

The Minnesota Atheist

Science vs. Religion

How Faith Makes Us Wrong



If You Go...

When:

Sunday, May 16, 2010
1:00-1:15 - Social Time
1:15-1:45 - Business Meeting
1:45-2:00 - Social Time
2:00-3:30 - Myers' Presentation,
followed by Q & A
4:00 - Dinner at Q. Cumbers
restaurant

Where:

Southdale Public Library
7001 York Ave South
Edina, 55435

On Sunday, May 16th, Minnesota Atheists will host a presentation by Dr. P.Z. Myers. Myers is a biologist, associate professor at U of M Morris and webmaster of the popular site *Pharyngula*. His discussion will feature three examples - from physics, developmental biology, and neuroscience - where religion has clearly led people down the wrong path to incorrect answers, and where even now believers oppose many of the fact-based conclusions of science. He will be

arguing that, if you try to argue that both science and religion are ways of knowing, you have to be able to test at some point whether what you know is actually correct...and that's precisely where religion fails by not only lacking a mechanism for evaluating truth claims, but also in promoting faith claims that are active barriers to understanding.

Please join us!

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- Discover prayer's effect on abortion.....see page 15



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

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

Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

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

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Festivals!



August Berkshire

With the coming of warm weather, we kick off our most active period of outreach into the community.

We start with Minneapolis' **May Day Celebration** on **Sunday, May 2nd**. This is an event we have been doing for decades. It begins with a **parade at 1:00 p.m.**, starting at **Cedar Field** (16th Ave. S. & 25th St. E.) and marching one mile south on Bloomington Ave. to Powderhorn Park (15th Ave. S. & 34th St.). Simultaneously that afternoon there is a **festival in Powderhorn Park** at which we will have a booth.

Please come out and march or help staff the booth with us. It's really great to see so many people lining the streets cheering for atheists! Wear your Minnesota Atheists t-shirt or, if you don't have one yet, we'll give you one!

Later that week, on **Thursday, May 6th**, **noon-1 p.m.**, we host and celebrate a **Day of Reason** in the **Rotunda** inside the **Minnesota State Capitol**. We began this five years ago as a response to the Day of Prayer.

Both the Capitol grounds outside and the rotunda inside are available for all private groups to use. We don't deny the right of religious groups to stage a *private* Day of Prayer outside the Capitol, just as we have the right to stage a Day of Reason inside. What we *do* object to is *government endorsement* of the Day of Prayer via proclamation.

As the state's oldest, largest, and most active atheist group, Minnesota Atheists is pleased to invite all other freethought groups in Minnesota to send a representative to share the stage with us.

This year we once again plan to have a booth at the **Juneteenth Celebration**, held in north Minneapolis on **Saturday, June 19th**. As a bonus, we are hoping to have a special presentation later that week by one of our members that we will advertise at the event. African-Americans are greatly underrepresented in the organized atheist community (as are all racial minorities) and we wish to correct this.

The weekend of **June 26-27** kicks off the first of five Gay Pride celebrations (including two parades) that we do each year. The **Twin Cities Pride** celebration is the largest festival and source of new names we have each year, and we will be needing a lot of volunteers for this event. We follow this with Gay Pride celebrations in **Rochester, Duluth, Mankato, and La Crosse**. The issue of equal rights for GLBT

people is one of the most visible state-church separation issues in the country and we are proud to support it.

For many years at these parades and festivals, we carried fun, colorful, hand-drawn signs made by **Jerry Rauser**. However, last year we were pleased to carry some great new signs that were created and donated to us by **Dan Norte**. Special thanks to both of them for helping to make us visible! One of our most popular signs last year was "Hug An Atheist" and the most huggable atheist of all turned out to be our immediate past president **Jeannette Watland**.

Of course, we also have our regular meetings with speakers, which are open to the public. On **Sunday, May 16th**, we will feature science-atheist blogger *extraordinaire* and 2009 Humanist of the Year **PZ Myers**.

On **Monday, June 28th**, we will have a special meeting in the evening (probably at a public library) with **Sean Faircloth**, the new executive director of the **Secular Coalition for America**. We are pleased to co-sponsor this event with our colleagues, the Humanists of Minnesota.

Finally, as the lazy days of summer approach, we have some fun social activities for families. We will have a **5th Sunday "All-You-Can-Eat Flying Spaghetti Monster Fundraising Dinner"** on **May 30th at 4:30 p.m.** at **Roseville Central Park**. Thanks to **Steve Petersen** and **George Kane** for organizing this.

We will also have our series of annual summer **Potluck Picnics** in **Columbia Park** in northeast Minneapolis at **noon-3:00 p.m.** on **Sundays, June 13th, July 18th, and August 15th**, hosted by the Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH); the Humanists of Minnesota; and Minnesota Atheists respectively. Thanks to **Ron Julien** for setting these up.

These and many other events that we sponsor and participate in are advertised through our **Minnesota Atheists Meetup**. Sign up for free at meetup.com/minnesota-atheists. We hope to see you at one or more of our many upcoming events!

APRIL MEETING REVIEW

April Membership Meeting Provided No Exit From Existentialism

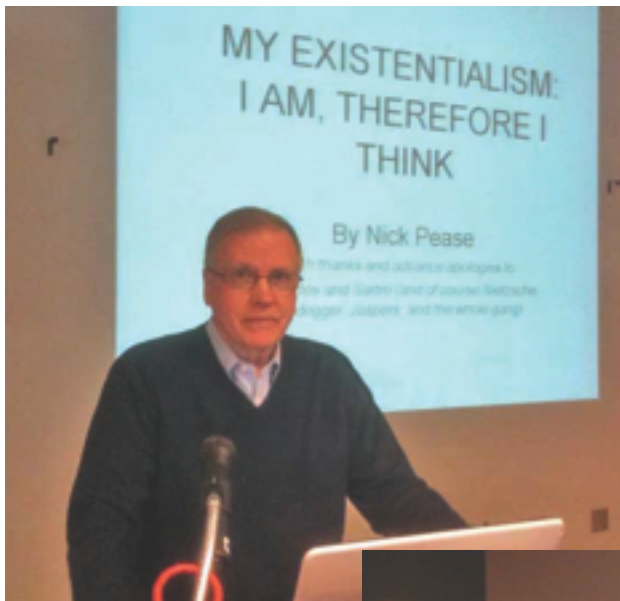
Dr. Nick Pease, adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota, presented a lecture on the moral philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre at our public meeting on April 18 at the Ridgedale Library. Dr. Pease explained that Sartre focused on the role of the individual in creating meaning and value in life

by George Kane

godless philosophy, several attendees struggled with Sartre's concepts, particularly questioning the apparent subjectivity of the moral system. For example, if individuals have responsibility for the consequences of their actions, why should actions be praiseworthy only because they are authentic expressions of self-created values? Doesn't responsibility require that correct moral action should be the product of a decision that leads to the best objective results? Dr. Pease explained that concepts like "correct moral action" and "moral error" are outside the framework of Sartre's philosophy. Rather, *authentic* decisions are a goal in themselves.

Dr. Pease concluded by observing that, while Sartre's prescription for moral reasoning may seem difficult, it is habit forming. Living an authentic life can become a natural reflex when one begins to consciously follow the precepts of existentialism.

There were about 55 people in attendance for the lecture.



through his actions. However, each individual also has freedom of choice, and therefore cannot escape responsibility for his actions. That responsibility, in Sartre's moral construct, is to act *authentically* in representation of the individual's values.

Dr. Pease's presentation sparked a lively discussion. While existentialism is a



AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION: APRIL PRESS RELEASE

Nonbelievers Call for Criminal Investigation into Catholic Church Sex Abuse Scandal

Secular Catholics invited to explore humanism

Washington, DC--America's oldest and largest humanist organization turned up the heat on Pope Benedict XVI today by calling for a criminal investigation into the pontiff's involvement in mishandling clergy sex abuse. The Washington-based American Humanist Association's call for an investigation comes on the heels of new evidence unearthed over the weekend that Pope Benedict refused to defrock an American priest who had sexually abused two boys, citing "the good of the Universal Church."

"The children who have been the victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests and who have doubly suffered from the cover up by the church deserve justice,"

said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. "It's outrageous that the Vatican appears to be using its religious status as a means of avoiding responsibility in this matter. If any secular institution or entity were credibly accused of what Pope Benedict has been accused of, there's no question those allegations would be investigated by the proper authorities. Religious institutions should not be exempt from such scrutiny just because they are religious, and they should be held accountable for any criminal wrongdoing."

The AHA said it supported arguments made by Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins that the Pope should not be able to claim diplomatic immunity from arrest.

The AHA stopped short of demanding the Pope's resignation, however. Speckhardt said that non-Catholics have no authority to demand papal resignations because such issues are internal affairs

for the church. Rather, Speckhardt urged nonbelieving Catholics--those who identify as Catholic only for familial and cultural reasons--to explore humanism as a positive alternative to the dismal shortcomings of the church and its leadership. "From a secular perspective, Ratzinger's byzantine approach to issues of the day provide a clear contrast that highlights the virtues of humanism," Speckhardt said. "We see humanism representing a moral and philosophical framework for today and for the future, a lifescape that brings hope and goodwill. As humanists, we see all of humanity as our brothers and sisters--not because we're God's children, but because we really are a human family. That's not theology or divine revelation; that's fact."

According to a 2008 study by the Pew Forum on

Religion
and Public
Life, a
stunning

thirty percent of Catholics believe God doesn't exist or is "an impersonal force." "Many of these secular Catholics undoubtedly retain their Catholic identity only for family or cultural reasons," continued Speckhardt. "This lack of belief in a personal God, combined with an undeniable reality that most Catholics don't take Vatican dictates very seriously (as is evidenced by the huge numbers that practice birth control despite church rules to the contrary), suggests that the flock's actual support for the institution is weak. We'd like to invite those folks to explore humanism as a lifescape that allows them to affirm their values while identifying honestly."

The American Humanist Association (www.americanhumanist.org) advocates for the rights and viewpoints of humanists. Founded in 1941 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., its work is extended through more than 100 local chapters and affiliates across America. Humanism is the idea that you can be good without a belief in God.

The logo for the American Humanist Association, featuring a stylized human figure icon to the left of the text "American Humanist Association".

May 23rd: Mark Your Calendars!



Get ready for a Minnesota Atheists double-header:

First, our Lakeville Highway Clean-up: The date will be Sunday May 23. We will meet at the McDonald's at 21044 Kenrick Ave, Lakeville this is just off Highway 35 at the 210th Street exit. We will gather about 11:30 a.m. for a short lunch and at noon we will review safety instructions and head out to the highway. Bring some work gloves and sturdy shoes, bug repellent and sunscreen. Please contact either Rhonda Arkley at 952-322-1003 or rhondaarkley@yahoo.com or Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277 or achair@mnatheists.org. These highway clean-ups are great visibility for Minnesota atheists to the public. We socialize, clean the highway, and then socialize some more.

Next, join us later the same day for our first ever De-baptism and Dinner event! This deliciously blasphemous event will be held in the banquet room at Al Baker's restaurant in Eagan, MN (off Yankee Doodle and 35E) at 4:00 p.m. Participants who get de-baptized will receive a pleasant burst of warm air under the *Hair Dryer of Reason* which will symbolically dry off erstwhile baptismal water. Participants will also receive a certificate recognizing their renunciation of their past baptism. If you have no baptism to renounce you can still fully participate to confirm your rejection of religious faith and archaic fairy tales for an acceptance of reason. Enjoy cocktails during the ceremony and partake in a godless communion, from Al Baker's menu, with your freethinking brethren (and sistren) afterward. More details on Minnesota Atheists Meet Up site.

Right: MN Atheists members and family were on hand to assist with the Rice, MN highway clean-up last month.

----->

Back Row: Steve Petersen, Jack Richter, Clint Buhs, Rob Taylor and Larry
Middle Row: Shirley Moll, Geri Jensen, Deb Doucette, and Jeff Everson
Front Row 5 year old Evan - our newest cleaner!



News and Notes

The separation of church and state triumphed in the case ***Freedom from Religion Foundation v Obama*** in April when District Judge Barbara B. Crabb, presiding at the United States District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, ruled that the National Day of Prayer violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. She struck down the National Day of Prayer, Title 36 US Code § 119, as amended in 2003, according to which "The President shall issue each year a proclamation designating the first Thursday in May as a National Day of Prayer on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals." Crabb ruled:

*In my view of the case law, government involvement in prayer may be consistent with the establishment clause when the government's conduct serves a significant secular purpose and is not a "call for religious action on the part of citizens." *McCreary County, Kentucky v. American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky*, 545 U.S. 844, 877 (2005).*

*Unfortunately, § 119 cannot meet that test. It goes beyond mere "acknowledgment" of religion because its sole purpose is to encourage all citizens to engage in prayer, an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function in this context. In this instance, the government has taken sides on a matter that must be left to individual conscience. "When the government associates one set of religious beliefs with the state and identifies nonadherents as outsiders, it encroaches upon the individual's decision about whether and how to worship." *McCreary County*, 545 U.S. at 883 (O'Connor, J., concurring). Accordingly, I conclude that § 119 violates the establishment clause.*

Unfortunately the Judge's order does not take effect immediately. The Obama Justice Department is expected to appeal, and will be

joined by the American Center for Law and Justice representing 31 congressmen. The order enjoining the presidential declaration and the Day of Prayer events are stayed until all appeals have been exhausted. The next stop for this case will be the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals



by George Kane

The FFRF's success in this case breaks a skein of Establishment Clause losses. On the same day in March, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Michael Newdow in ***Newdow v. Rio Linda Union School District***, covering the insertion of "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance, and ***Newdow v. Congress of the United States***, over the words "In God We Trust" on money and currency. Newdow has filed appeals in both cases for a rehearing or a hearing by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals *en banc*. Newdow is also appealing an adverse decision in ***Newdow v. Roberts***, in which he is fighting the addition of "so help me God" to the president's oath of office. Newdow remains optimistic, and in the last case was actually celebrating his court defeat:

I have always advocated for losing in the District Court if possible. Basically - except for findings of fact (which rarely exist in constitutional cases such as this) - it is advantageous to lose. As the loser, you are the Appellant in the next round. That allows you to frame the issues, since you go first during the briefing. The Appellant starts with a maximum 14,000 word Opening Brief. The "winners" then have a 14,000 word limit to respond with their Respondent Briefs. Then the loser gets to speak last, with a 7,000 word Reply Brief.

A few years ago, Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State

News and Notes continued on page 14.

ROY ZIMMERMAN

Freethinking troubadour Roy Zimmerman performed his tunes for a rapt audience at Cannon Falls High School on April 10th.



FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

Ny mumlvzlyv zkh wpqfzhpo thploptry fwmf qyokrmh bmffyhq
 nyhy jzh fwy qfmfy mlv bmffyhq zj jmpfw nyhy jzh fwy
 owkhow.

-Gkvcy Qfytwyl Hyplwmhvf, zj fwy Lplfw Ophokpf Ozkhf zj
 Mttymrq, nhpfplc pl vpqqylf pl *Lynvzn e. Hpz Rplvm Klpzl*
Qowzzr Vpqfhpof.

Answer on page 18

Book Review

organization. However, we do believe in informing and educating the community about atheism. Many atheists would benefit from the book, *Don't Be Such a Scientist* by Randy Olson. He has been a professor of marine biology who left to pursue a career in film making. In his pursuit of a film career, he has helped to make science more accessible to those who have no science background and to those who need to communicate more successfully to that audience of uninformed.

Olson starts his book with 'the four organ theory of commenting: your head, your heart, your gut, and your sex organs. In books on persuasion, they discuss these areas, but the terms they used are more academic. He contends, as a scientist, that science is not successfully communicated because it emphasizes the head or a cerebral approach.

Being cerebral is a problem when communicating with most people outside the academic setting; Olson would say that as you survey your audience very few respond from the 'head.' The cerebral audience thinks before it acts. In fact, their inability to communicate broadly is due to the narrowness of their style. An academic or head communication will appeal to less than twenty percent of an audience.

The second audience described is 'heart.' They respond to emotional appeal. They are prone to sentimentality and love themes. Belief for them is created from how they feel more than from how they think. Religious conversion and belief are most often generated from this appeal. We fear death and punishment, so we convert to a religion that promises

Minnesota Atheists does not identify as a proselytizing

offered.

A third audience responds to 'gut' level appeals. Gut level is the use of humor and intuition. The appeals that work are aimed at being irrational more often than rational. Logic does not necessarily persuade them. This audience often presents a contradiction and is impulsive and spontaneous in their responses. Their motto might be, 'just do it.' Their reactions are difficult to know and understand.

The fourth audience was identified with 'sex organs.' They do not respond to logic and are driven by the irrational.

What Olson wants the scientist to do is address all of these audiences and use techniques that appeal more. What most scientists lack in their presentation is spontaneity. A cerebral communicator needs the ability to respond

without pondering and to move from focusing only on substance to appreciating and using style.

In conversation the scientist needs to listen more and think less. Be present to that other person and respond with spontaneity and not with a prepared agenda. Become a teller of stories that engage the audience. Scientists need to allow poetry to be a part of who they are and not be literal minded.

Scientists become more approachable and likable when they leave their lab coats for a more casual appearance.

An audience will respond to the style of spontaneity over the drudgery of listening to the style of pedantry.



by Grant Steves

Don't Be Such a Scientist, by Randy Olson, © 2009, Island Press , 216 pages

The Podcast Needs You!

Mike Haubrich, Chair, Podcast Committee

June of 2009 saw the final broadcast of the Atheists Talk Radio Show on AM radio. Since then, the Minnesota Atheists have been asked by several people when the promised and hoped-for podcast replacement will be up and running. The response that we have been able to give has been that "It will be," but there has been no definite time-frame.

I am the chair of the nascent committee, but I am not planning on being the producer nor the host of the show and we are seeking talented people who want to lend your skills towards producing a regular podcast for the Minnesota Atheists. We don't need polished technophiles. We need people who want to contribute by writing, producing, talking, editing and promoting.

In Memorium: Helen Kagin

On February 17 the freethought community lost an amazing woman. I never had the honor of meeting Helen, but her influence in my life is strong. In 2005 she and Edwin were named "Atheists of the Year" at the American Atheist Convention. She was a vocal advocate of state-church separation and reason. She was a strong atheist woman, worthy of admiration.

One of Helen's biggest accomplishments was her role in shaping the lives of freethought families. Along with her husband Edwin, she co-founded Camp Quest, a summer camp for the children of nonbelievers. For at least one week of the year, children are in a place where it is all right to not believe in god. The self esteem and sense of belonging garnered by Camp Quest is invaluable to many of the campers who come through Camp Quest. The volunteers that dedicate their time to Camp Quest can also feel Helen's influence. Never in my life have I

felt so fulfilled and happy as when I'm working with these amazing children.

As a non-believer I still struggle with the fact that there is no afterlife. However, I also know that we live on through the legacies we make during our lifetime. I am no where near as accomplished as Helen was, but it comforts me to know that through kind and generous acts, a part of you never really dies. As long as there is a Camp Quest, there is a Helen Kagin.

Edwin Kagin asks that expressions of sympathy can be made my donating to Camp Quest. The Helen Kagin Campership Memorial Fund has been established to ensure that a child is never turned away from camp because of financial constraints. This can be accessed through the Camp Quest website camp-quest.org.

by Jeannette Watland

Picnic!

Sunday, May 30, 4:30 p.m.

Location:

Roseville Central Park (Lions Shelter)

2545 Victoria Street North (South of County Road C)

Roseville, 55113

For the low minimum donation of \$6.66, you can eat quality spaghetti, salads, bread and dessert. Kids under 12 years of age eat free, and donations over \$6.66 are welcome (cash and checks only). Feel free to bring sauces to share, but we do request that you provide a crock pot to keep the sauce hot. You can also bring desserts, salads, and beverages (non-alcoholic).

This event will be held at Lions Park in Roseville. There is a play field nearby, as well as trails and geocaches galore. As with our other fundraisers, there will likely be giveaways and prizes. This event is a great mixer for first-timers. For more information on the park, visit: <http://www.ci.roseville.mn.us/index.aspx?nid=190>.

We hope to see you there

Atheists and Humanists raise funds for kids: Freethinking community gathers to support campers

“It is time to stand up and support children from non-religious families,” says one freethought community leader.

“For years, non-religious families have been ignored by the larger freethought community. Now is the time to change that,” said Jeannette Watland.

Jeannette is the Chair of Camp Quest of Minnesota, a nonprofit secular summer camp which holds a weekly residential camp in Minnetrista. It will be held from July 25 to July 31 this year. Forty-eight campers from age 8 to 15 have registered this year, up from just 11 in 2004, the year Camp Quest was founded.

After volunteering as a camp counselor in 2007 and serving as President of Minnesota Atheists in 2009-10, she has the energy to excite the freethought community to benefit children.

“Religious communities have done a great job of raising children together. This benefits children, but is also helpful for parents to network, share success and failure stories and to simply not feel so alone. There isn’t a good reason why the freethought community can’t do the same,” Watland said.

On May 23 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Jaycees Shelter in Central Park in Roseville, a \$5 picnic fundraiser will be held to raise funds to support the efforts of Camp Quest. The freethought organizations of the Twin Cities have been invited and it is a great event for families to attend.

According to Watland, some people have expressed concerns that Camp Quest is like “Jesus Camp” for atheists. Counselors and staff are strict about not labeling children “atheist” or “humanist” because it isn’t appropriate to label children with a worldview.

“You won’t find our campers expressing anti-religious rhetoric,” Watland said. “Campers have to live in a majority religious community and bigotry toward religion is

something we don’t teach.”

Camp Quest of Minnesota includes traditional summer camp activities, such as canoeing, archery, field games and camp fire songs. It is unique because of the educational activities which teach ethics, critical thinking and respect for others with a different worldview. Campers also participate in a service project to give back to the community.

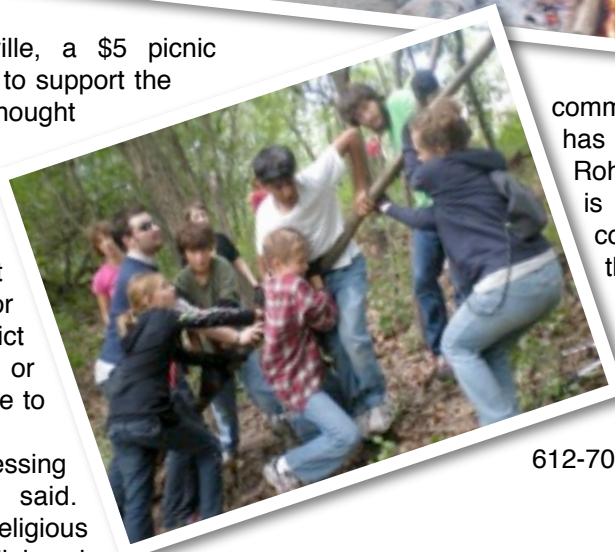
“We try to include a presentation from a religious speaker. This allows the children to become comfortable with the language of belief and they can ask questions to gain understanding. Outside of Camp Quest, kids feel more empowered to express their own ideas respectfully,” Watland said.

Camp Quest is also a great way for young people to build a community. Counselors are mostly in their 20’s and 30’s, a group of people who don’t typically get involved in freethought organizations.

Rick Rohrer, past Chair of Camp Quest of Minnesota, said he hopes Camp Quest helps to break down negative stereotypes of the non-religious.

“There are many people who feel that you need religion to raise ethical, caring children who care about our world and our communities. Camp Quest has proven that isn’t so,” Rohrer said. “Camp Quest is giving children the confidence they need to think for themselves.”

For information about Camp Quest of Minnesota, visit minnesota.campquest.org or call 612-709-6719.



Religion Should Not be Depended on for Morals

by August Berkshire • President, Minnesota Atheists

As patriotic atheists, we also have concerns about America. We are concerned that the Constitution is not being followed.

The Constitution states it (not the Torah, not the Bible, not the Quran) shall be “the supreme law of the land.” There is no mention of gods in the Constitution, nor in its amendments.

The First Amendment states there shall be “no law respecting the establishment of religion...”. It does not say “a” religion; it means religion in general.

We are concerned that not all citizens are being treated equally under the law, as the 14th Amendment demands. We can’t understand why gay people are treated as second-class citizens.

We are concerned that there are apparent attempts to overturn the 13th Amendment and make women’s bodies reproductive slaves of the government and religion.

The sex scandals in the church and among god-fearing conservatives prove that religion is not a reliable means of achieving ethical behavior.

According to the Bible, the following people should be killed:

People who curse or blaspheme the Lord (Leviticus 24:11-16)

People who worship another god (Deuteronomy 17:2-7) (Exodus 22:20)

Witches and wizards (Exodus 22:18) (Leviticus 20:27)

Non-virgin brides (Deuteronomy 22:13-21)

Gay men (Leviticus 20:13)

Disobedient sons (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

People who curse their father or mother (Exodus 21:17)

Someone who works on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36) (Exodus 31:15) (Exodus 35:2)

As we leave the nest of religion behind and soar to new scientific heights, the question seems to be: Can we be patriotic and good *with* god belief?

(This letter appeared in the St. Cloud Times. It was in response to “Watchful leaders needed to restore nation’s spirit” by Mary R. Joyce, which appeared on April 3rd. Website for this letter: sctimes.com/article/20100413/OPINION/104130014/1006-ed.)

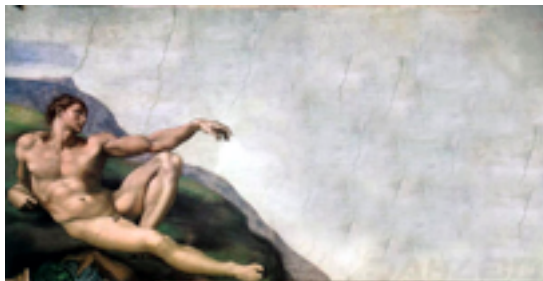
Easter, Elk River Style

by Nathan Ray

I was raised in Elk River and went to church as a child with my family. Around age twelve I was given a choice of continuing to go to church or stop going. The choice was clear: I was done. I knew church was not for me. There were always more questions than answers and some of the things they taught me were just plain stupid. My Mother and brother are still practicing christians, but are supportive of my own beliefs. I'm now

34 and typically keep my beliefs to myself; as people aren't shoving religion down my throat i am okay with it.

That changed on Sunday, April 4th. While visiting my parents in Elk River (where they live near The Crossing Church), I became very annoyed at car horns honking and people yelling "honk for jesus...Yeah!" After listening to this on Saturday evening and again on Sunday morning I'd had enough. I decided that if they weren't going to allow me peace then I was going to try



to annoy them too. I grabbed a piece of tag board and wrote "there is no god" on it and headed outside to the sidewalk. Within one minute people from the church came over to investigate. I was questioned by several people from the church as well as passersby. They wanted to know why I did not believe in their god. I didn't really want to get into any debates so I kept my responses brief. I was

amazed at the reactions I received. I was flicked off approximately 30 times, called the devil, told I should go home, and that I was stupid. One young man swerved his car towards me. One lady threw eggs at me - twice. There were a few people that were supportive as well, however. In all, I was out on the corner for around 2 hours; time very well spent. I am planning to go out there again next Easter if they are being loud.



My Second Trip into an Alien Lair

by George Kane

A few years ago, I saw Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State speak about his experiences joining right-wing Christian political organizations. He said that

he felt like Diane Fossey in the movie "Gorillas in the Mist," observing fundamentalist Christians in their native habitat. When I went to St. Augustine's Catholic Church in April to debate G. K. Chesterton scholar Dale Ahlquist, I pictured myself in quite a different Sigourney Weaver role: Lt. Ellen Ripley, walking alone into the Alien nest when she rescued Newt.

Nearly 400 people attended the debate, but only two faces in the audience were familiar to me. This crowd was much larger than for my previous debate there, which had itself set an attendance record for the Argument of the Month Club. Nevertheless, I did not expect the audience to be completely unsympathetic to my side. We were debating "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, and "In God We Trust" on currency and coins, the subjects of two suits which Michael Newdow had just lost in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Actually, I thought I might reach a good deal of agreement with my opponent in the debate. Although their clergy are extremely conservative, Catholics in America are traditionally a liberal, Democratic voting bloc. They have themselves been victims of religious bigotry in predominantly Protestant America, so I expected that hammering on the ways that secular government protects the rights of religious minorities would be a successful tactic.

My hopes for common ground were not justified. Ahlquist expects government to strongly support religion, especially in providing a religious environment in public schools. He seemed obsessed by the ludicrous complaint that Christians in America are the victims of government persecution, particularly in public schools, which he claimed are dominated by atheists. He justified government endorsement of religion not by a

loose interpretation of the Establishment Clause, but by asserting that the rights and liberties for which atheists argue could only exist if there is a God who grants them, so that it is the responsibility of government to acknowledge that God. And he claimed that this is a philosophical position rather than a theological dogma!

I tried always to return the discussion to laws regarding separation of church and state. At one point I quoted from a campaign address that John Kennedy had delivered to Southern Baptist ministers, in which he argued for an America "where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source--where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials."

But Ahlquist was not concerned with arguing law. He occupied his allotted time instead with jokes catering to his Catholic audience, and debating tactics. For example, in his opening remarks he said "I am not concerned with the atheist attack on faith, because faith is always under attack, and usually faith is strengthened, but I am more concerned with the atheist attack on reason." During my rebuttal I corrected him that the Newdow suits were not at all an attack upon faith, since their object was to impose restrictions on government alone. He responded brusquely that he had never said there was an attack upon faith! Of course, I could not verify that he had indeed referred to an 'atheist attack on faith' until I could review the audio record afterward. He relished a similar attack, after the moderator asked me if the government discriminates against atheists. I dismissed the invitation to claim the mantle of victimhood, but pointed out that, by disrespecting atheists, acts of government encourage a documented, widespread prejudice. Ahlquist's first words in rebuttal were "Mr. Kane, if you really want to be disliked, become a Catholic!"

I think that anyone would have to judge Ahlquist's performance as weak unless they were previously convinced that Christianity has an exclusive claim to the truth. Where is there any room for secular

Alien Lair continued on page 14.

My Second Trip into an Alien Lair (continued from page 13)

government, or for non-Christian citizens, in Ahlquist's remark "Where does our sense of justice come from? The only way to defend rights is to recognize them as divine rights. I do not see a reason to further accommodate atheism because it is an errant philosophy. It is my philosophy that has built Western civilization!" He commented that there was no need to protect the rights of atheists, because if they take over they will eliminate all rights, because secular government recognizes nothing higher than itself.

During the intermission and after the debate, a few members of the audience told me they thought that I had the stronger arguments. That was encouraging, but I think that few people are ever convinced to change their minds by public debates. Perhaps a contributing psychological factor is that the audience is always so lopsided in sentiment. So, next time you hear of a debate between a Christian and an atheist, make it a point to attend, and support the atheist debater enthusiastically. Like chicken soup, it can't hurt.

"The ambiguity about who is a believer and who a nonbeliever follows inexorably from the pluralism that has been assiduously fostered by many religious leaders for a century and more: God is many different things to different people, and since we can't know if one of these conceptions is the right one, we should honor them all. This counsel of tolerance creates a gentle fog that shrouds the question of belief in God in so much indeterminacy that if asked whether they believed in God, many people could sincerely say that they don't know what they are being asked."

- Daniel C. Dennett and Linda LaScola, "Preachers who are not Believers", Tufts University, March 15, 2010

April Treasurer's Report

*** Visibility Fund ***

Caroline Brunner	\$40.00
Kenneth Holmbeck	\$100.00
Amy Starzinski	\$25.00
Martin Steitz	\$25.00
Morgan Christian	\$65.00
Total:	\$255.00



*** Building Fund ***

Shirley Moll	\$50.00
Vernon Young	\$100.00
Daniel Norte	\$35.72
James Whitney	\$25.00
Dorothy French	\$250.00
Total:	\$460.72

Total Income: \$715.72

Building Fund Total to date: \$123,616.73



News and Notes (continued from page 7)

remarked to me that we are better off not taking on cases like this because the Supreme Court will never invite the political flak that a strong Establishment Clause stand would bring down upon them. At the Humanist of Minnesota Banquet in April, American Humanist Association President David Niose

suggested abandoning Establishment Clause litigation in favor of suits in state courts based on guarantees of equal protection in state laws. I think that it is too early to abandon the tactic that Newdow and the FfRF are pursuing, however. When we lose one of these cases we lose nothing, but every win is a big step forward.

The Need to Abort Prayer

About one in five known pregnancies ends in a *natural* abortion (i.e. miscarriage) according to the Mayo Clinic website. If the American Pregnancy Association is right there are about 6 million known pregnancies every year in the United States. That means that there are roughly 1.2 million natural abortions each year in this country. The estimate is a conservative one since many miscarriages occur in the early stages of pregnancy before women realize they're pregnant. Add the number of induced abortions performed in a year—1.2 million according to the Guttmacher Institute—and we have exactly doubled the rate of total abortions. Since 1973 there have been almost 50 million induced abortions and at least that many natural abortions. That's 100 million abortions in less than four decades—and that's just in the United States. All of the natural abortions are a direct act of God, if we suspend reality and entertain a belief in "Him." However, if we accept the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient god, as many do, then induced abortions are also surely an act of God's purposeful inaction to intervene and rescue the unborn (not to mention those of us living outside the uterus from fatal tragedies). This leaves me wondering why any rational person would use prayer as a means to end abortion. As it stands, there is a popular movement to do just that and I'm reminded of it each time I pass the large memorial outside *St. John the Baptist Catholic Church* in Savage that reads "Pray to end Abortion."

I don't celebrate the aforementioned statistics; in fact I find them to be very concerning. That is why I find the frustratingly counter-productive idea of praying abortion away to be absurd and careless. While I support a woman's right to choose, I'm positive that most would agree that a reduced abortion rate is a worthy goal. Ironically, those most vocal against abortions (they self-righteously identify

themselves as "pro-life") do the most to obstruct their own cause with ridiculous policy initiatives and ideological visions of a biblical utopia. They ignore thoughtful analysis and effective approaches for hyperbolic rhetoric and inimical policies.

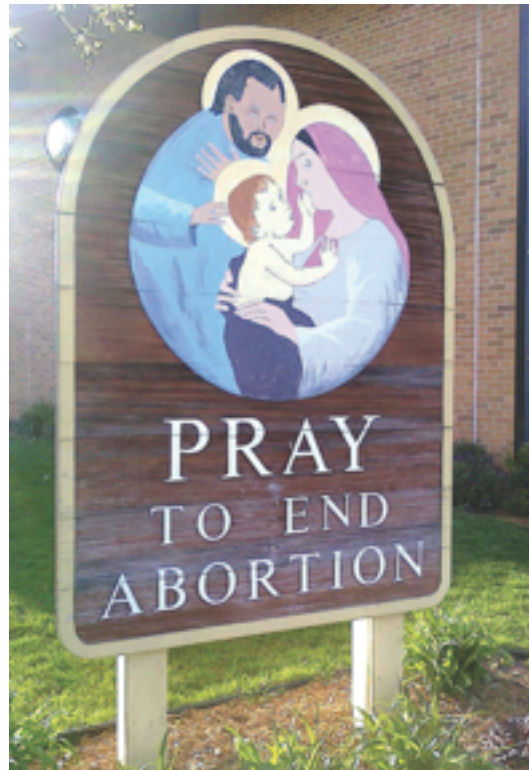
While unwanted teenage pregnancies make up a significant portion of abortions, the Vatican continues its war on prophylactics and the conservative right (led by the likes of Sarah Palin) fight for abstinence-only sex education. These campaigns are harmful to the "pro-life" cause, but we can't expect anti-intellectual demagogues to accept overwhelming evidence like the results from a study recently published in *Pediatrics* which finds teenagers who take a virginity pledge to be just as likely to have sex as those who don't but less likely to use contraception.



by Eric Jayne

Those who are inclined to replace facts and sensible tactics with futile telepathic petitioning have plenty of support from countless websites dedicated to the "Pray to end Abortion" movement. For example, one can do as squirrel58 at luke181.com and reserve a 20 minute time slot to pray so that "every minute of one entire year is covered in prayer to end abortion" (evidently God needs a lot of persuasion from people like squirrel58 to overcome His complacency).

The rate of abortion will be preserved as long as ignorance is celebrated and religious rules embraced. Abortion will continue to be entwined with poverty and unwanted pregnancies. Reasonable



Abort Prayer continued on page 17.

Secular Humanism is Not a Religion

In a recent letter to the *Stillwater Gazette* editor, Chris Nitardy claims that Secular Humanism is a religion and that this religion kicked God out of our schools, thereby prohibiting prayer in schools.

Wow! Too bad Chris' religion isn't as powerful; it too would be able to kick his God's enemies out of the public schools. Apparently Chris worships some mediocre mythical god of his imagination. But don't despair Chris, you've got lots of company as humanity seems to have an unending history of worshipping mythical, inept gods.

Seriously Chris, is it possible for a philosophical perspective to be a religion? If so, where are the Secular Humanist churches and pastors? Which god do they worship? What hymns do they sing? And if they do worship a god, is it any more inept than your god?

And Chris, please tell us which god you worship? If it's the bible's God, you make a disobedient representative - because the bible's God specifically commands, "Thou shall not bear false witness."

Your letter to the editor contains numerous distortions, false representations and flat-out lies.

Chris states that God was removed from public schools. Apparently Chris does not know of the bible's God, who the bible represents as omnipotent and omnipresent. If true, this God could not be removed from anywhere or anything. If Chris' God can be pushed around with ease by mere humans, does he/she deserve to be called God?

And Chris states, "prayer was removed from public school." Hmm, I don't recall hearing about police arresting children for praying in school or for having prayer meetings. Nor have we heard about children being suspended from school for praying in school. This would certainly be the case if prayer in school were against the law.

Apparently, Chris' definition of prayer is when a government official writes out a prayer and it is read over a public-address system. Does Chris really believe a cold, lifeless written prayer is the kind of prayer that gets a god's attention? The god of that kind of prayer deserves to be kicked out of our schools.



by Lee Salisbury

The constitutional ruling prohibiting prayer to which Chris refers was based upon the First Amendment and respect for the many beliefs in our pluralistic society.

But maybe the reality is that Chris has no concern for children of differing beliefs. So, tough luck to those of other religious beliefs such as Jewish, Muslim, Mormon, Jehovah Witness, Hindu, or non-theistic children. God is going to send them all to burn in hell, right Chris?

Chris laments, "our culture ... has become secularized." With examples like Chris and Michele

Bachman, can you blame us?

Bachmann stated in Congress, "I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if President Abraham Lincoln, one of President Obama's heroes, would have said overseas that he believed America was a nation of secularists..."

This is typical of Michele's lies and distortions said to please her misguided fear-mongering rightwing constituency like Chris.

What President Obama actually said was, "I've said before that one of the great strengths of the United States is - although as I mentioned we have a very large Christian population - we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation, or a Jewish nation, or a Muslim nation. We consider ourselves a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values."

Chris states: "When a student examines the world through a Darwinian lens long enough, life becomes ultimately meaningless." Really Chris? Have you ever once read a book explaining Secular Humanism or evolution? Have you ever once talked to an evolutionary biologist?

Has Chris ever heard of Kenneth Miller, Ph.D., a devout Roman Catholic, professor of evolutionary biology at Brown University and author of *Only a Theory* and *Finding Darwin's God*? Dr. Miller was one of several evolutionary biologists who were instrumental in the 2005 *Kitzmiller v. Dover, Pa.*, case which exposed the lies and fabrications of Intelligent Design (ID) proponents. After six weeks of extensive

Secular Humanism continued on page 17.

This I Don't Believe



Used by permission. For more atheist-themed comics, visit attheistcartoons.com. -ed.



"Is this what their 'change' is all about? I want to tell 'em, Nah, we'll keep clinging to our Constitution and our guns and religion — and you can keep the change."

-Sarah Palin, former Alaska governor, rallying a crowd of Tea Party supporters in Boston on Wednesday, April 14

The Need to Abort Prayer (continued from page 15)

policies—fashioned to reduce poverty, teach responsible sex education and increase the availability of birth control—will continue to be lambasted as long as “pro-lifers” cling to ecclesiastical rubbish and watch Fox News.

In spite of prayers and biblically influenced initiatives, abortion (natural and induced) continues at a stable rate well over 2 million per year in the United States. Over 3,000 American women will receive an

induced abortion today and another 3,000 will receive a natural abortion. Fifty women will have had an abortion during one of those 20 minute prayers advertised at luke181.com. If the “pro-lifers” were to cling to reality at least as much as they cling to religion they would realize that only humans who foster humanitarian policies can reduce the occurrence of abortions. It's time to switch the message from “Pray to end Abortion” to “The Need to Abort Prayer.”

Secular Humanism (continued from page 16)

hearings, the George Bush-appointed judge, John E. Jones, slammed the door on the ID-loving Dover school board's "breathtaking inanity," opining that Intelligent Design completely lacked any scientific basis.

So, whose life has greater meaning - a misinformed, misguided Chris Nitardy or the thousands of

biologists, geologists, cosmologists, and paleontologists who have devoted their lives to understanding the origins of our world?

(Salisbury's article originally appeared in the April 29, 2010 edition of the Stillwater Gazette under the title "Salisbury: Secular Humanism has not dominated this nation's schools." -ed.)

April Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

For our April taping James Zimmerman interviewed Dr. Grant Steves for two programs titled “The Clash of Worldviews” and “The Worldview of Naturalism.” “The Clash of Worldviews” contrasted the views that are rooted in theism and atheism. “The Worldview of Naturalism” highlighted the material found in the writings of Richard Carrier (*Sense and Goodness Without God*), Thomas W. Clark (*Encountering Naturalism*), and the general philosophical school of Naturalism.



Thanks to Jack Richter for getting our programs back on the St. Cloud cable network.

Cable Crew: Pictured below, left to right: Shirley Moll, Brian Knoblock, Brett Stenbridge, George Kane, and Wendy Steinberg. Not pictured: Steve Petersen.

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.; 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.



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

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

We abandoned our historic principle that secular matters were for the state and matters of faith were for the church.

-Judge Stephen Reinhardt, of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, writing in dissent in *Newdow v. Rio Linda Union School District*.

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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. South, #55 (Men's Center, in the basement), Minneapolis. Open to men and women. Contact: tcAgnostic@gmail.com.

Third Sunday, 1:00-3:30, Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting. (No meeting in July or August.) See front cover for details.

Fifth Sunday, Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund. Price: -\$7.00. (May, August, and November 2010.)

1st and 3rd Monday, 6:00p.m. Freethought Toastmasters Club. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. West, St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to party room.) 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, Richfield. Bob and Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

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

3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., Lunch Social. Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Ave., Columbia Heights. Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420

4th Wednesday, Meal and a Reel. Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin and Lake). 6:00 meal, 7:00 movie. Details in Atheists Weekly Email.

Thursdays, 7:00, Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) meeting. See cashumn.org for details.

1st Thursday, 6:00 p.m., Atheists Talk TV Show taping. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2nd Thursday. Rochester Area Freethinkers monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn@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 the Atheists Weekly Email (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.

To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit atheists.meetup.com/493.



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“Gods are fragile things; they may be killed by a whiff of science or a dose of common sense.”

-Chapman Cohen, author and lecturer (1868-1954)

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