

# The Minnesota Atheist

## *The End of Christianity?*

**John W. Loftus is the author** of the book *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity*. He is a scholar who has, in his own words, “pretty much the equivalent of a Ph. D.”

Loftus will be the guest speaker at the Minnesota Atheists Monthly Members Meeting at Southdale Library on Sunday, May 15th.

The End of Christianity: Is it a dream? Is it wishful thinking on the part of atheists? The religion is irrational in its premise, overbearing in its execution and intrusive in our lives. Why does it continue to maintain such a strong presence in our lives, thoughts and civilization? Loftus edited the book *The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails*, published in March, 2010, with contributions from Hector Avalos, Richard Carrier, David Ellers, Valerie Talerico, and others. The follow-up to this book is nearly finished and is due to be published in July of this year.

The End of Christianity does not mean that we expect the religion to disappear and become a historical curiosity. Perhaps it will lose its place of privilege as more people start to examine rationally the roots of their own religious beliefs. The End of Christianity examines Christianity from an outsider's perspective with some great new articles.

Loftus is an engaging speaker and has a unique story to tell. He has studied apologetics under the



*John Loftus*

celebrated William Lane Craig, he has taught apologetics and biblical studies, he has researched theology and mythology, and as an atheist, he has faced many apologists in debate. Loftus developed the “Outsider Test For Faith,” challenging Christians to look at their beliefs without faith to determine if they are rational. He accepts the label “militant” because in his experience he has learned that Christians are not always

led to clarity through philosophical debate. Sometimes you just gotta go after them and set them off balance, and just being nice doesn't always do the trick.

Loftus will be selling autographed copies of his books to help pay for his tour of the Upper Midwest, so please take the opportunity to join the Minnesota Atheists for our monthly meeting to meet and have an intelligent discussion with one of the more prominent atheist barnstormers in the United States.

### IF YOU GO

**What:** Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting followed by Loftus’ presentation.

**Where:** Southdale Public Library, 7001 York Avenue South, Edina

**When:** Sunday, May 15th

1:00-1:15 - Social time

1:15-1:45 - Business meeting

1:45-2:00 - Social time

2:00-3:30 - Presentation

4:00 - Dinner at Q. Cumbers

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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 atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

PRESIDENT'S  
COLUMNCommon Secular Objections to Same-Sex  
Marriage Rebuttedby August  
Berkshire

Last year Minnesota Atheists participated in six Gay Pride celebrations because the attempt by religious people to deny equal rights to people based on sexual orientation is one of the most prevalent violations of separation of state and church in America.

The Republican majorities in the State Congress are trying to place a question on the November 2012 ballot to allow Minnesotans to vote to amend the State Constitution to limit civil marriage to “only one man and one woman.”

Any religious argument for denying same-sex couples the right to a civil marriage can be dismissed out-of-hand as a violation of separation of state and church.

In an attempt to build a secular case in favor of discrimination against same-sex couples regarding civil marriage (as well as other civil rights), some people have offered the following arguments. For the following reasons, these arguments are not valid.

**A) Normalcy.** *“Same-sex attraction is not normal, so same-sex couples should not be allowed to get married.”*

If by “normal” we mean “conforming to the norm” or “common,” then there are many ways in which every person is “not normal.” For example, left-handed or red-haired people are “not normal” in most populations; people of Icelandic ancestry are “not normal” in Alabama; etc. But prevalence of a physical attribute or characteristic should not affect a person’s rights as a citizen.

**B) Nature.** *“Same-sex attraction is not natural, so same-sex couples should not be allowed to get married.”*

If by “natural” we mean “a naturally occurring variation,” then same-sex attraction is indeed natural and is found in many species, including humans. But even if same-sex attraction was not natural, it should not affect a person’s rights.

**C) Changeability.** *“Homosexuals have the ability to change their sexual orientation, and if they do they can be part of an opposite-sex marriage. Therefore, there is no need to offer*

*same-sex marriage.”*

Most scientists believe that, in the vast majority of cases, a person’s sexual orientation cannot be changed and that it is harmful to even try. Yet whether or not a person’s sexual orientation is changeable should not affect a person’s rights as a citizen.

**D) Fertility.** *“Two men or two women cannot naturally produce offspring with each other. Therefore, they should not be allowed to marry each other.”*

The State has never imposed fertility tests in order for couples to get married or to stay married. The production of offspring has never been a requirement for civil marriage. For example, the State does not have laws prohibiting post-menopausal heterosexual women from getting married.

**E) Brothers and sisters.** *“If we go down this slippery slope of same-sex marriage, what’s to prevent brothers and sisters from marrying each other?”*

The same law that now prevents a brother and sister from marrying each other can be applied to a brother marrying a brother or a sister marrying a sister. Such a prohibition would be Constitutional because it would be equal treatment under the law.

**F) Age.** *“If we go down this slippery slope of same-sex marriage, what’s to prevent an adult from marrying a child or a child from marrying a child?”*

Statutory rape laws should be applied equally, regardless of people’s sexual orientation. Children should not be allowed to marry each other, regardless of sexual orientation, because children lack the maturity necessary for marriage.

**G) Polygamy.** *“If we go down this slippery slope of same-sex marriage, what’s to prevent polygamy from being ruled legal?”*

The State may determine the number of people it wishes to recognize in civil marriage. However, it should not discriminate on the

*President’s Column continued on page 5.*

## News and Notes



by George Kane

**A ruling in April by the Supreme Court** may well have disastrous consequences for the separation of church and state in the United States. By a 5-4 ruling in the case *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*, the court overturned a 43 year-old precedent that had allowed tax payers to sue governments that subsidized religious institutions.

The precedent at issue was established by the Warren Court in the 1968 case *Flast v. Cohen*. In that case, Florance Flast sued Wilbur Cohen, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, contending that spending on religious schools violated the First Amendment's ban on the establishment of religion. The District Court denied standing, and plaintiffs appealed directly to the Supreme Court.

The majority opinion by Chief Justice Earl Warren ruled that taxpayers have standing to argue that the taxation and spending authority of government is being used to violate a constitutional restriction. This decision has permitted secularists ever since to go to the courts to stop government subsidies for religious schools, churches and religious activities.

In the *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization* case, the government subsidy was provided in the form of a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for parents paying tuition for Christian schools. The Arizona legislature set up a simple shell game to launder tax dollars that were paid to subsidize Christian schools. Parents made their tuition payments not directly to the schools, but to the Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization, which then turned the payments around and sent them to the schools. The parents then were credited for 100% of their payments when they filed their state income tax.

The Arizona subsidy program for religious schools went into effect in 1999, and has been challenged through the courts since then. After a lengthy tour of the judicial system, the United States Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals finally ruled the program unconstitutional. The Supreme Court set aside that opinion, however, but not because of any error in law or logic by the Circuit Court. Without addressing the question of a First Amendment violation, the decision by Justice Kennedy dismissed the suit because the plaintiffs lack standing. The decision does not overturn

*Flast*, but provides a simple solution for governments to subvert it. Kennedy found that *Flast* provided taxpayer standing only when the defendant government spent money, but that in the case of a tax credit there is no expenditure. Kennedy's

opinion was joined in full by the usual slate of right-wing Catholics –Chief Justice John Roberts, and Justices Samuel Alito, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas.

The Court's newest Justice, Elena Kagan, wrote for the four dissenters. She accepted the view of the plaintiffs that the Arizona program, in fact, uses public tax revenues to subsidize parochial tuition. She wrote that since the program's inception, it "has cost the state... nearly \$350 million in diverted tax revenues." The decision, she said, "devastates taxpayer standing" in cases involving claims that the government is breaching the constitutional wall of separation between religion and government. She accused the majority of seriously misinterpreting, and "ravaging," the *Flast* precedent. "In not a single non-trivial respect could the *Flast* Court recognize its handiwork in the majority's depiction," she wrote.

The dissenting opinion said the majority had manufactured a specious distinction between direct spending subsidies and aid to religion through tax credits. That conclusion, Justice Kagan wrote, "has as little basis in principle as it has in our precedent....Taxpayers pick up the cost of the subsidy in either form....What is a cash grant today can be a tax break tomorrow." The majority opinion, Kagan said, allows a taxpayer to challenge a grant, but not a tax break, but she argued that a tax break is just another form of a "tax expenditure."

"Assume," she wrote, that a given state wishes to "subsidize the ownership of crucifixes...It could purchase them in bulk and distribute them; it could reimburse buyers with a check; or it could pay with a tax

*News and Notes continued on page 6.*

# Attend the Blasphemer's Ball

Here's a party you just can't miss—a chance to mix and mingle with the coolest heretics, infidels, and idolaters you'll ever meet while we revel in the sights and sounds of the most unholy entertainment ever assembled on one stage:

**Le Cirque Rouge!**

**Robots from the Future!**

**Ocean Cats!**

**and a surprise special guest!**

All this at the perfect venue: **Hell's Kitchen** in downtown Minneapolis (80 9th Street South, Minneapolis 55402)!

**Admission is a paltry \$5, and proceeds will go to a cause near and dear to our heathen hearts: Minnesota Atheists.**

**If you haven't already marked your calendar in indelible ink, here's the kicker:** May 21st is the day evangelicals, led by Harold Camping, believe the Rapture will occur. According to Harold (who blames his last failed prediction in 1994 on "a mathematical error"), his righteous flock will be whisked away to heaven, leaving rest of us to party on. As much as we'd like to wish them a hearty "bon voyage," it'll be almost as much fun to mark the midnight hour as the end of yet another apocalyptic non-event.

Be there, or you'll be confessing your regrets for the rest of the year!



## President's Column (continued)

basis of race, religion, or sexual orientation, as to who may enter into a civil marriage contract.

**H) Assault on religion.** *"If same-sex marriage becomes legal, religions will be forced to perform same-sex marriages."*

Because of the First Amendment's guarantee of separation of State and Church, the State is prohibited from dictating what a religion's standards are for their religious marriage ceremonies. Thus, for example, Catholic priests may refuse to marry divorced people and Orthodox Jewish rabbis may refuse to marry interfaith couples. However, the State may not

refuse to marry divorced or interfaith couples. Similarly, religions may refuse to marry same-sex couples, but the State should not be allowed to exercise such discrimination.

**I) Definitions.** *"This will change the definition of marriage."*

Marriage, defined historically, has included polygamy. Marriage, as defined by some States in this country, used to exclude mixed-race couples. Even setting these examples aside, the State has the right to define marriage as it pleases, so long as in that definition it does not discriminate against its citizens.

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

“Mh mr, tchnk tii, wssl cqy hs rfnyl shpnk fnsfin’r jsyne.”

-Uqrhmxn Ninyt Otwty, lnkmlmyw Tkmasyt’r rxpssi bsqxpnk  
rerhnj my pnk lmrnyh my hpn xtrn *Tkmasyt Xpkmrhmty Rxpssi*  
*Hqmhmsy Skwtymathmsy b. Gmyy.*

(Answer on page 14)

Mark your calendars for the upcoming summer freethought potluck picnics. Once again they will take place on Sundays from noon-3:00 p.m. in Columbia Park in northeast Minneapolis.

June 12 - Hosted by Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists

July 17 - Hosted by Humanists of Minnesota

August 21 - Hosted by Minnesota Atheists



## News and Notes (continued)

credit. Now, really—do taxpayers have less reason to complain if the state selects the last of these three options?”

Joining in the dissent were Justices Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor.

Since, according to this decision, taxpayers do not have standing to challenge religious subsidies, who does? No one. The court has provided legislatures with a simple tool to shield from the courts any subsidy of religion: tax credits. Bills are in the works in state legislatures across the nation, including in Minnesota, to implement the plans like the one Arizona used in

this case. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment is thereby rendered an empty shell. The only protection we have against our tax money being paid to religious organizations is now to elect candidates who are committed to the separation of church and state.

As I am writing this I heard on the radio that the Seventh District Circuit Court has overturned the ruling that the Day of Reason is unconstitutional, dismissing the case because the Freedom from Religion Foundation lacks standing. The door to challenge Establishment Clause violations may already be closed.

**Patricia Churchland** is an outstanding philosopher and scientist. In her career, she has published several articles and books of importance in the area of neurophilosophy. Starting in 1986, her book *Neurophilosophy: Towards a Unified Understanding of the Mind-Brain* was published; in 1992, *The Computational Brain* was released; in 2002, *Brain-Wise* was published. The most recent volume, *Braintrust*, was released in March 2011. In each of her successive books, she has continued to make complex concepts more accessible to the general public.



by Grant Steves

*Braintrust* is an examination of the most recent literature on, ‘what neuroscience tells us about morality.’ Her stated aim is to “examine the foundations of mammalian sociability in general and human sociability in particular. I began this project because I wanted to understand what it is about the brains of highly social mammals that enables their socialability and thus to understand what grounds morality. I also wanted to understand the variability in social temperament... Though the approach through the various biological sciences may tell us a lot about the social platform, it is not, by any manner or means, the sum and substance of human morality.”

In her presentation she describes how morality appears to emerge within the mammalian social structure – rather than from some author on high. All the time that she presents this argument, she credits the voluminous sources that influenced her writing – whether Hume, Darwin, or Aristotle.

Unlike Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, where he speaks in a more definitive manner. Churchland qualifies that “although social problem-solving may in time culminate in explicit rules, antecedent and more basic are the implicit standards emerging from shared values – practices that most individuals pick up without much instruction, but by imitation and observation.”

Churchland also confronts the arguments advanced by Marc Hauser, *Moral Minds*, that morality is innate and universal. The argument is

## Book Review: *Braintrust*

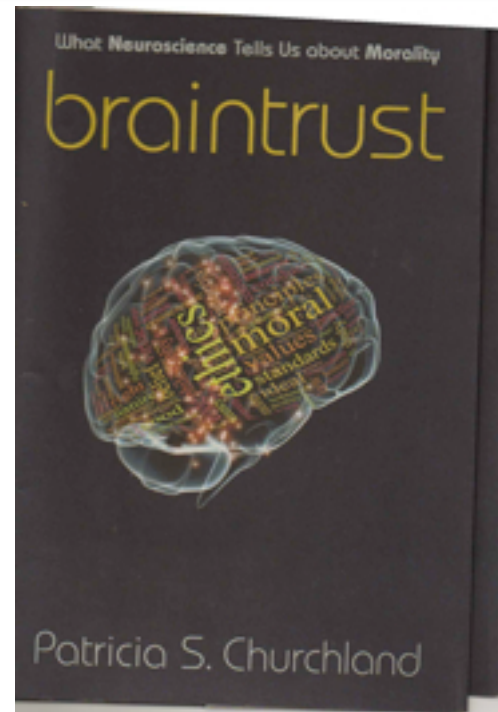


Image courtesy Princeton University Press. Used with permission.

*Braintrust*, by Patricia S. Churchland ©2011, Princeton University Press, 288 pages.

dismissed with the logical analysis of his claims and exposure of its contradictions. She appeals to Simon Blackburn, a Cambridge University philosopher, for support in this argument against Hauser. Blackburn is quoted as saying that moral intuitions and linguistic intuitions “are apparently not abundant, not instant, not inarticulate, not inflexible, and not certain.”

The third line of speculation that Churchland examines is from Jonathan Haidt, a Harvard psychologist, who argues that human morality is based on five intuitions (virtues), a tradition that goes back to Socrates, Aristotle, and Mencius. Churchland responds to his speculations saying, “Haidt’s project is laudable, the execution is disappointingly insensitive to the height of the evidence bar. No factual support ... is marshaled

*Braintrust continued on page 8.*

## ***Braintrust (continued)***

for his substantive claims about basic domains of intuitions.”

In contrast with these positions, Churchland takes a responsible stand that looks at the permissibility of her philosophical and scientific claims. At the intersection of philosophy and neuroscience she produces a challenge that says psychology and philosophy must adjust to the new research being published.

The moral value system seems to be derived from family values that are shared by all mammals, but it is the human brain chemistry that has processes that mold human interaction with other people. Humans’ morality is influenced by hormonal triggers, genes, and brain evolution. These elements come together to shape our ‘moral geography.’

Clearly, her approach is set in science, but she cautions about science, “The complaint that a scientific approach to understanding morality commits the sin of scientism does really exaggerate what science is up to, since the scientific enterprise does not aim to displace the arts or humanities. ...”

She also disposes of the naturalistic fallacy in the introduction of her book by describing the origin of the “is-ought” mantra in Hume’s writing and how this has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. This chapter alone is well worth reading, because of its careful and scholarly approach.

The above are some of the points she makes in her book. Throughout the book she emphasizes that morality is learned in social interactions and changes according to circumstance, and that the health of these social beings is related to their various circumstances and patterns encountered. Health is one of those elements the scientist cannot adequately define but know it is influenced by the institutions and influential features of this same element.

Churchland’s book will challenge your assumptions, inspire you to read more widely in the area of neuroethics, and help you adjust to the idea that morality is not imposed from a religious entity on high but, rather, has evolved with our human development.

## **Religion is Divisive, So Keep It Out of Politics**

**by August Berkshire,  
President of Minnesota Atheists**

*(The following letter was published in the St. Cloud Times on April 13, 2011. It was a response to a letter that can be found at: [tinyurl.com/sctimesff](http://tinyurl.com/sctimesff). -ed.)*

The March 27 letter “Religion tied in closely with Founding Fathers” asked why, in the name of diversity, can we not tolerate a prayer in the name of Jesus?

I wonder how many people who think this way would tolerate prayers in the name of Allah, Vishnu, Jupiter, or any one of the thousands of other non-Christian gods humanity has believed in over the millennia.

Although the exact phrase “separation of church and state” does not appear in the Constitution, the concept is clearly there in the First Amendment. The word “democracy” doesn’t appear in the Constitution either, though the concept is also clearly there.

Tolerance includes respect for one another as human beings. Religion is a divisive and private issue. Because our Constitution prohibits basing laws on religion (theocracy), we should respect each other as citizens and keep religion out of politics.

We have laws against such things as murder and theft because we can demonstrate harm, not because they are (sometimes) prohibited in holy books. What we all share is the natural world, not a belief in gods, much less any particular god.



## Highway Clean-Up

**The highway clean-up dates** for Rice and Lakeville are set. The clean-up near Rice will be on Sunday, May 22nd. We will start the clean up at 1:00 p.m. Some will gather at noon for brunch at the OLD Creamery Cafe in Rice, 405 Main Street, just west of the stoplight on Highway 10. Contact Deb at 320-253-5422, or Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277 or [achair@mnatheists.org](mailto:achair@mnatheists.org). Dress for outside weather conditions with sturdy shoes and work gloves. The latest in highway vest will be supplied. If there is rain we will still meet and discuss and plan the next date. We have been doing this clean up for several years, and have had a large enough crew to complete this in about two hours. For those driving from the Twin Cities we can car pool. Additionally, it will fun to get together with people from Friends Free of Theism in St. Cloud.

## Come Party With Us!

**Camp Quest of Minnesota** hosted a fund raising picnic last year and it was such a blast, we want to do it again!

This year, we will be meeting at the Jaycees Shelter in Roseville on May 22nd from 11:00 to 3:00. A suggested donation of \$5 will get you all of the food you'd like. Food will be served beginning at noon until it is gone. Camp Quest will be providing hot dogs and hamburgers (including vegetarian varieties). After food, we have games to play in the park, including sponge ball! We will also host a silent auction at 2:00. The picnic is a great chance to meet counselors, board members, and other volunteers who make Camp Quest possible. It's also a great way to meet other Camp Quest families, especially if your camper may be new to Camp Quest, he or she will see familiar faces in July. Camp Quest already has 50 campers signed up for this year, with a waiting list of more names. There are spots for two more volunteers; inquire at the picnic for further details.

Everyone is welcomed and encouraged to attend, whether you have been to Camp Quest before or not. Last year's participants had a great time!

**When: Sunday, May 22 from 11 to 3**

**Where: Jaycees Shelter, 2540 Lexington Ave, Roseville**

**How much: Suggested donation of \$5 per person. Donations for more than \$5 greatly appreciated.**

If you would like to bring something to share, please email Bjorn Watland at [bjorn.watland@gmail.com](mailto:bjorn.watland@gmail.com) to let him know what you will be bringing!

*-Submitted by Jeannette Watland, chair, Camp Quest of Minnesota*

## ***Atheists Talk: March/April Radio Report***

by Steve Petersen

Our radio program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 at the KTNF studios in Eden Prairie on AM 950. Minnesota Atheists is the producer and the director is Mike Haubrich. Hosts include Mike Haubrich and Scott Lohman. Original

**April 3, 2011 “Tyson Interview”** An interview with Neil deGrasse Tyson, one of the leading science communicators of our generation. As the host of *Nova Science Now*, Dr. Tyson conveys his enthusiasm and excitement for science and



his presentation, nixed with wit and humor bring excitement to a variety of topics. Tyson is the Frederick P. Rose Director and astrophysicist at the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. He hosts the Star Talk radio show and is a frequent guest on the Colbert Report whenever Colbert needs science to augment truthiness. Dr. Tyson is the author of several science books for the lay reader

### **April 10 “I’ll Take Sweden, Ja Ja”**

Greg Laden interviewed Swedish Science Blogger and outspoken Atheist Dr. Martin Rundkvist, a Swedish archaeologist affiliated with the University of Chester. He is the managing editor of *Fornvännen*, Sweden's foremost archaeological journal. Also interviewed was Yusie Chou, a journalist and broadcaster. She was raised in Mao's China and came to Sweden at age seven with her family.



music is composed, played and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. Live steaming can be done through our web page [www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org). The six month cost is \$5,320.00, each donation to support the program is greatly appreciated. To donate just send in a donation to our post office box or online at [http://mnatheists.org/component/option,com\\_civicrm/Itemid,55](http://mnatheists.org/component/option,com_civicrm/Itemid,55). All past programs can be accessed via web page.

### **March 20, 2011 “The Outsider Test of Faith”**

Mike Haubrich interviewed John Loftus. Loftus is the author of *Why I became an Atheist*, and editor of both *The Christian Delusion*, and *The End of Christianity*. Loftus will also be the speaker for our May meeting (see page 1).

### **April 17, 2011 “Mr. Deity, Brian Dalton”**

Scott Lohman interviewed Brian Dalton, the writer, producer, and director of the slyly subversive webcast comedy series *Mr. Deity*. According to Mr. Deity, he created our Universe with love and affection; mostly. This was not a simple production, you see, and there are many aspects to Creation of which we humans are not capable of understanding. Dalton's "Mr. Deity" is all too human, avaricious and behind his lovable exterior he hides a deep need to be worshipped. He is not above throwing a bunch of natural disasters in our way to get us to pay attention without "violating our free will." Mr. Deity is a funny look behind the scenes of Creation. Sure, things could have been done a bit differently. But, as Dalton asks, would that have made as good of a story?

## Take Me Out to the Ballgame ...Not Church

If you're a baseball fan like me then you're happy that the Major League Baseball season is underway. Even if the Minnesota Twins continue to have a rough season I will be spending my hard earned money at a few games in Target Field this year. It's fun to root for my favorite baseball team with 35,000 other fans. I also enjoy taking my kids to the game, eating the concessions, and watching the players through the lens of my own eyes. In the last ten years, however, an obnoxious and insulting element has soured my experience: the agonizingly shrill and superficially patriotic song, "God Bless America."

Originally written in 1918 by Irving Berlin, "God Bless America" wasn't released to the public until 1938. As World War Two escalated in Europe, Berlin changed some of the original lyrics and recruited a singer by the name of Kate Smith to perform the song on a national radio show celebrating Armistice Day. Proving that popularity and quality are mutually exclusive, "God Bless America" became an instant hit and is now identified as "America's unofficial national anthem" by the Library of Congress.

The way it's invading our culture, "God Bless America" may as well replace "The Star Spangled Banner" as the official national anthem. Many sports teams and leagues have injected "God Bless America" performances at sporting events since the 9/11 attacks as a way to somehow promote a coalescent message. Every time it's played during the seventh-inning-stretch at Twins games I notice that fans and players act like Orwellian automatons. They take the same position (hats off and all) they took during the pre-game "Star Spangled Banner," face the flag, and solemnly revere the song as a sacred celebration of our national identity.



by Eric Jayne

In 2008, one baseball fan was ejected from Yankees Stadium by the New York Police for going to the bathroom instead of attentively standing during the "God Bless America"

performance at the seventh-inning-stretch.

The Yankees no longer require fans to stand for the song after the New York Civil Liberties Union sued the team and the police department over the incident. So far, I haven't been ejected from Target Field for not standing, but there was one time a vendor refused to sell me a bag of peanuts while the song was being performed.

Occasionally I sing Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" during "God Bless America" performances at Target Field, since it was written to directly protest Berlin's song. This rebellious act may not work for all secularists because "This Land is Your Land" hints at Guthrie's own political views. Of course neither Berlin's song nor Guthrie's song are appropriate supplements for sports games. Perhaps a more effective way to protest compulsory "God Bless America" performances at ball games is to visit a local church with some friends, while wearing your favorite sports team's colors, and passionately sing "Take Me out to the Ballgame" during the communion service, and then say "that's what it feels like!"

To support the principals of our great nation, and to not alienate their fans, the Minnesota Twins should take initiative by putting an end to what is becoming an unfortunate compulsion to carelessly force an awful song—in both composition and meaning—into the Great American Past time. It's the right thing to do.

**Membership Report**

*Compiled by Steve Petersen*

As of April 18, 2011:

Individual memberships: 188 (email 69; paper 118)

Household memberships: 44 (64 members; email 14; paper 30)

Lifetime memberships: 30 (email 14; paper 16) We have sold 33 lifetime memberships, but three of our members have died.

Student memberships: 6 (email 4; Paper 2)

Sustaining memberships: 18 (19 members; email 2; paper 16)

Donors: 21 (email 4; paper 17)

Newsletter-only subscribers: 17 (email 4; paper 13)

Totals: Memberships: 278; Members: 307. All Current financial supporters: 345

The total mailed January newsletter was 263. The total emailed newsletter was 1,472. 117 of those were in a paid group and we had 415 who opened the email, for a 21% or just better than the industry average of 19.7%.

Meetup members: 876.



Giftworks Marketing list: 1,944, plus 380 in the active list.

We have 578 on our Facebook page.



**April Treasurer's Report**

*Compiled by Chris Matthews*

**Building Fund**

Daniel Norte	\$36
Vernon Young	\$100
<b>Total Building Fund</b>	<b>\$136</b>

**Radio Fund**

Geraldine Jensen	\$20
Arthur Searcy	\$25
Mark Nelson	\$200
Steve Petersen	\$250
<b>Total Radio Fund</b>	<b>\$495</b>

**General/Visibility Fund**

Meghan Kosowski	\$10
Anne Hanna	\$20
Dale Howey	\$20
Paul Gramstad	\$25
Leonard Sojka	\$25
John Montgomery	\$25
<b>Total General/Visibility Fund</b>	<b>\$125</b>

**Total Income: \$756**

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

## Spotted in Minnesota...



Minnesota Atheists members Chris Olson and Eric Jayne spotted this billboard in St. Paul, as seen from 35E South near the Maryland Avenue exit. It claims Jesus is “devine,” which only adds to his mystery. (Photos: above courtesy of Chris Olson, below courtesy of Eric Jayne. -ed.)

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*"I'm simply a nonbeliever and have been forever. . . . I'm interested in saying, 'Let us discuss the existential question. We are all going to die, that is the end of all consciousness. There is no afterlife. There is no God. Now what do we do.' That's the point where it starts getting interesting to me."*

- filmmaker David Cronenberg, *Film Threat* (February 1997).

# April Cable Report



by Steve Petersen

For our April cable program, Eric Jayne interviewed Bill Lehto on the Jesus Seminar. Bill works with the Westsar Institute host of the "Jesus Seminar." This is a calibration of bible scholars who promote and work toward an open dialog for an accurate understanding of the history of the bible and Jesus. See <http://www.westarinstitute.org/> for more information.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, please contact [achair@mnatheists.org](mailto:achair@mnatheists.org) or call 651-484-9277.

**Cable Crew:** George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson and Art Anderson.

**Podcasts:** Minnesota Atheists.org. Available via iTunes. Made possible by Grant Hermanson.

## Cable Schedule:

### Burnsville/Eagan Community Television:

Channel 14. Check their web site [www.bect.tv](http://www.bect.tv) for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

**Bloomington:** Channel 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. and 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, Moundview/New Brighton:** Channel 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

**St. Cloud:** Channel 12. Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 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.



## FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

“It is, after all, good fun to spend other people’s money.”

–Justice Elena Kagan, deriding Arizona’s school voucher system in her dissent in the case *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*.

# Minnesota Atheists

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.

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, 5:00-7:00 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

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Minnesota Atheists board meeting. Location varies. Contact George Kane, nup@minn.net.

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: Rochester Area Freethinkers book club meeting. Visit meetup.com/raftmn 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 meeting at public library. Visit meetup.com/raftmn for details.

3rd Thursday. Rochester Area Freethinkers happy hour. Visit meetup.com/raftmn for details.

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**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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New Brighton, Minnesota 55112

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"Religion is like a house of cards built  
inside a fortress."

- atheist blogger Greta Christina (<http://gretachristina.typepad.com>)

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