kids at Camp Quest say that, at school, they either keep quiet about their lack of belief or are teased for it. What they like about Camp Quest is that no one tells them they are going to Hell."

Members of the Humanists of Minnesota and Minnesota Atheists volunteered their time and talent to making Camp Quest a success this past summer. Reading this article in such a prestigious paper does make one proud to be a member of both organizations.

To read these articles go to Economist.com/blogs/lexington, and access the July 18th issue.

Financial Report

Financial Report for September:

Building Fund: \$35.72
Daniel Norte \$35.72

Visibility (General) Fund \$777.32
Maureen Murphy \$25.00
Elizabeth Nelson \$12.00
Vern Young \$100.00
Anonymous \$640.32

Cryptogram answer

It vexes me when they would constrain science by the authority of the Scriptures, and yet do not consider themselves bound to answer reason and experiment.

-Galileo Galilei, "The Authority of Scripture in Philosophical Controversies"

September Cable Report



Grant Steves, right, interviews Brooks Peterson on his atheistic upbringing.

by Steve Petersen

For the September taping, Grant Steves produced two programs with a unique twist. In the first program, Grant interviewed Brooks Peterson on being a natural atheist - one who was not raised religious, but still became a student of religious life and remained a natural atheist. In the second program, Brooks interviewed Grant on atheism as a choice. Grant talked about being a Jehovah Witness and then moving to Catholicism and evolving finally to an atheist. These programs profiled two completely different life circumstances and life experiences.

Cable Crew: Art Anderson, George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley

Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, and Grant Hermanson,.

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

Cable Schedule

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

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

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

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

Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View, New Brighton: Channel 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

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

Stillwater: Channel 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. and 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.



Crystal Dervetski

Apathetic Atheists

My favorite kind of person in general is an apathetic person.

I find them endlessly interesting and entertaining. So far in my life, I have known so many of the apathy-ridden. But, the best, by far, are the apathetic atheists. I recently stumbled across some statements from the Positive Atheist website's mail bag... Honestly, it's the same stuff over and over, and I myself have heard the statements time and time again: Why should an atheist organize? Atheism is negative, and there's no reason to stand up concerning a negative. Beliefs really aren't an issue, so why take a stance either way? Isn't organizing atheists just like being in a religion? At times, these apathetics even belittle or criticize those of us who are brave enough to out ourselves and work toward building a community of atheists and other freethinkers. So let me answer some of this my way:

“What is *organized* atheism? Do people get together for parties or something.” Sure, why not? Parties are great fun. Why do so many apathetic atheists seem to have something against having a good time with other people?

“I am an atheist, but by its very nature it is more of a solitary thing isn't it?” Atheism does not have to be solitary. Where does this idea even come from? I'm just picturing a hermit in a cave somewhere pleasuring himself. Does it have to be that way? Can't we at least stick our heads out of the cave and say hello to our friends and neighbors from time to time to shake hands?

(After washing them, of course.)

“Since atheism is the absence of a belief in a supreme being then it is a negative (I don't mean negative as in bad). Wouldn't people only join a group if it was for something, and not the absence of something?” You're right, it is pretty dreadful. I often sit around with people and talk about all of the things I'm not, especially at atheist events. The list is *so* long; why, anyone who's been to a Minnesota Atheists event knows that I can talk for hours concerning all of the negatives about myself. Hooray!

“The term Organized Atheism sounds like atheists have a "Church" to go to every Sunday where they all meet and do something together.” You're starting to convince me now... Wouldn't want to go meet like-minded people or anything. That sounds pretty awful. Back to the cave...

“From what I can tell, the desire to meet in groups seems, for the most part, to be a leftover from going to church. In the groups I did not meet many who were raised atheists, most had simply transferred affiliation from religion to atheism as adults. Thus much of the thinking habits of a life of religion remained.” This goes back to that unbelievable notion that organizing or wanting to be around other people is somehow religious in nature... Can you please just sit and think of even *one* example of a time when wanting to be with other people, or building a social network/community had nothing to do with religion? I can think of too many to list. Or, take a moment and think of some of the reasons for a social network or strong community? One of my religious friends

was talking the other day about how when she had a surgery that her church provided her and her child with meals while she was recovering. I was just thinking, “I could really use some atheist casseroles if that ever happens to me.”

“Hate groups are against a group of individuals because of their color or beliefs or something else. As an atheist, I am against an idea or premise. I am also against communism and fascism and socialism and altruism. I don't think that makes me part of any ‘hate group’. It is the idea or concept or premise that is hated and needs to be changed (not that I have an answer for that).” I get where you're going here. The idea, though poorly worded, is that if atheists organize, it automatically places them in the category of 'hate group', and that needs to be changed. Probably the best way you can change that idea is to just continue to do nothing. Sit at home (or in your cave) on your butt and don't say anything or do anything, especially in public. To that I say: “Apathetic Atheists: Go home!” Oh wait, you're already there.



Minnesota Atheists

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

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

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. **Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous**, 3249 Hennepin Ave. S., #55 (Men's Center, in the basement) Minneapolis. Open to men and women. FFI: tcAgnostic@gmail.com

3rd Sunday, 1-3:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting**. (No meeting in July or August.) See MNAtheists.org for details.

Every Sunday, 10:30 - noon, **Brunch Social**. Q.Cumbers, 7465 France Avenue South, Edina. Bring your AWE for a \$2 discount.

5th Sunday, **Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund**. Price: \$6.66. (May, August, and November 2009).

1st and 3rd Monday, 6 p.m., **Freethought Toastmasters Club**. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to Party Room.)

Roger Belfay, (651) 222-2782 or George Kane, nup@Minn.net.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 p.m., **Dinner Social**. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W. 66th Street (corner of Penn Ave. and 66th St.), Richfield, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

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

3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. New China Buffet, 105 85th Ave. NW, Coon Rapids. Bill Volna, (612) 781-4273.

4th Wednesday, **Meal and a Reel**, Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin Ave. and Lake St.) 6 p.m. meal, 7 p.m. movie. George Kane, nup@Minn.net. Details in Atheists Weekly E-mail.

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

cashumn.org for program and location.

1st Thursday, 6-9 p.m., **"Atheists Talk" TV taping**. MTN, Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2nd Thursday, evening. **Rochester Area Freethinkers** monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn64@hotmail.com or (507) 259-4237.

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

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

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

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“There are religious scientists and Darwinian churchgoers. But this does not mean that faith and science are compatible.”

—Jerry A. Coyne, author of
Why Evolution is True

**“Check out the Minnesota Atheist Podcast
At
Mnatheist.org.”**