

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action SM

Volume 20 Number 1

January 2010

January Meeting: "How to Lobby Your State Legislator"

The Minnesota State Capitol can seem like a very intimidating place. And yet the legislators there are elected to represent us and they welcome our input.

What's the best way to contact our representatives? How do we set up a meeting? How can we find out about upcoming legislation? How do we know what legislative bills have been introduced and when they might get a public hearing? How does one sign up to testify at committee hearings? What bills might be introduced in the upcoming legislative session? How can an average person (or, in the case of a Minnesota Atheists member, an above average person) make a difference?

Our very special guest to lead us in this discussion will be Minnesota State Representative Phyllis Kahn. Currently serving in her 19th term, she represents District 59B in Minneapolis.

Rep. Kahn has a B.A. in physics from Cornell, a Ph.D. in biophysics from Yale, and a M.P.A. from the J.F.K. School of Government at Harvard. Her support for science, the environment, separation of state and church, and equal rights for everyone make her an especially valuable member of the Min-

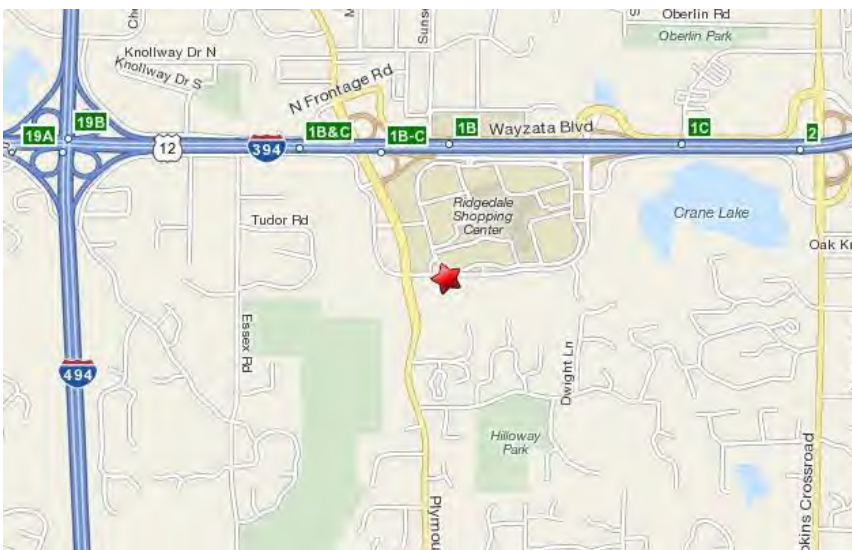
nesota legislature.

Rep. Kahn has a reputation as a colorful iconoclast. For example, during debate over whether Minnesota should pass a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, she opened up a Bible and noted that no one was talking about enacting legislation based on other draconian Biblical passages!

Rep. Kahn has the distinction of being the only member of the Minnesota State legislature with the courage to speak at our annual Day of Reason event at the Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda.

After the meeting we will have dinner at the Wanderer's Garden Chinese Buffet Restaurant.

Please join us!



When?

Sunday, January 17, 2009

1:00-1:15 p.m. - Social Time

1:15-1:45 p.m. - Business Meeting, including annual nominations for the board of directors

1:45-2:00 p.m. - Social Time

2:00-3:30 p.m. - Speaker and Q&A

4:00 p.m. - Dinner at Wanderer's Garden Chinese Buffet Restaurant

Where?

Ridgedale Public Library

12601 Ridgedale Drive

Minnetonka, 55305

In This Issue...

President's Column	3
November Meeting	4
Board Nominees Call	5
Improvement at the UN	5
Cryptogram	5
News and Notes	6
Spaghetti Fundraiser	8
Book Review	9
A Hell of an Education	10
Rapture Plans	11
Inclusive Celebration	12
Treasurer's Report	12
Cable Report	13
The Bridge	14
Protecting Xmas	14
Things To Do	15

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edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

Honorary Members

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

MNA Meetup members: 623
Life memberships: 31

Building Fund:
\$121,339.04

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.

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

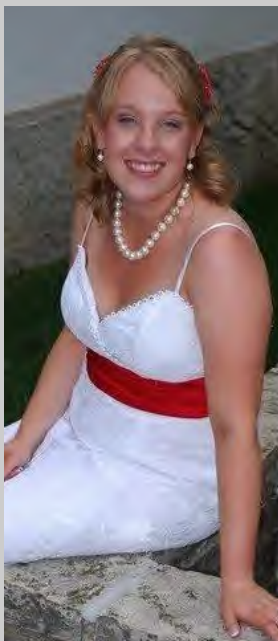
- Provide a community for atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

President's Column by Jeannette Watland

My Family of Cats

Christmas day saw me sitting around a table eating Dim Sum in a Chinese restaurant with about nine other atheists. At one point during the meal, one of the diners told the table that this has been the first Christmas in awhile that has actually meant something. I'm lucky enough to have a family that supports my atheism, but the sad reality is that many of us do not. Providing an alternative on a religious holiday normally shared with family not only gives us something to do when everyone else is out, but is also an example of community in Minnesota Atheists.

I recently had an email correspondence with a member who was dismayed at the apparent pride some atheists take in the "herding cats" mentality. Honestly, it dismays me too. I can understand the reasons people don't like to organize. It can feel too much like church or other organized religions. People feel like they will lose individualism if they band together with a group. I can understand these things, but I still think the benefits of joining



and participating in an atheist community outweigh the downfalls.

One of Minnesota Atheists' missions is to educate the public on atheism. The more the public is educated the more we will build tolerance. If the public could see how many of us there actually are, and how normal we look, the stereotypes begin to break down. When we band together we can also make a larger wave in the world of politics. We are going to make more progress in fighting for the separation of church and state if we act as a community. Already our numbers at the Day of Reason are beginning to rival those of the Day of Prayer.

Finally, creating a close community is just in our human nature. Humans are social beings. It is good for us to be around other people. For many of us, being around other atheists is an invaluable experience. I love the Minnesota Atheist community and hope that every single one of our

members has a chance to experience it. It is a place where we can discuss our lack of belief without fear of offending someone. We can come out of the atheist closet and be ourselves without fearing discrimination. We baby-sit each others children, celebrate weddings, welcome new babies, comfort the sick and lonely, and mourn the loss of members. We maintain our individualism and offer our services to benefit others. I am truly proud to be part of such a caring group of people. Minnesota Atheists has become like a second family to me. I hope it means as much to our members as it does to me.



"Evolution is almost universally accepted among those who understand it, almost universally rejected by those who don't."

- Richard Dawkins, "Darwin and the case for 'militant atheism'" CNN.com, November 24, 2009

The November MNA Meeting

David Niose, the recently elected president of the American Humanist Association, gave the feature presentation of the November 15 meeting at the

of this organization, and in recognition of the intelligence and attention to member service he always brought to his work.”



David Niose.

Ridgedale Library. Niose argued that John Dewey's writings in the early twentieth Century were an important advance for American humanism, and are largely overlooked today. The lively discussion that followed showed that many in the audience were already familiar with Dewey's writings. Niose's appearance drew a large turnout from members of the Humanists of Minnesota.

Before the meeting, Chair Jack Caravela presented to Steve Petersen a plaque designated as "The Founders' Award," "in appreciation of the leadership that he has provided since the inception



ABOVE: Chair Jack Caravela (left) presents Steve Petersen with the Founders' Award. Photo credit: August Berkshire.

BELOW: Petersen offers his thanks for the award.

Photo credits: August Berkshire and Matthew Richardson.



Call for Nominees to the Minnesota Atheists Board of Directors

Nominations for the Minnesota Atheists board of directors will occur at the January 17, 2010 meeting at the Ridgedale Public Library and elections will be held at the February 2010 meeting. Nominations will open and close at the January 17 meeting. We will publish and mail candidates' statements prior to the February meeting elections.

There are nine positions to fill, elected in the following order: President, Associate President, Chair, Associate Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors-at-Large. Our bylaws provide that anyone who runs for one position and loses may run again for any other position that has not yet been elected.

Some incumbents will likely run for reelection, but there will also be vacant seats. All terms are for one year. Now is your chance to step forward to help guide Minnesota Atheists.

Candidates for all but the three director-at-large positions must have been members of Minnesota Atheists for at least one year as of the time they assume office (March 1, 2010). Candidates for the three director-at-large positions must have members for six months.

You must be nominated by another Minnesota Atheists member. You cannot nominate yourself. You need not be present to be nominated. (If you wish to nominate someone not at the January 17 meeting, please check beforehand to make sure that person is willing to serve if elected.)

Nominees should send candidate's statements (up to 150 words) and a jpeg headshot to the MNA newsletter editor at editor@mnatheists.org by January 25, 2010.



Improvement at the UN

by George Kane

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in October criticized the anti-defamation policies that are repeatedly proposed at the United Nations by the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Clinton stated that "an individual's ability to practice his or her religion has no bearing on others' freedom of speech." This statement is a substantial improvement over the UN resolution that had been jointly sponsored earlier that month by the United States and Egypt that sought to balance freedom of speech with protection for religion.

Freethought Cryptogram

by George Kane

Qc Wzu qj, fyt qj y jbyism; tzn, fyt oyt ytu fija vm chmm;
apmt, Wzu uzmj tza mkqja.

-Fqrpyqb Vyritqt, Wzu ytu Jayam

(Answer on page 13.)

News and Notes



George Kane

Local Events Show Intelligent Design in Public Education is Still Contentious

On November 10 the *Journal of Law and Public Policy* conducted a symposium on “Intelligent Design and the Constitution” at the University of St. Thomas School of Law. This free and open-to-the public event was not advertised at all in the local freethought community. It seemed to me that the great majority of the audience was from St. Thomas. A large number were law students, identifiable by their youth and uniform dark grey suit, white shirt and tie. From the questions asked, there was no indication that there was another atheist in the audience.

I am certain that the organizers never thought for a moment to send a notice to Minnesota Atheists, and they were very likely unaware that such a group exists. I’m also fairly sure that the balance in the composition of the panel pleased them. They had two representatives from the Intelligent Design-promoting Discovery Institute, balancing two from the National Center for Science Education, plus the lead defense lawyer in the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* case and a professor of philosophy and theology.

In fact, the panel was heavily weighted in favor of teaching ID. The symposium was supposed to focus on the legal issues rather than questions of science. How you decide the law, however, depends on whether you consider Intelligent De-

sign to be a scientific conclusion, even if flawed, or merely religion utilizing pseudoscience to perpetrate a fraud. That is a question that only working scientists, the experts on the subject matter, can decide. Lawyers and philosophers, by contrast, are formalists, who can only judge the issue by external attributes such as compliance with the *process* of science.

The first presenter was Casey Luskin, an attorney who is a program officer in public policy and legal affairs for the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank best known for its advocacy of intelligent design.

Luskin claimed that the Discovery Institute wants to *permit* public school teachers to teach Intelligent Design, but not *require* them to do so. I had the opportunity to ask him one question: Since he argued for academic freedom, what would he do if parents were to come to him to complain of a public high school biology teacher who tells classes that the evidence of evolutionary history precludes the possibility of intent? Would he support that teacher? He responded that teachers are limited to the curriculum in what they teach, and since “Intelligent Design” is not in the biology curriculum in any public school, the teacher should not criticize it! When I pressed further, he stated that if ID were on the curriculum, then he would support teaching it critically.

The next speaker was Dr. Peter Hess, Faith Project director at the National Center for Science Education, which staunchly defends the teaching of scientific evolution in public schools. He was also a theist, how-

ever, and argued that there is no incompatibility between evolution and Christianity. He further denounced Intelligent Design as both bad science and bad theology. Dr. Hess had nothing to contribute when the discussion got rolling.

The final speaker of the morning session was Patrick Gillen, a defense attorney in *Kitzmiller v. Dover School District*, who claimed, disingenuously, that he “did not have a dog in this fight.” He did not mention that his services were provided to the Dover School District by the arch-conservative Thomas More Law Center, dedicated to promoting the legal standing of Christians. His presentation was a completely one-sided criticism of Judge John Jones’ decision in *Kitzmiller*.

Gillen was certain that there will be more cases brought to court over the teaching of ID. If I had the opportunity, I would have asked him why the lesson of *Kitzmiller* for ID proponents should not be that they should first win the battle among professional biologists, and only shift their efforts to public education after they have won the biologists to their side. I would hope to get him to admit that they wanted to contest the *social* debate to an audience that was incompetent to judge the *scientific* debate.

The afternoon session was opened by Dr. Thomas Sullivan, who holds the Aquinas Chair in Philosophy and Theology at St. Thomas. He argued that teaching ID must be constitutional because it would be a practical impossibility to keep it from ever being mentioned in a classroom! His other principal thesis, that the exist-

tence of consciousness proves the existence of God, was equally specious and equally irrelevant.

Next came David DeWolf, a professor at the Gonzaga School of Law, speaking on “teaching the controversy.” He is listed in the program as the author of *Teaching the Controversy: Darwinism, Design and the Public School Curriculum*, a “briefing book for public school administrators,” and *Teaching the Controversy: Is it Science? Religion? Speech?* Oddly, nowhere in the materials for this symposium is it noted that he is a Senior Fellow at the Discovery Institute! Since I did not at the time know DeWolf’s connection to the Discovery Institute, I was futilely hopeful that he would explain that there *is no real controversy over the correctness of evolution among biologists*. Instead he simply rehashed the usual Discovery Institute talking points, such as that 700 Ph. Ds had signed a statement of disbelief in evolution. He gave examples to show that there is a social and cultural controversy over evolution, and concluded that there must therefore be a scientific controversy. DeWolf claimed that the Cambrian explosion cannot be explained by common origin, so it must have been a time of separate creation of the different kinds of animals. It was a similar claim to one that Luskin had made in the morning, that the geographical dispersal of species disproves evolution. At those times I wished that it was a debate rather than a symposium, so that a biologist would have the opportunity to explain why professionals in the field do not consider these to be problems.

I asked him how he explains that the professional scientific associations deny that there is a biological controversy over the veracity of evolution. “Teaching the controversy” presumes that there is valid scientific controversy, but I pointed out that in fact creationists never present papers

at conferences on evolution, and that professional biologists consider their work to be not merely flawed or erroneous science, but pseudoscience. He replied that the ‘controversy’ is proved by a disagreement between Dawkins and Gould, but this common tactic is pure fraud. Both Dawkins and Gould were firmly convinced of the correctness of the theory of evolution, however. Neither of them believed that any disagreement between them brings the theory of evolution at all into question.

The last presenter of the day, Joshua Rosenau, was the only panelist to state a case for keeping Intelligent Design out of the public school science curriculum. The Public Information Project Director at the National Center for Science Education, Rosenau was the only working scientist on the panel.

Rosenau spoke to the inability of ID promoters to make their case, because “science is hard.” He pointed to the publications and conferences promised by the Discovery Institute that they never produced, choosing instead to devote their resources to convince the general public rather than scientists. This, he noted, is because ID is a project to deceive rather than to persuade. Their plan is to rebrand creationism to justify teaching non-science in the name of “fairness.”

Rosenau then derided the Academic Freedom Act, asking if it permits a public school teacher to teach holocaust denial. He explained that the Academic Association of University Professors adopted the position that scientists should define academic freedom in the science classroom, not legislatures. Rosenau called state Academic Freedom Acts “a solution in search of a problem” that has so far been rejected by the courts, and noted that when legislatures single out evolution in their AFAs, they demonstrate a religious purpose.

During a question and answer session to conclude the symposium there was at last an opportunity for a direct interchange among the panelists. This sharply highlighted the different perspective of Rosenau, the only biologist. In contrast, attorney Patrick Gillen looked quite foolish when he asserted that Dembski’s “information theory” shows promise of becoming a “new, overarching theory that will supplant Darwinism”.

Discovery Institute spokesman Luskin quoted a court decision that referred to a “tyranny of scientific orthodoxy.” He hoped thereby to debunk current scientific orthodoxy by showing that past orthodoxies, such as phrenology, were false. But of course evolution is supported by such an enormous body of evidence that, while it may be often refined, it is extremely unlikely ever to be refuted. If it ever is, scientists will revise the theory as the evidence requires, but not before.

In response to Rosenau’s assertion that “ID teaches what we don’t know,” one person in the audience claimed “to have studied a lot of Intelligent Design,” and learned from it “to look for intelligent causes.” I thought that this was an interesting glimpse into the views of the audience. Scientific inquiry inoculates one against precisely this type of superstition.

While I have been for a long time aware of the creationist argument of “irreducible complexity,” I confess that I was unaware of the companion argument for “specified complexity.” According to specified complexity, an organism or feature needs to be finely tuned in order to be functional. Rosenau said that this argument begs the question, while Luskin derided the presumption that unexplained phenomena have a natural explanation as “materialism of the gaps.” Rosenau pointed out that this is not

(Continued on page 8)

All-You-Can-Eat Flying Spaghetti Monster Fundraiser Dinner

On Sunday, January 31, there will be two chances to join in at the All-You-Can-Eat Flying Spaghetti Monster Fundraiser Dinner; at 2:30 p.m.–4:30 p.m. and again at 5:00 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

This event had gotten too large in the past, so we are dividing the event into two seatings. The room will be cleared at 4:30 for the 5:00 seating.

RSVP on Meetup.com, or to George Kane, nup@Minn.net. Please specify which seating you will be attending and how many guests you are bringing.

Location: 1276 Larpenteur Avenue west in St. Paul 55113. Enter through the gap between buildings in the rear of the complex. Follow signs to the Party Room. Cost is \$7.00. Free for small children.



News and Notes (continued)

(Continued from page 7)

parallel to “god of the gaps,” because we know that other results have natural causes, but we don’t know if there is a god.

Perhaps the greatest entertainment of the day occurred near the very end. Rosenau pointed out that evolution is more certain than the theory of gravity because gravity equations fail to work with subatomic masses. Evolution, he pointed out, is the “grand unified theory of biology.” Patrick Gillen was apoplectic at this claim, and Luskin derided it as ridiculous and representative of the “nonsense” that the science community keeps throwing out.

Less than a week later, P. Z. Myers debated young-earth creationist Jerry Bergman at the University of Minnesota’s St. Paul campus on the question of whether Intelligent Design should be taught in public schools. The debate was a blowout, as Bergman’s presentation was incoherent. He made a shamble of even standard creationist arguments like “Irreducible Complexity.”

The event was worthwhile only

because of Myers’ exposition that Intelligent Design is not science and provides nothing to teach. A theory of ID would have to tell us how a designer implemented his designs, but instead it just says “he did it.” It must also show the evidence that justifies the conclusion of Intelligent Design, but no such evidence has ever been presented. Since ID provides no mechanism or evidence, it presents neither a theory of biological design nor data to support its claims.

A demonstration of the vacuity of ID is that proponents do not even agree on the age of the earth. In order to sustain a “big tent,” the Discovery Institute supports people who claim that the earth is as young as 5,000 years and as old as 5,000,000,000 years – a margin of error of a million times. By contrast, scientists in every field are all in agreement that the earth is about 4.54 billion years old. Jerry Bergman replied incredibly that ID proponents just do not consider the age of the earth to be an important question!

Later in the week, Bergman was a guest on the “KKMS Live! With Jeff and Lee” radio program. A caller

asked Bergman what evidence would prove to him that Intelligent Design is false. When Bergman tried to sidestep the question by claiming that the theory of evolution gets modified to accommodate any new evidence, the caller pointed out that evolution could be falsified by anomalies such as rabbits in the Precambrian period. The host, Jeff Shell, asked the caller if he were an atheist. When he responded affirmatively, Shell asked the caller if he could prove that there is no God, and that if not, was atheism not just as “purposeless.” This is a red herring, since there is no claim that atheism is a conclusion of science. But that is the very claim about ID that proponents must prove to justify teaching it in public school science classes.

We are probably past the days when scientists avoided debates with Creationists, fearful that they would legitimize pseudoscience by giving them a stage, and that the Creationists would throw up enough smoke to buffalo the audience. Rather, a working biologist who is prepared for the arguments of the Intelligent Design proponents is the best opponent for them. They are the ones who best see through the ID nonsense, and can best refute them.

Book Review: *The Atheist's Bible Companion to the New Testament*



by James Zimmerman

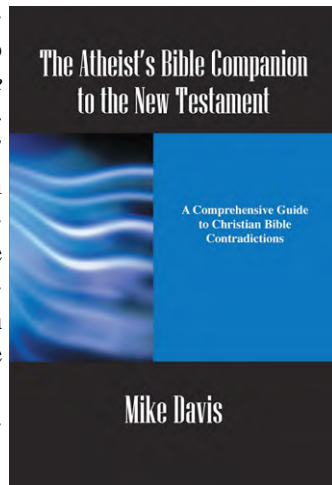
If you've ever wondered how there can be so many branches of Christianity, with each denomination somehow able to back up its doctrines with scripture, look no further. *The Atheist's Bible Companion to the New Testament* breaks down those 27 little books and shows them for what they really are: a collection of ramblings capable of 'proving' nearly any theological standpoint a Christian desires to hold. Davis' bible commentary offers a logical, realistic look at the New Testament – verse by verse.

The book primarily picks apart the irreconcilable accounts in the gospels, as well as the Apostle Paul's inability to construct a coherent, consistent doctrine. All the familiar contradictions are cited (such as Matthew's and Luke's differing genealogies and the disciples' disagreement on Jesus' final words), as well as hundreds of others that the casual reader (and devout believer) may not notice.

For example, in Romans 7:18, Paul claims "nothing good dwells within" him. Yet, as Davis points out, the very same Apostle also claimed that Christ lives in him (Galatians 2:20).

As another example, the commentary on Galatians 4:4, states: "Paul reminds us that Jesus was born of a woman. But Jesus himself said that no one born of a woman is greater than John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:11) Therefore, Jesus himself was no greater than John the Baptist, and thus could not himself have been divine. And it gets worse: In John 10:8, Jesus declares that all who came before him were

'thieves and robbers.'" Clearly, then, Jesus must've been no better than a thief and a robber.



Readers will enjoy (or be shocked) to discover some of the patterns Davis uncovers in his Commentary, including: John the Baptist, who was supposed to "prepare the way" for Jesus, did an absolutely horrible job. Despite constant claims to the contrary, there are no clear-cut messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that Jesus fulfilled. While Jesus enemies – the Pharisees and Sadducees – understood him, his closest disciples were baffled by nearly everything he said. Jesus purposely spoke cryptically with the express purpose of concealing his true message.

Davis also preempts apologists' 'reasoning' when warranted, such as when he first notes the gospels' con-

tradictions), Davis' commentary doesn't just point out the internal hypocrisy. It provides background information, alternative interpretations, religious and secular disputes on the time and place of certain writings and notable highlights from the scriptures. One such example is in the commentary on Matthew 5:39, where Davis tersely observes: "'Turn the other cheek.' One of many Jesus maxims that practicing Christians do not follow." Davis' objective look at the New Testament is seen in his ability to call attention to consistencies, too, such as when he states (regarding Matthew 6:19): "One of the few consistent points in Jesus's teaching is his disdain for material wealth." Davis is even courteous enough to point out when apparent contradictions are likely not contradictions at all. He isn't above pointing out the implications of such careful readings, either. In his commentary on Romans 3:5-6, he notes: "[The world] is a rigged system, in which man is created too weak to resist sin, and then is condemned for sinning."

This isn't, necessarily, a book you would want to read cover-to-cover, and it's not meant to be. Instead, I suggest keeping it on your

shelf next to your favorite version of the Bible. When you need to reference the latter, make sure you grab the former, too. *The Atheist's Bible Companion* provides an insightful starting point for responding to apologists, fundamentalists, or any well-meaning Christian.

Bottom line: A.

The Atheist's Bible Companion to the New Testament, by Mike Davis.

©2009, Outskirts Press, 460 pages

traditions of the time of day when certain events took place. Davis acknowledges the assertion that such discrepancies are due to differences in Roman and Jewish time-keeping, only to then note that the two time-keeping systems were the same.

Despite the subtitle (*A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Bible*



by Eric Jayne

How is it that a well educated biology teacher refuses to accept the scientific theory of evolution by natural

addition to their Christ-centered academic endeavors, the university also owns 16 different Christian radio stations that cover markets in North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Florida, and Minnesota (including KTIS 98.5 here in the Twin Cities).

Like Bethel University in Arden Hills, and many other biblically fundamental Christian colleges, NWC requires students and faculty to complete a personal faith statement where the applicant affirms his/her devotion to “Jesus Christ as [his or

tute’s list in perspective, the National Center for Science Education started a list titled Project Steve, named after Stephen Jay Gould. The list consists of scientists named “Steve”—which represents only one percent of all scientists—who accept Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection and label intelligent design as “irresponsible creationist pseudoscience”. As of December 2009 the Project Steve list has over 1,100 signatures.

One of the few biologists on the Dissent from Darwin list is NWC Professor Bruce Simat, who testified in the 2005 Kansas evolution hearings as a proponent of teaching Intelligent Design in public school science classrooms. The spring 2006 NWC periodical, *Pilot*, proudly claims that Simat helped create the NWC biology curriculum and degree program which allows biology majors to earn roughly a quarter of their biology credits by attending Michigan’s Au Sable Institute for a five-week summer program. One can only imagine the unique education biology students receive at Au Sable since the institute identifies its mission as “the integration of knowledge of the Creation with biblical principles.” Students who attended Au Sable will surely be prepared for this year’s NWC honors biology course titled “Was Darwin Right? An Analysis of Creation and Evolution.”

Undoubtedly, NWC is an indoctrination machine that is skilled at defending and teaching weird beliefs. Perhaps the weirdest belief held at NWC is found in their doctrinal statement (the foundation of the school’s educational programs): premillennialism. Basically, premillennialism is a fundamentalist view based on the bible book of *Revelation* where it is believed that Jesus will physically return to earth and battle “the Antichrist,” who will ap-

(Continued on page 14)

Northwestern College Offers One *Hell* of an Education

selection? How is it that otherwise articulate and intelligent people believe in ghosts, angels, demons, and literal interpretations of bible stories? In his book *Why People Believe Weird Things*, Michael Shermer posits that “smart people believe weird things because they are skilled at defending beliefs they arrived at for non-smart reasons.” I can think of no better institution supporting Shermer’s hypothesis than Northwestern College in Roseville.

Not to be confused with Northwestern University—the Big Ten conference school in Illinois—Northwestern College (NWC) is a liberal arts college that “exists to provide Christ-centered higher education equipping students to grow intellectually and spiritually” (www.nwc.edu). The school proudly boasts that Billy Graham served as the school’s president for five years beginning in 1947. Currently, according to the NWC website, more than 3,000 students are enrolled among more than 50 undergraduate and graduate programs and that one in ten students was home schooled. In

her] personal Lord and Savior.” NWC appears to turn up the ecclesiastic craziness a couple of notches from Bethel, but this might be simply because NWC shares more information on their website than Bethel. According to the NWC 2009-10 catalog, biology is taught as a way for students “to understand how they relate to the creation.” Students also have the benefit of NWC’s unique pedagogical approach that encourages confused students to sit down with their biology professors “and pray about God’s direction in [their] life” (www.nwc.com). Perhaps that’s an approach Dr. PZ Myers might consider implementing in his biology class?

It should come as no surprise that NWC is well represented on the Discovery Institute’s Dissent from Darwin project—a list of scientists who signed a statement produced by the institute declaring they are skeptical of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection. It’s worth noting that the vast majority of the list’s scientists are NOT biologists and that there are less than 800 total signatories. To put the Discovery Insti-

Local Atheist Plans for the Rapture



by James Zimmerman

Eternal Earth-Bound Pets, USA is the country’s first post-Rapture pet rescue internet business. Launched in July 2009 by Brad from Minnesota, and Bart Centre of New Hampshire, the business offers Christian believers in the Rapture a guarantee that if the Rapture occurs and they are called to Jesus, their pets will be rescued and adopted by pet-loving atheists.

For \$110.00 for the first pet, and \$15.00 for each additional animal, Eternal Earth-Bound Pets will insure their rescue in the event of the Rapture for a ten year period.

Covering twenty-two states, including Minnesota, Bart and Brad have coordinated a network of twenty-six atheist pet rescuers who are committed to the project. Each have passed criminal back ground checks, and have met stringent criteria

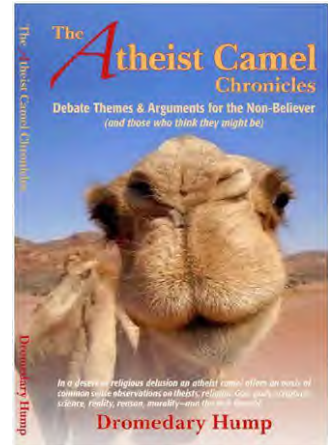
including blaspheming in writing against the Holy Spirit (the only “unforgivable sin” according to the New Testament; see Mark 3:29). This guarantees that should the Rapture actually happen their cadre of pet rescuers aren’t going anywhere.

“We are very upfront. Our website clearly states we have no belief in gods or Rapture doctrine,” Centre said, “But we are not absolutists. In the 100 billion to 1 chance we are wrong and they are right we are prepared to fulfill our contractual obligations.”

While most of the 100 plus clients they have signed to date come from south-Midwestern and Southern states, they have two clients from Minnesota thus far.

The idea for the business was serendipitous. It came from a chapter in Centre’s book *The Atheist Camel*

Chronicles: Debate Themes and Arguments for the Non-Believer, a best-selling atheist book on Amazon.com; and Brad discovering a joke UK



website on Rapture pet rescues. The rest is history.

For more information, visit their site: eternal-earthbound-pets.com/.

Minnesota Atheists Name Badge Order Form

Get your own engraved name badge

only \$10.00 with pin or clip fastener
(add \$2.00 for magnetic fastener)



To Order

1. Fill out form at right
2. Submit with your payment to any board member
3. Make checks payable to Minnesota Atheists

Name (20 character maximum per line)

Fastener Type: Pin Clip Magnetic (\$2.00 extra)

Amount Paid: \$ _____ Cash Check

(The badge shown above is just a sample; yours needn’t say “George Francis Kane” unless you specifically request that it does. –ed.)

Inclusive Celebration?

Minnesota Atheists' Treasurer Andy Flamm wrote the following letter to the St. Paul Pioneer Press, which was published in their December 23rd edition. —ed.

I was shocked at "The Christmas season" (Dec. 17). Among the letter writer's outrageous assertions is that we are in the midst of the "Christmas" season, not the "holiday" season. Last I knew,

there were several other holidays this time of year, including New Year's, Hanukkah, Winter Solstice and, yes, Kwanzaa. Who is the writer to claim that only those who share her faith have a right to celebrate the season? As for businesses that accommodate those of all beliefs in marketing their goods and services, I salute them. They are being inclusive without hurting anyone. The writer is welcome to restrict her glad tidings to those in her identity group, but how dare she suggest that others

must be excluded?

Finally, her suggestion is ridiculous that nativity scenes on public property and prayer in public schools were banned because of "one or two people" and "an atheist" being offended. Those unfortunate efforts to force the majority religion on our entire society were banned because they violated the great Constitution of the United States, and such bans are strongly supported by a majority of Americans, religious or not.

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 switching from paper to electronic, please contact editor@mnaatheists.org.

November / December Treasurer's Report

Visibility Fund

John McCallum	\$ 10
Thomas Stavros	\$ 10
James Buchanan	\$ 40
Charles Cummings	\$ 15
Laverne Schleicher	\$200
(in memory of Gordon Schleicher)	
Erik Engelbretson	\$125
TOTAL	\$400

Building Fund

Vernon Young	\$300
Erik Engelbretson	\$125
Daniel Norte	\$107.16
James Whitney	\$ 75
Paul Heffron	\$ 50
(for Crystal and Vic's wedding)	
Mike Haubrich	\$105.76
Leonard Sojka	\$ 10
Jeffrey Wolfe	\$100
Robert McGeachie	\$ 55
TOTAL	\$927.92

November and December Cable Report

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: Ch. 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.

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

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

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Channel 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.



August Berkshire, right,, interviews George Kane regarding Justice Sotomayor.

by Steve Petersen

In November, August Berkshire interviewed George Kane on Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the recently selected member of the U.S. Supreme Court. This was a review of her known positions from past writings and cases. December featured a discussion between Greg Laden, Stephanie Zvan and Mike Haubrich, contributors to the blog quichemoraine.com. They discussed social networking communications systems on the web.



L to R: Greg Laden, Stephanie Zvan, and Mike Haubrich discuss the worldwide web..

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.

Cryptogram Answer

If God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist.

-Mikhail Bakunin, *God and State*

A Message of Thanks from The Bridge for Youth

Thank you so much for choosing The Bridge to be the recipients of the items gathered at winter solstice donation drive, which we received on December 20, 2009.

Your generosity will make an immediate difference in the lives of the runaway and homeless children at The Bridge for Youth this winter.

The winter is a hard time for kids at The Bridge, but because of your support they're also full of hope –

by Chelsea Miller

hope for reuniting with their families, hope for never having to spend another night on the street, hope for a better future.

So thank you for doing your part to bring shelter, safety and hope to hundreds of youth and families at The Bridge this winter. Like last year I really enjoyed the dinner, the com-

pany and the program! Thank you for inviting me to be your guest. Please share our gratitude with The Humanists of Minnesota and the Minnesota Atheists.

The Bridge for Youth is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization, to which contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law; no goods or services were provided in exchange for this donation.

Congressman wants Christmas "Protected"

by Vic Tanner

On 08 December 2009, Representative Henry Brown (R-SC) introduced H Rev. 951, a resolution to protect the "symbols and traditions of Christmas". The text of the resolution is as follows:

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the symbols and traditions of Christmas should be protected for use by those who celebrate Christmas.

Whereas Christmas is a national holiday celebrated on December 25; and

Whereas the Framers intended that the First Amendment of the Constitution, in prohibiting the establishment of religion, would not prohibit any mention of religion or reference to God in civic dialog:

Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives--

- (1) recognizes the importance of the symbols and traditions of Christmas;
- (2) strongly disapproves of attempts to ban references to Christmas; and
- (3) expresses support for the use of these symbols and traditions by those who celebrate Christmas.

The resolution is co-sponsored by 74 other Representatives, including Minnesota's Michele Bachmann. It has been referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. No further action has been taken.



Representative Henry Brown

Northwestern College (continued)

(Continued from page 10)

appear as a revered political/religious leader. After seven years of the Antichrist's shenanigans, Jesus will defeat the Antichrist as well as Satan then proceed to raise the righteous from the dead and reign over an

earthly kingdom (established in Israel, of course) for 1000 years. When the 1000 years—or "millennial age"—are up Satan will come back once more with demons from the four corners of the earth (the earth is square?) to battle God

only to be permanently defeated and tossed into an eternal lake of fire, along with all nonbelievers. Sure it's weird, maybe even crazy, but it can't be denied: the faculty at NWC offer one hell of an education.

Minnesota Atheists

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

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All memberships include the newsletter. To pay by credit card or PayPal, please visit our website.

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

Name: _____ Phone (____) _____

Address: _____

>>Minnesota Atheists has IRS 501(c)(3) status. All contributions are tax-deductible. <<

Things to do, places to go: A Calendar for Atheists

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. **Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous**, 3249 Hennepin Ave. 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.

5th Sunday, **Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund**. Price: \$7.00. (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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"The new atheists are not trying to take away the comfort of faith. We are trying to show that life is much more comfortable without it."

- Victor Stenger, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*, p. 17

**“Check out our website at
mnatheist.org.”**