

# The Minnesota Atheist



## *The Trouble With Christmas*

Tom Flynn has been recounting the history of the year-end holidays – and offering his rollicking

Flynn is Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, Editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, and Director of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. He co-founded and was for thirteen years co-editor of the newsletter *Secular Humanist Bulletin*. He blogs in Washingtonpost.com’s “On Faith” section.

rationale for why secular humanists should just sit the merriment out – since his book *The Trouble with Christmas* came out in 1993. But 2010 is the first year that his presentation is fully illustrated in a lavish PowerPoint show containing more than 200 slides. (Fear not, as the angel never really said; some of those slides go by really, really fast.)

His presentation will be preceded by a Minnesota Atheists business meeting which will include the ratification of Andy Flamm’s appointment to fill a director-at-large position on the Board of Directors.

Please join us.

In “The Trouble with Christmas” Flynn will examine where our most treasured holiday traditions came from – from the Christ Child to Santa Claus, from the wassail bowl to the tannenbaum – and ask whether there’s still time to send them back. It’s an information-filled, thought-provoking, yet wildly funny audiovisual extravaganza. Missing this presentation would be like getting a lump of coal in your stocking!

### IF YOU GO

**What:** Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting followed by Flynn’s presentation

**Where:** Ridgedale Public Library, 12601 Ridgedale Drive, Minnetonka

**When:** Sunday, November 21

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. - Presentation

4:00 p.m. - Dinner at:

**Wanderer’s Garden**

13059 Ridgedale Drive, Minnetonka

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Submit material for the newsletter to [editor@mnaatheists.org](mailto: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.

**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

## Membership and Meetups



by August  
Berkshire

Thank you, thank you, thank you! We received such a large increase in members and other financial supporters last month that, had any of us prayed for it, it would have caused us to rethink the power of prayer. Instead, as Dan Barker would say, we tried not praying – and it worked!

The increase in members and donors can, I think, be attributed to a number of factors. We had a joint mailing with Atheist Alliance International (AAI) soliciting for members for both groups. Member Shirley Moll has been very busy sending out renewal reminders to lapsed members. Steve Petersen has been tirelessly adding the hundreds of new names we acquired from the May Day celebration and the six Gay Pride festivals where we had booths this past summer. Mike Haubrich has spearheaded the revival of our radio show, which has increased our visibility and the pride our members have in MNA. Also, there is hope that the national economy is turning around.

And finally, our Minnesota Atheists Meetups continue to fulfill the first goal of our group: to provide a community for atheists. For those who don't know, Meetups are on-line communities centered around a given interest or topic, which seek to connect like-minded people in a specific geographic area (usually a metropolitan area). Leaders of Meetup groups then post events on-line (such as a gathering at a restaurant) and invite other Meetup members to attend them.

Five to six years ago, there were fledgling attempts to start and maintain an atheist Meetup in the Twin Cities. None of them lasted too long until the one started by Scott Muir on July 5, 2006. It was a true Meetup in that it was not associated with any group but was just atheists getting together, usually for

a social meal. A day after Scott started his Meetup, we tried something different: I started the Minnesota Atheists Meetup as a way to better promote specifically Minnesota Atheists events. After a couple years, Scott's Meetup ceased operating, making ours the oldest continuously operating atheist Meetup in the state.

For the first year or two, we tended not to list more than about two events per month. This changed when Bjorn Watland took over the Meetup and also became MNA president. Under his leadership, we saw an explosion of Meetup events - not all of them MNA specific - but all serving the purpose of providing opportunities for atheists to get together and have a good time. Of particular note are the blood drives set up by Jack Caravela and Crystal Dervetski.

I have to admit I wondered if all this activity would confuse our members – but I needn't have worried. Once a person's mind is emptied of supernatural thought, it apparently leaves plenty of room to fill it with useful and fun things.

After Bjorn left the MNA presidency, Jack Caravela took over as the main Meetup scheduler. His emphasis on Newbie Nights (for people new to MNA) and family events are two areas that are very valuable to MNA.

Others, such as Eric Jayne, Patricia M., Rhonda, Valerie, Brian Knoblock, and George Kane, have also stepped forward to set up and lead MNA Meetups. Gatherings include: book

*President's Column continued on page 4*

## Recent Events: Avalos Presentation

by George Kane

Professor Hector Avalos' excursion from Ames, where he teaches at Iowa State University, to present at our public meeting has become an October tradition. This year his topic was *From Darwin to Hitler? How Creationists Revise History*. It is a familiar canard of the religious right that the rise of Nazism and Adolf



Hitler, as well as the genocide they attempted, resulted directly from atheism and Darwin's godless theory of evolution; and further that only the cultural dominance of Christianity can inoculate the world against a recurrence.

This was the thesis, for example, of Ben Stein's propaganda-driven documentary *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*. Dr. Avalos effectively undercut every argument for this thesis, by showing that Hitler, as revealed in his own writings, was a creationist; that the Germany the Nazis ruled was a Christian nation; that the Nazis opposed the theory of evolution, and banned the writings of Charles Darwin; and that the Nazi hatred of Jews was deeply

rooted in Christian history, and the writings of Christians like Martin Luther. The claims that Hitler was an atheist and committed to the theory of evolution are based upon an unverifiable book, titled *Hitler's Table Talk*, based on transcripts from Martin Bormann. Since the discourses recorded directly contradict Hitler's writings, it is probable that they reflect Bormann's thinking more than Hitler's.

This monthly public meeting was the first we've held at the Ramsey County Library in Roseville since it was refurbished. There were about 80 people in attendance.

### *President's Column (continued)*

clubs; adopt-a-highway cleanups; blasphemers brunches; debaptism ceremonies; freethinking females lunches and dinners; hiking and biking; and outings to Twins games, Canterbury Park, the Roller Derby, and comedy clubs.

We now have over 770 Meetup members and have listed more than 335 events. To sign up for the Meetup, go to: [www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists). You don't have to be a member of Minnesota Atheists to sign up for our Meetups. However, your membership is much appreciated and will help us to continue providing a community for atheists.

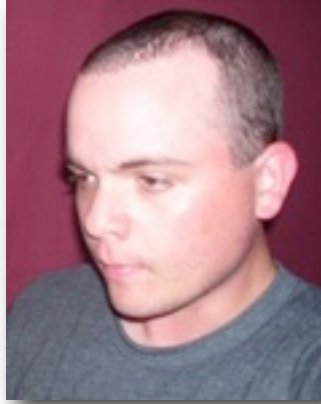
## God and the Army

**I want to make** it clear that I do not hold ill will toward the United States Army, or any branch of the military for that matter. I enjoy being a part of something larger than myself, and hopefully having the opportunity to make a difference. I have never regretted my decision to enlist, or to start my commissioning program in the Army National Guard. That being said, any organization a person can be a part of may reflect ideals that are contradictory to one's own values. The military is no different.

The military claims its Chaplains are a means of spiritual support for its soldiers. I am certain there are non-Christian chaplains somewhere in the military, but in my experience, I have never met nor heard of one. The chaplains are mostly well-meaning, personally delightful people. When I first felt negatively about the program was during a process the Army calls SRP (Soldier Readiness Processing) which is a series of legal, medical, administrative stations a soldier must attend occasionally in the military. One of the stations was a chaplain (Christian, of course) which was an absolute requirement. Why not have a mental health professional?

The chaplains always introduce themselves as Christian, yet they are not there to spread Christianity, and anyone of any faith can receive spiritual guidance from them. But if I were a Buddhist, I would not benefit from a Baptist giving me his philosophy which by nature contradicts my sutra-ethical background. The chaplains often have free reading material which is displayed and available for anyone interested. I have never seen reading material presented by them of any faith outside of Christianity. Clearly the "spiritual guidance" is lip service.

At one of the military schools I attended, the entire company was required to attend church. We were told we would march to a Catholic Church service, and our attendance was mandatory. If you truly were offended by having to go, the commander may or may not grant you to stay behind. "Staying behind" meant punishment, in the



by Jacob Budd

form of cleaning detail, or possibly even extra physical training.

One of the most bothersome experiences is an online test I was required to take which asks a series of questions about your mental state. Simply put, it is a multiple choice test which determines your stability for deployment. I am sure it is by no means the absolute standard of the Army's mental testing. It is

however mandatory and used as a tool to grade you on paper. One of the categories is "Spiritual Strength." I scored impressively low in that category. According to that test, I am a low scorer for mental stability based on the fact I do not believe in a god or an after-life. I have no way of knowing if the test is considered valid in determining the progress of my career, but the fact that it exists concerns me.

It is very hard for me to deny that the US Army wants its members to not only be religious, but to be Christian, yet I had struggled to understand why. In a nation where we honor freedom, why does its backbone of power feel the need to push this particular belief? George W. Bush answered this question for me. His belief that the invasion of Iraq was a mission given to him by God revealed much. I do not claim Bush has started this God-craze in the Army, yet the belief surrounding his words says it all. Religion is used as a proxy to the Army's soldiers for acceptance to its policies overseas. This is a very simple answer, yet without this need, nearly every single oath in the Army (as it is currently written) is meaningless. To me the oath has meaning only if I choose to ignore the reference to God. If a military action is complicated, and ambiguous to the more "simple-minded" of those in the Army, then religion is used to help persuade them.

I really wish to be wrong about this, as I am very proud to serve my country, and will continue to serve with dignity and integrity.

## *Atheists Talk: October Radio Report*

by Steve Petersen



Minnesota Atheists restarted our popular radio program in August. The program hosts are Mike Haubrich and Scott Lohman; the director is August Berkshire. We have a six month contract at a cost of \$5,320. We have sold ad spots to help with the cost and had two \$500 donations from August Berkshire and Randy Quast to kick off the funding and a number of smaller donations. Each donation is greatly appreciated. Original music was composed, played and recoded by Brent Michael Davids.

The past month's programs were:

**September 26:** August Berkshire interviewed Dr. Mark Welter from St. Cloud State University. Dr. Welter teaches World History and this program was titled "The Bible: Folklore as Fact." There are almost 3,000 years of high culture and folklore preceding the Book of Genesis. Many of the stories that we consider to be original to the Bible are in fact shared across many cultures in slightly variant forms. Fables of the Sumerians, the Persians, and other cultures have found their way into what Christians and Jews claim to be factual,

Jesus has antecedents dating back to 1000 BCE.

**October 3:** Scott Lohman interviewed Jennifer Hancock on her book *The Humanist approach to Happiness*.

**October 10:** Mike Haubrich interviewed Dr. Hector Avalos on Darwin and Holocaust. Dr. Avalos is a Professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. He has been a great resource in analyzing and debunking the claims of Intelligent Design creationism. He sorts through the nonsense of poor scholarship and and misunderstanding of history in claims that the study of evolution has been responsible for evils in the world since Darwin's publication of *On the Origins of the Species* and *The Descent of Man*.

**October 17:** Lynn Fellman interviewed August Berkshire on "Morality With and Without God." August Berkshire, the president of the Minnesota Atheists has been studying the morality found within religion, and the development through non-religious sources of morality and ethics. Sociology, social psychology, and other social sciences have examined evolutionary roots of morality as have philosophers. Now even evolutionary biology has made some interesting discoveries, suggesting that morality is not necessarily unique to humans. If non-human animals can be good without God, are humans weaker and need God?

The programs can be listened to on our web site, [www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org), where they are listed by date. The program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 Central Time, or stream live from [www.KTNF.com](http://www.KTNF.com) and type in a Minnesota zip code.

## Exploring Positive Atheism in Action

The concept of *positive atheism in action* is undoubtedly a valued principal among members of Minnesota Atheists (MNA). Some members have suggested that *positive atheism in action* precludes some events from happening in order to spare the feelings of religious believers who might be keeping track of our events. This was the main reason why 34 cents was recently added to the \$6.66 Spaghetti Dinner admission fee. The concept of positive atheism in action was also invoked by a few members who made requests to discontinue debaptisms and ban a particular book from a book club discussion. This all begs the question: What, exactly, is *positive atheism in action*? The mission statement of Minnesota Atheists says the organization is “dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through education programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs” with a purpose “to promote the atheist viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse.” That sounds good, but what are *secular values* and the *atheist viewpoint*? Maybe if we define our shared values and viewpoints we will have a better understanding and consensus of what is meant by *positive atheism in action*.

In her book, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*, Susan Jacoby suggests that in spite of a diversity of opinions among 19<sup>th</sup> century freethinking secularists, virtually all were dedicated to the causes of “free political speech, freedom of artistic expression, expansion of legal and economic rights... dissemination of birth control...and the expansion of public education” (p. 154). I believe that virtually all 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century humanistic, freethinking atheists are dedicated to these secular values as well. In fact I submit that atheists particularly depend on the constitutionally protected principal of free speech



by Eric Jayne

and expression in order to survive! Those who have a nominal knowledge of history are well aware of the brutal and savage torture inflicted upon “heretics” by Protestant and Catholic rulers, not to mention the inhumane treatment applied to violators of Sharia law in the Muslim world today. Without the protection of our first amendment rights, we might still be living under a draconian theocracy that would severely punish us atheists.

Besides protection, our first amendment rights also grant us the freedom to actively ridicule ideas, philosophies, and institutions no matter the source and no matter how innocuous or toxic they might be. Since religious organizations, religious teachings, and religious leaders hold far too much power and wield too much influence in our culture I can think of no better institution to ridicule than religion. I’m not suggesting that we stand outside of a church shouting Linda Blair lines from *the Exorcist*, but the way I see it, it’s healthy to irreverently mock institutions that indoctrinate children, control minds, and campaign against gay rights, birth control, science, and other humanistic causes. Harmless displays of religious mockery within the Minnesota Atheists organization is a secular value that we should all feel free to celebrate.

Of course members are free to hold different opinions and question some of the practices within the Minnesota Atheists organization. We’re atheists after all, not a pious group of orthodox-following automatons. Demonstrating this point, I was recently contacted by a MNA member about his concerns over the Burnsville Book Club reading and discussing *The Satanic Bible* by Anton LaVey. I listened as he argued that the book discussion would damage our public image because it plays into



## Exploring Positive Atheism in Action (continued)

negative stereotypes some Christians have about atheism being synonymous with Satanism. Therefore, he argued, the book discussion is inconsistent with promoting positive atheism in action. My response was that banning controversial books from MNA book discussions is a troubling precedent to set and that submitting to ridiculously false misconceptions held by Christians, who also have false misconceptions about many other subjects, does not reflect positive atheism as I know it. To be sure, our exchange was respectful and we agreed to disagree. Interestingly, those who actually read the book and participated in the book club discussion discovered that they, themselves, had a misconception about Satanism. One member mused that LaVey's Satanism "is like humanism with brass knuckles."

From the viewpoint of *freethinking* atheists, freedom of thought, inquiry, speech, and expression are secular values that we hold dear. It should follow then that our organization should value the free secular expression displayed at book discussions, debaptisms, and spaghetti dinners without accommodating the religious beliefs of theists. Speaking as former Christian, I found myself drawn to more piously taboo subject matter as I began to develop skepticism. So it might very well be that sacrilegious mockery is more likely to appeal to a skeptical theist who is contemplating the merits of his/her religious beliefs. If we hold true to the *atheist viewpoint* and *secular values* not only will we demonstrate our genuineness, but we might even attract more skeptical leaning theists!

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 FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

Ek kew wfwb omhw dk pmtdz te Xwgqg dzbkqrz

bwmgke kb uj fwbtjter pmodg.

-Wfmerwntomn abemozwb Mntgdmth Uwrr, ke ztg

*Dbqdz pkb Ntpw* bmctk gzks.

(Answer on page 14)



*Freethought Follies and Solstice Celebration  
Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>.  
The most fun you'll have all year!*



- *For 6 p.m. banquet dinner and Follies show, please register before December 14th. See the Flyer in this newsletter, or to pay by credit card at [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org). Look for the Follies link.*
- *For 7 p.m. Follies only, \$20.00 per person or whatever you can afford. Advance registration requested via [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org).*

## Denouncing the Catholic Conference's Mailing

Minnesota Atheists denounces the Minnesota Catholic Conference for mailing 400,000 DVDs to the homes of Catholics as a clear intent to influence upcoming elections. The videos, which feature John Nienstedt, Archbishop of Minneapolis and St. Paul, call for Catholics to take political action to demand an amendment to the Minnesota State Constitution to restrict marriage to opposite-sex couples.

Nienstedt asserts that the videos are educational, rather than political, but the timing of the mailing belies this claim. Catholics received this video less than 5 weeks before the elections, just in time to boost the campaign of Republican gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer, the only major party candidate who opposes same-sex marriage. The identity of the donor who funded the mailing is being withheld, raising suspicion of a political connection.

The videos are similar in content to others mailed out by Catholic dioceses during the campaign for California's Proposition 8. Those campaign videos conveyed to voters that same-sex relationships are

inferior to opposite-sex relationships and dangerous to children.

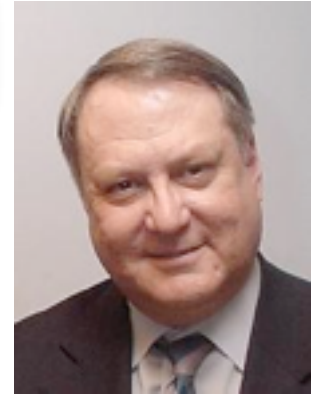
Without such a booster shot of hateful indoctrination, Catholics might lapse and treat their gay and lesbian family members, friends, and coworkers as people deserving of equal treatment under the law.

Several studies have shown that there is no significant difference in parenting outcomes whether the resident parents are of opposite sex or the same sex. The only justifications for opposition to same-sex marriage are ancient religious prejudices. To ensure that government remains secular, we must be vigilant to justify our laws by their consequences in peoples' lives rather than conformity to religious dogma.

In America, social progress has been in part accomplished by rebelling against religious orthodoxy. That is one of the many benefits of separation of state and church.

Minnesota Atheists supports the right of same-sex couples to marry based upon the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. To view our position on the civil rights of gays and lesbians, please read our public policies at [mnatheists.org/content/view/133/71](http://mnatheists.org/content/view/133/71).

## News and Notes



by George Kane

**When I drive my car** I often listen to Christian radio station KKMS, because I like to hear what the opponents of church/state separation are up to. In early October, I heard their drive-time host, Pastor Brad Brandon, announce his plan to challenge the tax code regulation that forbids tax-exempt organizations from endorsing candidates for election. Under the 501(c) regulations, churches as well as educational organizations such as Minnesota Atheists are permitted to argue for positions on political issues, but not to engage in electoral politics by directly endorsing or donating to any candidate.

Brandon, Pastor of the Berean Bible Baptist Church in Hastings, is hoping to provoke the Internal Revenue Service into an action that he can take to court to have the tax regulation declared an unconstitutional abridgment of free speech. Brandon is just one cleric challenging tax exemption regulations in a project sponsored by the Alliance Defense Fund, a well-funded Scottsdale, Arizona-based nonprofit organization that seeks to break down the wall of separation between church and state through litigation. They seem to provide the opposition legal team in practically every case that the Freedom from Religion Foundation and Americans for Separation of Church and State take on.

Religion has throughout history played a major role in affairs of state. Usually the church has supported and justified the temporal authority of the state, but in many cases around the world it has inspired insurrection and overturned governments. A constitutional government such as ours, which maintains a separation between church and state, holds a difficult line. Government confers upon religion a tax exemption in order to encourage private parties to support community work. How, though, can it prevent churches from using this government benefit for partisan advantage? The current regulation barring tax-exempt organizations from endorsing candidates was introduced in 1954 by then-Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson. But experience has proved that whenever a tax exempt organization has a position on the wedge issues that divide the parties and candidates, IRS-imposed neutrality is an empty charade.

The regulation has (not surprisingly) been ineffective. The Allied Defense Fund in 2008

sponsored another Pulpit Freedom Sunday, which generated complaints against thirty-three churches around the nation where clerics endorsed candidates in their sermons. The IRS decided that it had to review its procedures for investigating complaints, and initiated an investigation against only one of them. That solitary investigation was dropped without comment after a few months. The IRS is clearly not committed to enforcing this regulation.

Of course, an organization advocating separation must oppose politically organized churches. That is why Americans United filed a complaint with the IRS over Pastor Brandon's October 17 sermon, in which he endorsed Republican gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer and other conservative candidates. Nevertheless, I think that Pastor Brandon and the Alliance Defense Fund have a valid argument, that the tax-exemption regulations in question are a government restriction of constitutionally protected political speech. The state should guard against funding political advocacy not through regulations, but by eliminating the tax exemption entirely. It will also affect Minnesota Atheists if tax exemption is withdrawn from all 501(c) organizations, but we should have no objection as long as the law is applied equally to all groups.

**PBS** ran a 3-part special on *God in America* in October. While the program was interesting and had some appealing qualities, the exclusive focus on religion gave it a very peculiar lens on America's history. On the positive side, the program did portray some dangers of the politicization of religious fervor. On the negative side, the Establishment Clause issues that are the basis of so many court cases were handled summarily if at all. For example, in the discussion of teaching religion in public schools, *McColum v Board of Education* case was the only case mentioned. It seemed comical to me that it viewed the social unrest of the 1960s only as the context for a revival of religious passion that followed it.

*News and Notes continued on page 13*

# You **WILL** Read This Title! (part II)

by James Zimmerman



Last month, I discussed the first two of the four requirements any prophecy must meet before being considered a bona fide prophecy by critical thinkers. Those two requirements were:

- 1. **The prophecy must have predictive power** and
- 2. **The prophecy must be specific**

Let's now consider requirements number three and four:

- 3. **The prophecy must be counterintuitive.**

Like requirement #1, above, this requirement should be obvious, but apparently it's not. Matthew 24:7 states: "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom" (*New International Version*). This is a prophecy that's almost always true; when *isn't* one nation rising against another nation? More specifically, Joseph Smith, the original Mormon CEO, predicted that a civil war would emerge in America between the northern and southern states (*Doctrine and Covenants*, section 87). He made his prophecy in 1832, when the issue of slavery was already rending the nation and dictating the admission of new states into the nation. Anyone who could read a newspaper could've made a similar prophecy, especially when we consider that Smith left out the date of fulfillment.

When a meteorologist predicts, in mid-January, that there will be snow and cold winds tomorrow, no one thinks he's making some bold prediction, because it seems like the logical continuation of events already observed. It's like predicting that there will be a thunderstorm next summer, or that the Hollywood will make a sequel to their latest blockbuster, or that the next President of the United States will be from the Democratic or Republican party: such things are nearly *always* true.

- 4. **The prophecy must not be influenced by the prophet**

A person may predict when they will get a new job, when they will go on vacation, or even what year their

life will end. Nostradamus, in fact, correctly predicted the date of his own death. But none of this is spectacular for the simple fact that the person in question is not only the prophet, but also the subject of the prophecy.

Jesus, evidently, predicted all sorts of things about himself. And the Bible, cobbled together centuries after the events they addressed, makes many predictions that are later fulfilled within its pages. But this isn't any more amazing than the *Star Wars* prequels offering up predictions that 'later' proved true in *Episodes IV* through *VI*. These prophecies were all masterminded by the scriptwriters. The *Harry Potter* series, likewise, has amazing predictive prophecies. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Sybil Trelawney declares: "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives." The prophecy, annoyingly cryptic and useless until it's nearly too late to do anything about the ominous events it portends, does succeed in coming true. But we need to give it wide latitude here: its creation, interpretation, and fulfillment were all masterminded by a single author.

Wouldn't it be great if today's story spinners branched out from the bland, intuitive, non-predictive, vague convention of "prophecies" and begin to use prophetic messages that actually carry some value?

On the other hand, maybe we shouldn't be too hard on them. After all, they're just entertaining us with a bit of fiction. Like the Bible.

Planning your estate?  
Don't forget to include  
Minnesota Atheists.



# Christmas Reclaimed

by Jodin Morey

Christmas time was full of joy, when I was just a little boy,  
The Christmas tree, and family, and every brand new toy.

Decorations round the house, Christmas food and rhyme,  
Rituals from long ago: songs and tales of wintertime.

But as I grew, the more I knew and felt the weight I bore,  
To ascribe my joy, as a growing boy, to an unseen god of lore.

Without that thought, I was taught, I was just a heathen,  
an empty heart, and held apart from the joyous season.

The warm glow faded, and I grew jaded until I came of age,  
and met some friends who'd made amends and helped me turn the page.

So I resolved, to absolve the ones who'd stole my cheer,  
For they'd been burned, and also learned, from those that they held dear.

To forgive, I learned, need not be earned, but given heart and soul,  
for reasons underpin each flaw, that no one can control.

My folks forgiven, and anger driven from my heart at last,  
Now I strive to re-ascribe, the joy of Christmas past.

Not to gods, but love of friends and family drawn near,  
To celebrate how fortune's brought us all to gather here.

I picked and chose, from treasure trove of rituals I knew,  
I kept some rites, the Christmas lights, some songs and stories too.

By doing this, I won't dismiss connection to the past.  
The grown boy who lost Christmas joy, reclaims this day at last.

## Membership Report

by Steve Petersen

### As of October 18, 2010...

Individual memberships: 186 (Paper: 125, email: 61)  
Household Memberships: 42, and Members: 61  
(Paper 30 email 12)  
Lifetime Memberships: 27, Members: 19 (eight  
members have died; paper 7 email 12)  
Student Memberships: 4 (paper 2, email 2)  
Sustaining Memberships: 15, Members: 16 (paper 13,  
email 2)  
Donors: 11 (paper 7, email 4)

Newsletter Subscribers: 15 (paper 11, email 4)

Totals for memberships: 274, total members: 286,  
total for all active supporters: 312. Mail Chimp e-  
newsletter was sent to 1,402 addresses, 276 opened  
the message and out of that 37 opened the PDF  
newsletter. Our paper mailing went to 325 addresses.  
Total Giftworks list is 2314. Meetup Members is 767.  
Changes from August 2010: Memberships are up by  
41; members are by 39. Total mailing list is up by  
103: MailChimp AWE and e-newsletter is up by 31  
and Meetup members are up by 47.

## News and Notes (continued)

The *News Hour* promoted the program by interviewing Robert Putnam, the author of a study of religion in America entitled “American Grace.” This interview revealed in Putnam’s study the same weakness as the *God in America* series, a presumption that religion is somehow at the heart of everything that Americans do. When asked how many atheists there are in America, Putnam replied: “Almost nobody. In our — among our 3,000 people, we had two people who, when we asked them what they were religiously, said they were atheist or agnostic.” Since other studies show that ten to sixteen percent of Americans do not believe in supernatural gods, there must have been a sampling bias in the study that Putnam did not disclose in the interview.

### Great Holiday Gift Idea



Remember: George Erickson’s books make great holiday presents - and the proceeds are used to fund educational charities. The books can be ordered from [www.tundracub.com](http://www.tundracub.com). Minnesota Atheists’ members get 10% off of the prices listed and free postage, so be sure to mention your membership.

## October Treasurer’s Report

### General/Visibility Fund \$255

Paul Heffron	\$25
Max Joiner	\$25
Jon Strand	\$50
James Smith	\$100
Valeri Miller	\$25
Anne Hanna	\$10
Nick Karlisch	\$20

### Building Fund \$486

Bob Schmitz	\$100
August Berkshire	\$250
Vernon Young	\$100
Daniel Norte	\$36

### Radio Fund \$600

Lee Salisbury	\$100
August Berkshire	\$250
Shirley Moll and Steve Petersen (in memory of LaGretta Dean)	\$100
James Whitney	\$100
Douglas Post	\$50

**TOTAL INCOME: \$1,341**

**Current Building Fund  
Total: \$127,837**



*Donation amounts may not sum exactly to total due to rounding.*

# October Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

In part one of the two-part show, host James Zimmerman interviewed Eric Jayne. Eric organizes and heads up the south-of-the-metro bookclub. Eric gave details on where and when the bookclub meets and how many people usually attend. Eric then discussed some of the books the club has discussed in recent months, include Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* and John Allen Paulos' *Irreligion*.

In part two of the show, Eric continued his discussion of the book club. He gave examples of books the club had discussed that are critical of disbelief and atheism. Eric also explained why such books are not likely to be discussed in the future. Host James Zimmerman then shifted gears to discuss Eric's "Debaptism" ceremonies. Eric organized and hosted one such ceremony last spring and in late October and is planning for future such events. Eric explained how he came up with the idea of being debaptized and responded to some of the criticisms it receives. Eric explained that for many people it is just good fun, while for others it can be a catharsis. Eric went on to explain the "hair dryer of reason" and admitted that he does not operate the hairdryer differently depending on if the participant had originally been merely sprinkled with holy water or fully immersed in a body of water. Eric pointed out that the debaptisms are open to anyone - even if they were never baptized into a faith.

Programs can be viewed on cable television (see schedule) or on our podcast via iTunes.

If you are interested in having our program played on your local cable access station, please contact [steve.petersen@mnatheists.org](mailto:steve.petersen@mnatheists.org) or 651-484-9277.

**Cable Crew:** George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant



Hermanson, Brian Knoblock, Art Anderson and Gretchen Anderson.

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

## Cable Schedule

**Burnsville/Eagan Community Television:** Ch. 14.

Check their web site [www.bect.tv](http://www.bect.tv) for day and times.

Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

**Bloomington:** Ch. 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. and 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, Moundsview/ New Brighton:** Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m.

Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

**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.

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais**

**Heights:** Ch. 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

## FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

No one ever came to faith in Jesus through reason or by verifying facts.

-Evangelical preacher Alistair Begg, on his *Truth for Life* radio show

# Minnesota Atheists

[www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org)

P.O. Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112

## Join or Renew Membership

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$35 - Individual Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$45 - Household Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$75 - Sustaining Fund Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 - Student (newsletter by email; send copy of fee statement or school ID)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$600 - Lifetime Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 - Newsletter Only

## Donate to Special Funds

- \$\_\_\_\_\_ General Expense / Outreach Fund
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Building Fund
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Radio Fund
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Donation

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

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

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

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

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

## Things to do, Places to go: A Calendar for Atheists

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous, 3249 Hennepin Ave. 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. See front cover for details.

Fifth Sunday, Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund. Price: ~\$7.00. (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.) 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](mailto:awe@mnatheists.org).**

**To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit [atheists.meetup.com/493](http://atheists.meetup.com/493).**



Minnesota Atheists  
P.O. Box 120304  
New Brighton, Minnesota 55112

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*“It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.”*

– Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, in the conclusion of their book *The Grand Design*, page 180

**Check us out on the radio!  
AM950 on Sundays at 9:00 a.m.**