

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists Established 1991 Positive Atheism in Action SM

Volume 20 Number 3

March 2010

March Meeting

Beyond Errancy: How to Use Bible Contradictions to Refute Christianity

When you discuss religion with Christians, do you just end up talking past each other? Most of us have had such encounters, where our arguments from science and reason are rebutted by biblical myths. We walk away from these discussions dismayed by our adversary's shortcomings in reason, while they leave shaking their heads at our ignorance of the Word of God.

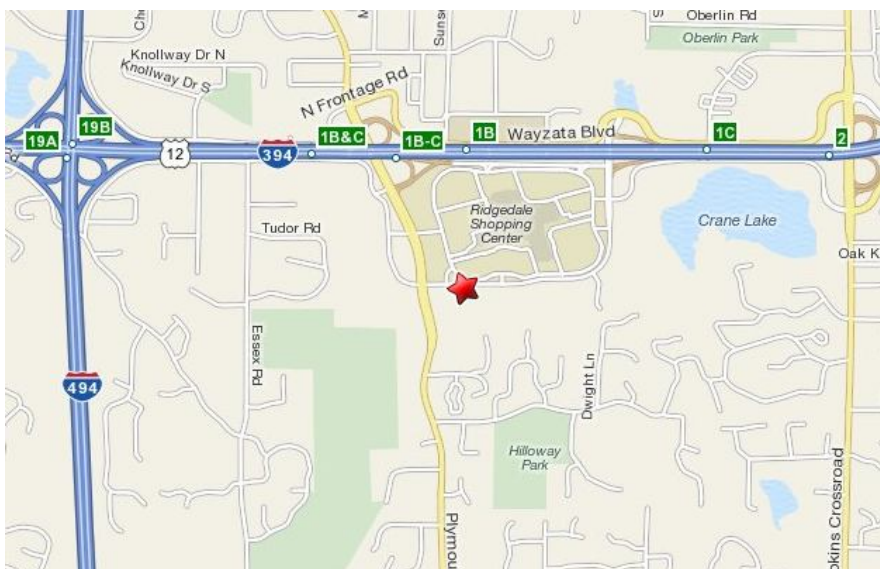
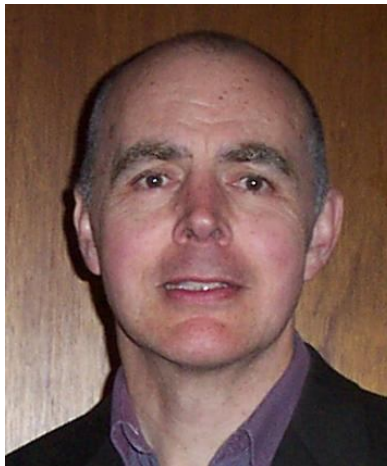
To overcome this impasse we must refute the Bible's authority, and that can only be done by showing that, on its face, it is often demonstrably wrong. We can use contradictions and other Bible "difficulties" to do more than just prove the Bible is fallible. At our upcoming meeting, by means of numerous examples from the New and Old Testaments, Mike Davis will demonstrate that the Bible's imperfections are sufficient in themselves to justify a rejection of Christianity and its doctrine of Jesus Christ as the savior of mankind.

"If you are familiar with these biblical flaws," Davis

tells us, "you can easily prevail in any debate with the typical Christian fundamentalist. But chances are if you are an atheist, agnostic, skeptic or doubter, you don't have either the time or inclination to delve deeply into the Bible on your own to uncover the logical and historical flaws it contains." In this presentation, Mike Davis will tell us where to look.

Mike Davis, who lives in Roseville, is the author of *The Atheist's Introduction to the New Testament: How the Bible Undermines the Basic Teachings of Christianity* (2008) and *The Atheist's Bible Companion to the New Testament: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Bible Contradictions* (2009). He was a recent guest on our "Atheist

Talk" cable program, and runs the website bibleblunders.com.



When?

Sunday, March 21, 2009
1:00-1:15 p.m. - Social Time
1:15-1:45 p.m. - Business Meeting,
1:45-2:00 p.m. - Social Time
2:00-3:30 p.m. - Speaker's presentation and Q&A
4:00 p.m. - Dinner at Wanderer's Garden Chinese Buffet Restaurant

Where?

Ridgedale Public Library
12601 Ridgedale Drive
Minnetonka, 55305

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MNA Meetup members: 660
Life memberships: 31

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

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.

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Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnaatheists.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 August Berkshire

Building Fund:
\$122,364.76

I'd like to begin where our previous president, Jeannette Watland, left off last month,

by highlighting three more women who have made extraordinary contributions to Minnesota Atheists. I join Jeannette in encouraging more women to step forward as atheist leaders.

The first woman I'd like to mention is **Marilyn Niekerk**. In 1982, with her husband, Bob, she co-founded the Friends Free of Theism, an atheist social group that existed for about ten years. Their interest in promoting atheist social events continues to this day, as they sponsor two dinners a month at Davanni's and a lunch at Old Country Buffet. Long before there was Meetup.com there were Marilyn and Bob Nienkerk.

There are few people who have worked as long and hard for Minnesota Atheists as **Shirley Moll** has. In 1984, she co-founded the Twin Cities Chapter of American Atheists and, as secretary for the next seven years, helped to maintain our mailing list and print and mail the newsletter. She received the American Atheists national 1985 Chapter Worker of the Year Award.

When we became Minnesota Atheists in 1991, Shirley continued helping to maintain our mailing list and mail the newsletter and also catalogued our extensive library. She has also acted as secretary, treasurer, and as a part of the cable TV crew. For 25 years now, if there was a booth to staff, a parade to march in, or a major Minnesota Atheists event that needed volunteers,

Shirley was – and is – always there to lend a hand.

In 2002, Minnesota Atheists made a conscious decision to turn from ridiculing, negative atheism to positive, friendly atheism. There was no one more important in leading this change than **Sue O'Donnell**. As editor of our newsletter for three years, Sue not only changed the tone of our organization but introduced professional standards of journalism. Sue also served as Chair of Minnesota Atheists and for many years was a leading organizer of the Freethought Follies.

These women have set high standards for all of us and we are grateful for the contributions they have made.

As a new Minnesota Atheists board takes office, I'd like to thank all those who served on the board last year: **Bjorn Watland, Jeannette Watland, Grant Steves, Jack Caravela, George Kane, Andy Flamm, Mike Haubrich, Cathy Prody, Crystal Dervetski, and Vic Tanner**. As our webmaster, Bjorn took us a quantum leap forward on the internet and in social networking. This was best exemplified by a picnic last summer at Como Park that drew well over 100 people.

Our new board consists of a mix of veteran members, **George Kane, Steve Petersen, and me**, and newcomers **Laura Hutt, Rick Rohrer, Brian Knoblock, Mike Haubrich, Karen Burke, and Cody Peterson** (who will also be our new webmaster) – though several members of this latter group have been part of our freethought community for awhile.

I'd also like to thank our newsletter editor, **James Zimmerman**, and our

chief photographer, **Richard Trombley**, for their continued excellent work.

On March 6, the new Minnesota Atheists board and other leaders will be meeting for an **Atheist Advance** (we do not “retreat”) to discuss goals and strategies for the coming year. We will be strengthening our committee structure to make it easier for people to volunteer. Stay tuned for your opportunity to help us grow!



CORRECTION:

The Freethought Follies photos featured in last month's newsletter are the work of Richard Trombley.

February Meeting Review

by George Kane

Our February Meeting opened with the election of officers for the 2010 year. All of the candidates were unopposed, and were elected by voice acclamation: President, August Berkshire; Associate President, Laura Hutt; Chair, George Kane; Associate Chair, Steve Petersen; Treasurer, Brian Knoblock; Secretary, Rick Rohrer; Directors-at-large Karen Burke, Mike Haubrich and Cody Peterson.

The Educational Presentation, provided by members of the First Amendment Watchdog Committee, was on how to be an activist. This group was formed as a committee reporting jointly to the boards of directors of both Minnesota Atheists and the Humanists of Minnesota. Because it was the intention of the group to actively lobby legislators, they dissociated themselves from their parent groups so that their activities would not endanger the 501(c)3 tax exemptions held by those organizations. The group is considering renaming itself, perhaps to 'Church State Separation Watchdogs,' since most clauses of the First Amendment do not fall under the committee's area of concern.



The group does not intend to duplicate the function of national groups such as the Freedom from Religion Foundation or Americans United for Separation of Church and State, although they may pass some cases up to those groups for litigation. Rather, the purpose of the Watchdog Committee is to identify local violations of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, and to get the word out to activists in the state. They hope to

Photo credits: Steve Petersen and Matthew Richardson.



complement rather than duplicate the other organizations that support strict application of the Establishment Clause.

The longest segment of the presentation was a review by August Berkshire of current laws and governing court decisions. Marco Scavo, the committee Chair, spoke of their new web site, MNWatchdogs.org, where anyone can join or sign up for e-mail alerts. George Kane provided guidelines for writing effective letters to legislators.

A handout was distributed of two very different letters, one by George and one by Steve Petersen, each asking Governor Pawlenty not to participate in Minnesota Day of Prayer events. George and Steve urged everyone to write and send their own. While it is good to draw on a variety of sources for ideas and information, writers should only send original letters. There is disagreement, however, on whether hard copy letters are more effective than e-mail.

Bob Schmitz, the original Chair of the First Amendment Watchdog Committee, spoke about the lack of structural safeguards for charter schools against entanglement of church and state. The promotion of Islam by



the Arabic language immersion TiZA school is by now well known, but there are other suspect chartered schools receiving state funding, particularly former parochial schools that meet in classrooms on church property.

The presentation ended with a panel discussion, which gave the audience the opportunity to ask questions of all the presenters.

ATHEISTS JOIN SECULAR COALITION FOR AMERICA FOR MEETING WITH THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

The following is a portion of a mass email sent out Thursday, February 25 by Larry Munding of American Atheists. —ed.

American Atheists will be among the non-believer groups led by the Secular Coalition for America for an historic briefing with the Obama Administration in Washington, DC, on Friday, 26 February 2010 CE.

Representatives of several leading Atheist, Free-thought, and Humanist organizations will gather in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, next door to the White House, at 11:00 AM ET, for the briefing.

Dr. Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, said "We are delighted that we will get the chance to speak to and to hear from the Obama administration at the briefing with the Secular Coalition for America tomorrow. We will not be seeking support for Atheism from the federal administration, because we know they must be neutral and because we are

confident that our conclusions can compete and win in the marketplace of ideas, unaided by government. We seek an end to special rights for religious ideas and beliefs--in all regulations, laws, procedures, and pronouncements. The privileging of religiosity violates the First Amendment and good sense."

The American Atheists delegation will include Dr. Buckner; AA Vice President and National Spokesperson Dave Silverman; Vice President and Military Director Kathleen Johnson; Indra Zuno, AA general member, translator, and writer; Ellen Birch, Chair of the American Atheists Life Membership Committee and systems engineer; and Camille A. Brewer, AA general member, political/freethought activist and art expert.

"We will be represented by a wonderful cross-section of our membership," Said Dr. Buckner.

The following is a portion of a mass email sent out Thursday, February 26 by Blair Scott of American Atheists. —ed.

Led by the Secular Coalition for America, representatives from leading Atheist, Freethought, Humanist and other non-believer organizations met earlier today with White House officials in an historic gathering.

Dr. Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, praised the Obama Administration for "giving us our rightful seat at the table in the discussion over public policy."

Vice President and Military Director Kathleen Johnson told White House representatives: "I have witnessed firsthand how service members who are openly non-theist have been harassed by their commanders, leaders, and peers, and have been disrespected by their subordinates for failing to hold certain religious beliefs." [...]

Johnson called for the Obama Administration to "demonstrate its commitment to improving the cli-

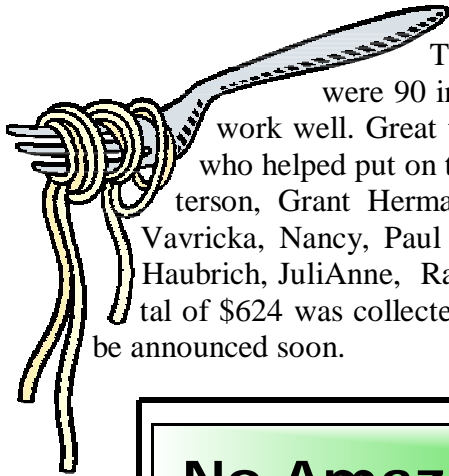
mate for non-theists by ensuring nominees to key senior leadership positions answer hard questions intended to identify if they hold views detrimental to non-theists and if so, that such views be considered a disqualification for that officer."

Johnson also called for those holding non-theist convictions to enjoy the status of "a protected class throughout the Armed Services on par with the protections afforded to women, minorities, and those belonging to minority faith groups."

AMERICAN ATHEISTS is a nationwide movement that defends civil rights for Atheists; works for the total separation of church and state; and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.

Fifth Sunday Spaghetti Dinner

by Steve Petersen



The 5th Sunday Spaghetti dinner was a community family event. There were 90 in attendance including 14 children. The two different sittings seemed to work well. Great thanks to George Kane who hosted the event and prepared food. Those who helped put on the event, contributed food or others items include: Ron Julien, Cody Peterson, Grant Hermanson, Tom Riddering, Karen Burke, Martha, Andrea Clouteir, Tom Vavricka, Nancy, Paul Cocoanto, Wanda, Linda Brown, Steve Petersen, Shirley Moll, Mike Haubrich, JuliAnne, Rachel Wilson, August Berkshire, Andy Flamm, and Jack Caravela. A total of \$624 was collected. Mark your calendars for Sunday May 30. Exact location and time to be announced soon.

No Amazing Grace in *the Amazing Race*

by James Zimmerman

During the February 28th episode of the CBS reality show *the Amazing Race*, contestants Monique and Shawne (billed as “Moms/Attorneys”) attempted to curry favor with the prime deity of the New Testament. During the leg’s Roadblock, teams were required to lasso a target 18 feet away and pull it towards them to receive their next clue. Though Monique and Shawne arrived at the Roadblock prior to several teams, they were still trying, without success, to lasso the target after all other teams had come and gone. The women agreed to petition the Christian version of Mithra in an attempt to complete the task. Soon after their audible prayers, they were able to complete the task and continued on to the pit stop. It was unclear if their success was due to Jesus’ intervening assistance,

the team’s increasing proficiency (gained from so many prior failures), or simply random chance. The team, however, attributed their sudden success to the Christ, as was evident by their passionate thanks to him once they got in their car and sped onto the pit-stop.

Nevertheless, this demonstrates the need to be specific when praying to divine beings. Presumably, the team desired to complete the task so that they could continue on to the next leg of the race. However, their prayers only indicated a wish to complete the immediate task and, though they did accomplish that, they checked in at the pit-stop last and were therefore eliminated from the race.

Neither CBS nor the show’s producers commented on the legality of requesting help from supernatural beings. Jesus could not be reached for comment.

In iPad We Trust

[F]or some people, myself included, technology has become a kind of religion. We may not believe in God anymore, but we still need mystery and wonder. We need the magic act. Five centuries ago Spanish missionaries put shiny mirrors in churches to dazzle the Incas and draw them to Christianity. We, too, want to be dazzled by shiny new objects. Our iPhones not only play music and make phone calls, but they have become totemic objects, imbued with techno-voodoo. Maybe that sounds nuts, but before the iPad was announced, people were calling it the ‘Jesus tablet.’

– Daniel Lyons, “In iPad We Trust,” *Newsweek*, February 8, 2010

Mountains of Money Out There

There is simply no reason why we of Minnesota Atheists should be struggling to get members to tithe or donate mere dollars when, if we used our brains (which atheists, as a community, have plenty of) we could get hundreds of thousands of dollars from rich atheists. We've never tried this in the past, so let's give it a shot now!

We never had a committee on Grant Writing. There are 15 books on grant-writing that can be borrowed from the Hennepin Public Library system. We could organize our own classes on grant writing, before paying for grant-writing classes at Normandale Community College.

What could we get if we made the intellectual effort? I envision a two-story building: 15 rooms plus large meeting hall to hold 500 people, swimming pool, dining hall, a restaurant/bar combo, and a trust fund to pay for insurance and utilities for the next 50 years. The number of rooms I suggest will be to rent out to people who are also working toward separation and humanistic goals.

People with billions look more favorably at requests for big proposals than little stuff. In our grant proposal, we can already show a growing membership from the past two years--thanks, largely, to our Meet-up program. We should start by asking our realtor volunteers to look for this size building and get a price for it. We inspect it and make sure it has about what I envision and we go for it!

The New York Times recently reported that George Soros, for example, “. . . was awarded the confiscated IndyMac bank (renamed OneWest) with \$32 Billion in assets, Soros & friends paid \$2 Billion, along with a sweet deal for the FDIC to pay off the bad debt. . .” (nytimes.com/2010/01/28/business/28aig.html?ref=us).

In our grant writing, we will have to describe what can be done with our grant. With our new

board, I've been encouraged by members who are envisioning a building in which we can finally grow even more.

by **Matthew Richardson**

Our grant proposal will start out with an overall description of why Minnesota Atheists exists, what we accomplished in our 18 years of existence, what we envision for the future, and how a building will help us get there. We then describe in greater detail why we need the kind of building suggested above. We would give a description of the crowds we could attract if we had an auditorium seating 500 people and how many speakers we expect to use that auditorium on an annual basis. Since there is no educational organization called “The First Amendment Learning Center,” that's what I propose for our building.

I've been following all of the meetings that Jack Caravela has been setting up. I pay attention to the limits of people who may attend because of the small venue available for particular events. We are an educational institution and there should be no limits. There is no reason why we can't have our own kitchen to make attractive meals prepared by our own paid professional chef, and charge about the same as the restaurants we go to. I, for one, am discouraged by the high prices of restaurants and the idea that I'm supporting religious proprietors. We must be financially self-sustaining.

Warren Buffet would love to hear from us. The fact that we have a recent history of raising tens of thousands of dollars before the convening of the last board, will tell Mr. Buffet that we are a solid, enthusiastic and growing organization, and now we would like for him to help us.

In July 2006, Elaine Friedman wrote “Buffett has stated that he agrees with Carnegie's belief that ‘huge fortunes that flow in large part from society should in large part be returned to society’” (HumanistNetworkNews.org).

(Matthew Richardson is a past Director of Minnesota Atheists. -ed.)



What is in a Name?

by Bjorn Watland

Atheist, humanist, secular humanist, Bright, freethinker, secularist, naturalist: these are all words I've heard people use to describe themselves. I recall the diversity of identifiers used at the Atheist Coming Out Day last year. I was reminded of this diversity when an issue came up with the newsletter for a secular organization: Should "humanism" be capitalized?

I began doing some research to see what was used by some humanist organizations, particularly the International Humanist and Ethical Union and the American Humanist Association. The IHEU uses 'Humanism' and encourages member organizations to do so. The AHA also encourages the use of 'Humanism' versus 'humanism.' One of the reasons given is that Pope Paul VI referred to himself as a humanist.

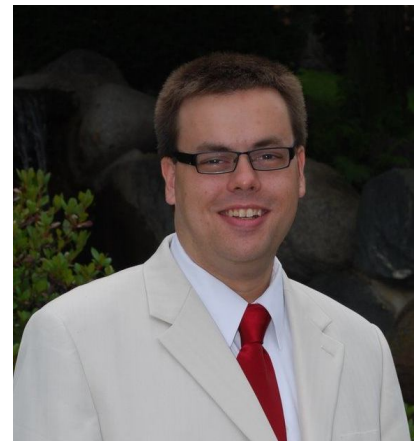
The consensus among the people who were working on the newsletter was that atheist should be lowercase and many also thought that humanism should be treated in the same way. One of the reasons given to treat humanism in the same way as atheism was that neither are religions and religions are capitalized. However, there is a feeling that capitalizing a word adds to its respect, as determined by the author. Certain authors do not feel that religions deserve any respect over atheism or humanism, leading to

the conclusion that religions should be spelled in all lowercase, such as islam and christianity.

The core issue is the challenge we all face. We lack branding and a unified label. While researching the humanism issue, I ran across articles touting the efforts of humanist organizations to simplify the use of humanism by removing labels like "secular" from the front and expanding the use of the "Happy Humanist" logo. This logo lets humanists from all over the world recognize each other and other organizations.

Atheists have attempted to do the same thing by choosing a logo at an Atheist Alliance International conference and rallying around the red "A" of the Out Campaign from the Richard Dawkins Foundation. However, atheist groups aren't as unified as humanist groups are with branding.

The diversity of labels in our community is a strength, but also an unavoidable weakness. I have met members of Minnesota Atheists who are frustrated with others who don't use the label "atheist" and have tried to encourage others to push aside words like 'agnostic,' 'non religious,' 'Bright' - even 'humanist' - in favor of the label 'atheist.' This has encouraged some to adopt the label of 'atheist,' but has also made others feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. By browbeating others into calling themselves what we would like to be called in an attempt to unify the cause we may



be alienating others who would be just as enthusiastic about supporting the separation of church and state and raising awareness in the community of our issues.

I used to be enthusiastic about encouraging people to use the word atheist to describe their worldview. I used to get really irritated when someone would be uncomfortable with the word atheist and I would want to do what I could to rid them of this fear. What I realized is that personal labels, no matter what they are, are something each of us needs to come to by ourselves and not be pushed into. We should not be shamed into choosing one label over another, whether that is atheist, humanist, secular, non religious, Bright, or any other future iteration of identification we will invent to describe what we think.

“Science itself — 99 percent of it is B.S.”

- Tom Barnard, on the KQRS Morning Show, Feb. 11, 2010.





Adam, Eve, AND Steve

by **Herb Silverman**

(The following is an excerpt from an article that appeared in the 10 February 2010 edition of the Washington Post. Herb Silverman serves as President of the Secular Coalition for America. The complete article can be viewed at washingtonpost.com/onfaith. —ed.)

Religious fundamentalists often justify their homophobia with the sound bite, "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." The Middle East writers of this Adam and Eve fable quite understandably placed the happy first couple in a paradise located in a land they knew. Today we have incontrovertible evidence that the first humans emerged from Africa, not the Middle East, and we

have a common ancestor that makes all our citizens African Americans. Had we known this in the 1940's, perhaps there would have been less opposition to black African Americans serving in the military alongside white African Americans. Then again, scientific evidence is rarely sufficient to sway racists or religious fundamentalists.

If evidence matters, we should look at other militaries. In more than 30 countries, including allies like Canada, Israel, and the United Kingdom, gay Steves and Samanthas serve openly and effectively alongside straight Adams and Eves. The question for me is not whether "Don't ask, don't tell" should be repealed, but why it's taking so long. If the United States can't be a leader in civil rights, it should at least not follow so far behind.

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@mnatheists.org.

Freethought Cryptogram

by **George Kane**

Gwmem oya vm ai uifvg, vmgzmma jypgw yau
 kdmsgpopkb, zwpow pk gwm biem emrpyvrm giir
 jie upkomeapac gwm gefgw ij y byggme.

(Answer on page 13.)

Waiting for Armageddon: Review and Panel Discussion

by James Zimmerman

REVIEW:

Waiting for Armageddon details the lives of several Americans who live in expectation of a rapture. And, as the film stresses, these evangelical Christians expect the End to arrive very, very soon—one young girl was nearly in tears as contemplated the future she was never going to have. Later, a mother pointed to her son, saying he would never grow old enough to graduate high school, or even to get a driver's license.

Much of the film is taken up with footage of Christians making a pilgrimage to Israel, primarily to see the sights where Jesus will soon initiate World War III, but also taking time to be baptized in the River Jordan. In between, we are treated to an interview with an ex-atheist confidently asserting he has now given his life to Jesus (or, rather, his wife makes this argument), a pastor explaining wistfully his desire that a missile 'accidentally' knock out the Dome of the Rock (another pastor had edited a photo of the Jerusalem skyline by removing the Dome and replacing it with a Judaic temple), and scenes of President Bush affirming his Christian faith.

Despite the fascinating, timely subject matter, the film's creators had little to say. It's a dry film, and viewers are not presented with results, conclusions, or even ideas for what to do with the information presented. Most Americans, from the most conservative fundamentalist, to the anti-theist, will leave the theater thinking "Interesting..but now what?" This is a missed opportunity at best. Though there is something to be said for filmmakers that limit their opinions, the film would've been greatly enhanced had it presented the dangers inherent in holding an apocalyptic world-view, and what concerned citizens can do about the matter. After all, as the film noted, some 10 million Americans believe we are living in the 'Last Days' (and, judging from the film's poster, above, that includes at least one German Shepherd).

Bottom line: B



PANEL DISCUSSION:

On Saturday, February 20th, I was invited to participate in a panel discussion following a showing of the film at St. Anthony Main Theater. There were four people on the panel: one woman (a representative of Minnesota Film Arts who served as moderator), me, and two other men - both pastors at local churches. One was the pastor at an evangelical church; the other at Grace Lutheran Church in Apple Valley.

The discussion was lively. The moderator asked questions mostly concerning our impressions of the film. She inquired as to the history of apocalyptic cults in America (the evangelical pastor was quite well-versed in this area), and asked what sort of dangers this mentality may pose for society at large. She then took questions from the audience. I learned

that, contrary to what I imagined, most people in the audience were not non-religious, the majority were Christians who came to find out about even wackier versions of their faith.

At one point, the moderator asked: "How do you feel that having the world-view that Armageddon is coming influences a person's life?"

The two pastors, though careful to label the apocalyptic Christians as 'extremists,' nevertheless answered that such a view can bring a person closer to Jesus, and that it helps give a person focus. I added that such an outlook fundamentally alters every normal action persons would otherwise have. This was immediately argued by an audience member who countered that many of his relatives believe in an imminent rapture, and he doesn't feel that they are traumatized. I then spoke for about five minutes

(Continued on page 12)

Waiting for Armageddon, Eureka Film Productions, directed by Kate Davis and David Heilbroner. ©2009, 74 minutes

Book Review: *The Heathen's Guide to World Religions*



by James Zimmerman

William Hopper's *The Heathen's Guide* presents a light-hearted, at times comical, overview of the world's religions. It's a short book, and thus doesn't capture every detail about every little sect or cult in existence, but it spends a chapter on each of the biggies. The book is laid-out in a logical order: the chapter on Judaism leads to a chapter on Christianity leads to a chapter on Islam. The overlapping religions of Buddhism and Hinduism are side-by-side, too. In each chapter, Hopper gives the historical roots of each religion, details the changes the religions experienced through the centuries, and offers tidbits on their current statuses. Hopper is insightful enough to know what will most interest his readers. In the chapter on Judaism, for instance, he devotes a couple of pages to the Kabbalah, and in the chapter on Islam, he explains how bin-Laden arrived at his extremist views. He also offers information on various religious offshoots – such as his subheading on Mormonism.

Unfortunately, though, the book is filled with errors. And I don't mean spelling or punctuation errors (though there are plenty of those, too). No, I am referring to factual errors. True,

The Heathen's Guide to World Religions, by William Hopper. ©2006, Eris Publications, 230 pages

Hopper is attempting to write a humorous book here, but he's also trying to give his readers' an accurate overview of world religions. Errors include:

-The bible claims that the Patriarch Abraham lived to be 200 years old.

(No, it doesn't.)

-God sent Jonah to Israel to warn them 'about being bad,' then later climbs a mystical ladder. (Jonah was sent to preach to the inhabitants of Ninevah, in Assyria. And it was Jacob, not Jonah, who climbed a ladder.)

-Alexander the Great's territory was divided among his children when he died. (Alexander only had one young son at the time of his death; his territory was divided among his generals.)

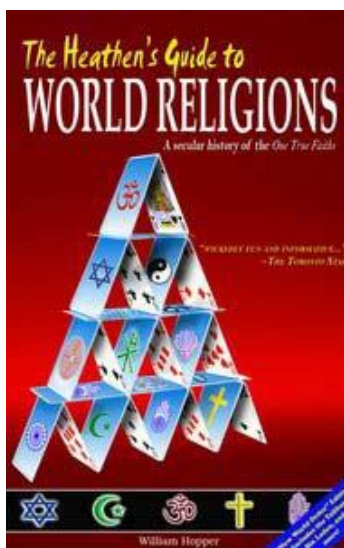
-Bilbo met up with and manipulated Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*. (Actually, this occurred in *The Hobbit*.)

-The Jewish temple was destroyed in 607 BC. (It was destroyed some twenty years later than that date. 607 is used by various fundamentalist groups in an effort to retro-fit bible prophecies into real-world events.)

-Jehovah's Witnesses believe in a concept called the 'rapture.' (No, they don't. In fact, the majority of Witnesses do not believe they will ever go to heaven regardless of how devoutly they proselytize. Also, Hopper claims their proselytizing is based on a prophesy in Revelation, but the scripture he cites is from Matthew.)

-Dr. Radhakrishnan was President of India in the early part of this century. (Radhakrishnan served as India's President in the 1960s. He died before this century even began.)

I cite these, not to poke fun at the



book, but to question its validity in other matters: if I caught this many factual errors, how many did I not catch? I am not very well-versed in the history of Islam or in the tenets of Hinduism, but I am not confident that what I read about those religions in

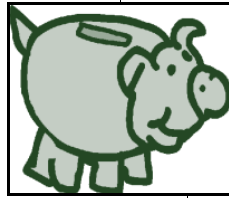
Hopper's book is at all accurate. Indeed, Hopper almost seems to encourage this feeling. More than once, he admits that what he's discussing is boring. On one page, he claims he's too lazy to get up and do the proper research. And the book's bibliography begins with a definition of 'bibliography': "A list of books intended to illustrate that the author has read enough of other people's thoughts to think his own."

Hopper is not afraid to lambaste religion and religious holy books at every turn. This is frequently funny, even refreshing. But here, again, Hopper often fails to use convincing arguments. For example, when providing reasons against Moses' authorship of the Torah, Hopper cites the two weakest arguments: It's written in second-person (Hopper even admits this is not very convincing),

(Continued on page 14)

February Treasurer's Report

by **Brian Knoblock**



* Building Fund *

Jack Caravela	\$470.59
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Mike Haubrich	\$164.22
Daniel Norte	\$35.72
James Whitney	\$25.00

* Visibility Fund *

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Lagretta Dean	\$500.00
Robert Wilson	\$25.00
Morgan Christian	\$10.00
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Waiting for Armageddon (continued)

(Continued from page 10)

about how traumatizing it is, culling mostly from my own life, but also referencing the film and pointing out that if I was to convince the audience that the end was coming exactly ten years from now... wouldn't it greatly influence how everyone lived out those ten years? I also noted that most of the trauma isn't consciously observed by the cult member until they have excused themselves from that belief.

Another question tried to uncover reasons why the general public should care if their fellow Americans have this worldview. The two pastors agreed there were dan-

gers involved in having such a view of Jesus' coming. I added that one reason we should all care is because, as the film noted, such people vote. "Think about it," I said, "do you really want someone going to the polls and thinking there is no need to be concerned with candidates' stands on environment, education, or foreign policy because, after all, Armageddon is coming within the year?"

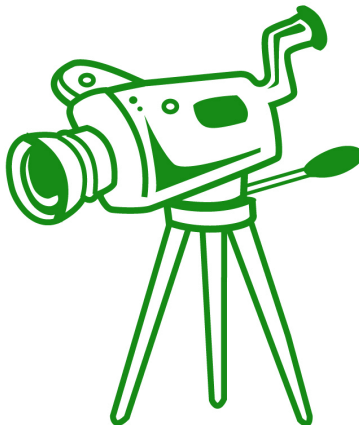
Following the discussion, several audience members approached us saying they enjoyed hearing the differing viewpoints. One Christian even handed me a free copy of a book he and his wife had written.

February Cable Report

by *Steve Petersen*

This past month Mike Haubrich interviewed Stephanie Zvan and Greg Laden, contributors of the website quichemoraine.com on Intelligence and Race. Stephanie and Greg reviewed and debunked the myth of connecting intelligence with race. They reviewed several classic cases of scientists with a predetermined prejudice who constructed studies to arrive at their conclusion about a variety of races to be either of inferior or superior intelligence.

Cable Crew: George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, Mike Haubrich and Karen Burke,.



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

Minneapolis: Ch. 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: Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

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

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



Host Mike Haubrich, right, interviews Greg Laden and Stephanie Zvan..

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

Cable Schedule

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

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

Taxes from Hell

by Eric Jayne



Last month Joseph Stack flew his single-engine airplane into the side of an IRS office building in Austin, Texas. The attack killed Stack, one other man, and injured 12 others. The flurry of complaints and unhinged anger in Stack's suicide note made it difficult to read but it was clear that he had a major grudge against American tax policies and the IRS. Like Stack, most of us don't enjoy paying taxes (even though we enjoy the services their revenue provides) but before you take a page out of his nefarious play-book on how to stick it to the man maybe you should consider going to Hell instead.

Let me explain. Hell is a delightful place surrounded by beautiful lakes (of water, not fire) where about 300 people live. To get there from the Twin Cities you can hop in your car and head east on I-94 for about 650 miles. If you end up in Detroit you know you've gone too far because the town of Hell, Michigan is about 60 miles west of the Motor City. While there's not a hell of a lot to

do in Hell there are a few devilishly unique activities and events including one that soothes the sting of filing your annual income tax return—as long as you don't mind submitting your tax return to the IRS the old fashioned way. The local post office, conveniently located in the general store, will postmark your envelope with the message "Taxes from Hell" for no extra charge. Pay no mind that the extent of your anti-tax protest will probably go no fur-



ther than the passing notice of some mailroom clerk at the IRS; what's important is that you will receive a bit of therapeutic satisfaction from your efforts.

After you're done sticking it to the man, reward yourself by taking in the charming local culture. Treat yourself to a delicious frozen treat at *Screams Ice Cream and Halloween* or rent a canoe and go fishing in one of the many nearby lakes (of water) near Hell. Cap the evening with cocktails and live music at the *Dam Site Inn* which sits in the middle of Hell's quaint downtown district. Before you take the highway out of Hell, be sure to get some souvenirs at the general store gift shop. One popular item sold there, for a fitting \$6.66, is a deed documenting ownership of one square inch of land in Hell, and you don't have to worry about reporting that real estate investment to the IRS.

Book Review (continued)

(Continued from page 11)

and Moses dies in the penultimate chapter.

The Heathen's Guide is a decent book and, at about 200 pages (excluding the endnotes, glossary, and index), it doesn't require a major

time investment. Still, I'm hoping a more accurate look at the comedy of errors that is religion appears on the shelves soon.

To find out more about the book, visit heathensguide.com

Bottom line: C

Cryptogram Answer

There can be no doubt, between faith and skepticism, which is the more reliable tool for discerning the truth of a matter.

Minnesota Atheists

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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 Avenue south, #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 2010).

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**. Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Ave., Columbia Heights. Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420.

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 television show 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. Contact George Kane, nup@Minn.net.

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 entire process of 'cultivating faith' is the process of suppressing your basic, intuitive, inborn understanding that the stuff your parents told you doesn't actually make a whole hell of a lot of sense.

-Ryan Sutter (posted on his website, ryansutter.net, February 25, 2010)

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