

# The Minnesota Atheist

## Angry Atheists?

“Why are you atheists so angry?” The atheist movement is often accused of being driven by anger. What are so many atheists so angry about? Is this anger legitimate? Do the firebrands and diplomats in our community deal differently with this anger – and how can those differences be resolved? And can anger be an effective force behind a movement for social change?

Join us as we resume our monthly meetings on Sunday, September 18, with our special guest speaker Greta Christina, who will address these and other questions.



When most of us think of atheist bloggers, three names come to mind: PZ Myers, Hemant Mehta, and Greta Christina. Greta resides with her wife in San Francisco and is one of the most widely-read and well-respected bloggers in the atheist community.

She is the regular atheist correspondent for *AlterNet*, the online political magazine with over 1,200,000 hits a week, and has been writing about atheism and skepticism for her own blog (<http://freethoughtblogs.com/greta>) since 2005.

Her writing has appeared in numerous magazines, newspapers, and anthologies, including *Ms.*, *Skeptical Inquirer*, the *Chicago*

*Sun-Times*, and the anthology *Everything You Know About God Is Wrong*.

Greta Christina has been writing professionally since 1989, on topics including sexuality and sex-positivity, LGBT issues, politics, culture, and whatever crosses her mind. She is an experienced and entertaining public speaker, who has been doing public speaking for many years. Next year, she will be a speaker at the Reason Rally in Washington, D.C.

In our efforts to “share the wealth” (of talent), we are trying to book Christina for additional speaking engagements in Minnesota while she’s here, primarily on college campuses. As we go to press, plans are underway for her to speak for the Secular Student Alliance at Saint Cloud State University on Monday, September 19.

Please join us as we start our new season of speakers on a definite high note! Afterward, we will dine at Q. Cumbers Restaurant.



### If You Go...

**When:**  
**Sunday, September 18, 2011**

**Where:**  
**Southdale Library**  
**7001 York Avenue South**  
**Edina, MN 55435**

**Schedule:**  
**1:00-1:15 p.m. – Social time**  
**1:15-1:45 p.m. – Business Meeting**  
**1:45-2:00 p.m. – Break**  
**2:00-3:30 p.m. – Presentation**  
**4:00 – Q. Cumbers Restaurant**

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Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnatheists.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.

MNA Meetup members: 939  
Life memberships: 30

**Honorary Members**

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

**Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement**

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

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Welcome Back!



by August Berkshire

Welcome back from summer vacation! We hope you were able to enjoy at least one of our picnics. We have a number of events and opportunities to report on this month:

We are very excited to have **Greta Christina** kick off our fall schedule of speakers (see page 1). She'll be followed next month by **Hector Avalos**, making his sixth annual visit to our group. In baseball, Reggie Jackson used to be known as "Mr. October," but Hector now owns that title for us. Please support us with your new or renewed membership and donations, so we can continue to bring in world-class atheist speakers such as these two people.

A fundraiser for our **Legal Fund** will occur on Oct. 9 (see insert). As we reported last month, we have filed a friend-of-the-court brief on behalf of three same-sex couples who are suing for the right to get married in Minnesota. (Actually, they have already been legally married in other states and are seeking to have their marriages recognized in Minnesota.) We anticipate our costs to eventually be \$5,000 and wish to pay for this out of new money and not dip into our treasury. An excellent story about the case and our brief appeared in the on-line journal *The Minnesota Independent*: "Couples file appeal in Minnesota same-sex marriage lawsuit" at <http://minnesotaindependent.com/86475/couples-file-appeal-in-minnesota-same-sex-marriage-lawsuit>.

After many months of heroic service, almost single-handedly planning and running our *Atheists Talk* radio program, **Mike Haubrich** is taking a break. He'll still be helping out occasionally, but we

are pleased to announce that scheduling duties have been taken over by **Carl Hancock** and hosting will mainly be handled by **Stephanie Zvan** and **Brianne Bilyeu**. **Scott Lohman** of the Humanists of Minnesota will continue to be a regular interviewer and host, as needed.

We continue to seek submissions for our book project, tentatively titled **Atheist Voices of Minnesota**. The deadline is Sept. 30, 2011. For more information, see page 4 of this issue, and visit <http://mnatheists.org/content/view/602/199>.

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) has produced a very nice, one-minute long "**Living Without Religion**" video (see: <http://livingwithoutreligion.org>). We are looking for someone to produce a similar 30 or 60 second video for us. If you're interested, please contact us at (612) 588-7031 or [info@mnatheists.org](mailto:info@mnatheists.org).

Our **Public Relations Committee** is looking for someone to volunteer to submit notices of our activities to **press and web events calendars**. If interested, please contact our Public Relations Officer, Emily Matejcek, at [Emily.Matejcek@mnatheists.org](mailto:Emily.Matejcek@mnatheists.org).

Finally, we'd like to plug the "**Project 42 Freethought Convention**" being hosted by the Red River Freethinkers, **Sept. 23-25, 2011** in Fargo, ND. It will feature speakers such as PZ Myers, Michael Shermer, Robert Price, and Richard Carrier. For more information, see page 9 of this issue, and visit <http://project42convention.org>.

New Promotional Cards Available

**Minnesota Atheists** has a new "Saved by an Atheist" card. August Berkshire designed the card and MNA member "E.Z." a professional graphics designer who wished to remain anonymous, 'polished up' the card. The cards are available at our third Sunday meetings and at festivals at which we have a booth. Or contact us at [info@mnatheists.org](mailto:info@mnatheists.org) or (612) 588-7031 and we'll be happy to send you some!

**Saved by an Atheist!**

Minnesota Atheists  
MinnesotaAtheists.org  
(612) 588-7031



Meetings • Social Events • Friendship • Activism • Newsletter  
Website • TV • Radio • Podcasts • MeetUp • Facebook

## Do You Have a Unique Story to Tell?

### Dear Minnesota Atheists,

You are invited to submit a paper for possible inclusion in a new book scheduled to be published in late 2012. The book, with the working title **Atheist Voices of Minnesota**, will be a collection of primarily autobiographical writings from atheists living in or who are from Minnesota. All proceeds from the sale of this book will benefit Minnesota Atheists, a 501c3 nonprofit organization.

The project has two goals: to create a unique outreach tool for atheism here in Minnesota, and to financially support Minnesota Atheists. As an outreach tool, the book will cast atheism in a positive, personal light, and will be something that anyone, no matter their point of view, will be able to read and find interesting. What this book will not be is a collection of diatribes against religion, or science writings. There is enough of that already out there. This will be a volume of positive, personal stories of individual lives. It will be professionally published and widely distributed, including on amazon.com. Advance copies of this book will be submitted for reviews in newspapers, journals, and other media outlets. We will also seek advance endorsements.

Not all submissions will be accepted for publication. Essay selection will be based on the quality of the writing and the impact of the story. The book's editorial board will be looking to include a wide variety stories from a wide variety of people, and so selections will also be made with an eye on diversity.

This is an all-volunteer project; a collaborative effort to help advance atheism and to support Minnesota Atheists. No individuals working on this project, including authors, will receive any financial benefit. Although authors of accepted submissions will not be paid, they will receive two complementary copies of the book and will



have a 40% author's discount available for purchasing additional copies.

Additional submission guidelines:

- The deadline for submissions is **September 30, 2011**. Feel free to submit your essay at any time from now until then.
- Maximum length is 4,500 words. There is no minimum length.
- Papers must be submitted electronically, as an attachment, to [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com).
- You will receive a confirmation email verifying that we received your paper.
- Papers should be submitted in MS Word. If you are unable to use or access MS Word, please contact us at [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com).
- Include your name and contact information in the email, but not in the Word file. Papers will be read "blind" by the book's Editorial Board.

We are also seeking volunteers to help with the production and promotion of this book, particularly with copy editing, proofreading, advertising and marketing. If you are willing to help, and have strength or experience in any of these areas, or if you think you can help with this project in another way, please email us at [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com). All project volunteers will be thanked in the book.

If you have any question about this project, submitting a paper, or how you can help, please feel free to contact us at [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com).

Thank you,

### Editorial Board

August Berkshire  
Jill Carlson  
Mike Haubrich  
Eric Jayne  
Bill Lehto  
James Zimmerman



## News and Notes



by George Kane

**I've noticed that Christians** seem to have a particular difficulty with the names of atheist organizations. When I debated at a Catholic men's club, I was introduced as the representative of The Atheist Society. I have heard August Berkshire mentioned on a Christian radio station as the president of "the local chapter of Minnesota Atheists."

But the most persistent problems seem to be those plaguing Jay and Jordan Sekulow, the father/son duo that heads The American Center for Law and Justice. Each has a weekday radio show, and each has for many days in a row referred to American Atheists as the American Atheist Association. That sounds like a minor, harmless slip-up, but it is used too often and too consistently to be accidental. Every day they quote from American Atheists' legal briefs and web site. How can they avoid noticing the organization's name?

They do seem to like the name "Freedom from Religion Foundation." In fact, they like it so much that they always refer to the Military Religious Freedom Foundation as "The Military Freedom from Religion Foundation." I have decided that in the future, I will always refer to their organization as "The Law and Justice League of America." I just hope I do not get sued by DC Comics.

**When the Dalai Lama** was in the US last month, he visited Congress. Speaking with House Speaker John Boehner and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, the 76 year-old Buddhist monk said "The religious institution, the leader of the religious, and the political leadership, should be separate." I had never before seen this sentiment attributed to the leader-for-life of Tibetan Buddhism. Since his escape from China's occupation of his homeland in 1959, he has headed Tibet's government in exile, so it is at least ironic, if not hypocritical. An electrical engineer by

academic degree, he has, to his credit, often supported progressive Western values. My favorite quote from him is "If my Buddhism tells you one thing, and modern science tells you something else, then my Buddhism is wrong."

**When Anders Behring Breivik** killed 91 in terrorist attacks in Oslo, Norway, American conservatives fumed that he was identified as a Christian. Typical was Fox news commentator Bill O'Reilly, who declared that "No one believing in Jesus commits mass murder." This is the "No true Scotsman" fallacy. Here is how it is explained by Internet Infidels in their list of logical fallacies:

*Suppose I assert that no Scotsman puts sugar on his porridge. You counter this by pointing out that your friend Angus likes sugar with his porridge. I then say "Ah, yes, but no true Scotsman puts sugar on his porridge."*

*This is an example of an ad hoc change being used to shore up an assertion, combined with an attempt to shift the meaning of the words used in the original assertion.*

When we identify a person's religion we have to rely on the person's own statements. On his Facebook page, Breivik claimed to be a Christian who chose to be baptized at age 15, and a conservative. In his political tract, he identifies with many of the same causes that O'Reilly supports, such as opposition to Islam and multiculturalism.

**Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain** made the curious assertion that communities already have the right to ban the building of mosques. Cain declared that it would not at all be discrimination against a religion, and pointed to the constitutionally guaranteed separation of church and state for justification. It is good that he acknowledges this principle, although in a totally twisted way. The problem, he said, is that Islam does not accept that separation, but is simultaneously a religion and a mandatory legal code, Shariah. Every mosque, therefore, is established with the intent to undermine the constitution. Communities that ban the building a mosques are doing so not to suppress the religion of Muslims, he asserted, but rather to keep Shariah out of their courts!

*News and Notes continued on page 8.*

## Book Review: *The Atheist Camel Rants Again!*

In his new book *The Atheist Camel Rants Again*, Bart Centre

by James Zimmerman

reprises his role as Dromedary Hump, pontificating in a humorous, pseudo-grumpy, and often blunt manner on a spectrum of theological matters that capture his attention. Comprised of several two- and three-page chapters adopted from his blog, *atheistcamel.blogspot.com*, the book is very similar in style and content to Centre's 2009 work, *The Atheist Camel Chronicles*.

The book's press release states that Centre's book offers "readers ironic, humorous ammunition against religion." And, well, it's tough to argue with that synopsis.

Centre offers plenty of witty words, such as in chapter 87, "The Invocation," where he offers a pre-dinner invocation for use by freethinkers which includes "no mandated kowtowing to any man or myth" (page 262). Then there's his response to the comment "God is Good," Centre asks, "Good for what, precisely?" (204). In that same chapter, he suggests 'a duel of verses' in which for every scripture a theist offers in support of the biblical god's love and goodness, Centre will match it with one and a half verses that demonstrate the deity's evil and hateful manner (205). In like manner, he offers an entire chapter as a rebuttal to the tired apology that "religion is a beautiful thing" (53-56).

Just looking at the chapter titles is enough to entice free-thinkers to dig in and read. Consider: "Geocentrists Are the True Christians" (chapter 22), "Anne Frank Had It Coming" (chapter 29), "'Hey, Little Suzie Is Having a Tourette's Episode! Who's up for an Exorcism?'" (chapter 37), and "Hump's Dog Explains Her Trip to the Other Side" (chapter 71), in which Centre's aged canine comes so close to death that it is able to explain what happens in the moments immediately prior to dog death. A prime example of Centre's unabashed style is on page 166:

*It took three hundred and fifty years for the Catholic Church to apologize for the persecution of Galileo, seven hundred and fifty years to apologize for the Inquisition. I'm going to guess that the thousands and thousands of victims of wholesale sexual abuse and cover-up by the Catholic clergy should get their apology in, oh...2500 CE. This assumes the Church doesn't copulate itself into oblivion between now and then.*

Written over 22 months (March 2009 to January 2011), Centre goes back to the same topics a few times, such as the Catholic stance on condoms and the creep of fundamentalism into the US government. Some might find this a bit repetitive but, unfortunately, these are issues that are not going anywhere anytime soon, and Centre approaches them from a different angle (and is reacting to different events) in each essay.

Sometimes, though, we are made very much aware that we're not reading new material. Page 296, for example, begins by saying, "Over the past week bird and fish kills have been reported." Likewise, chapter 98 commences by discussing the mass killings and attempted assassination of Congresswoman Giffords "last week" (page 299). And the terrorist attacks in New York and the Pentagon are spoken of as being "nine years ago today" (245). The date cited at the start of each chapter cues readers in to when Centre originally wrote the words. The chapter referencing the terrorist attacks was, of course, written on September 11, 2010. This, however, has the effect of pulling the reader out of the text; as if the words, despite being in a brand new book, are not current.

Overall, though, this is a minor quibble. Anyone who reads the book is sure to know Centre culled his essays from his website; after all, the back cover informs us that the book has "drawn from the best of [Centre's] writings." The book, directed to "freethinkers and atheist activists," is perhaps best read as a substitute for the erstwhile *Bathroom Reader* series: pick it up when you need to

sit down for a minute. The short, self-contained chapters are just the right length...

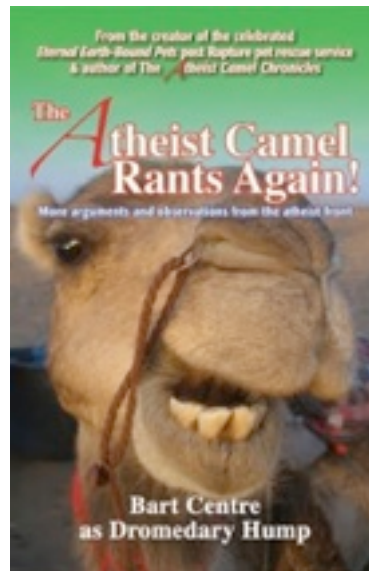


Image courtesy Bart Centre. Used by permission.

*The Atheist Camel Rants Again!*  
by Bart Centre, © 2011  
self-published, 312 pages

## Freethinkers Don't Drink Tea

We are freethinking  
atheists because we are  
not persuaded by the

extraordinary theistic claims that go against the laws of nature. We also reject religion (theistic or political) for its rigid control and fear-based mind-manipulation that shields and fosters a particular belief system. We freethinking atheists are skeptical about all unfalsifiable claims and we question beliefs, think critically about ideas, and seek out accurate information for a clear understanding of our world—past, present, and future. We are not beholden to personalities or ideologies. Our philosophies and viewpoints are always vulnerable to reason and evidence because it is with reason and evidence that our loyalty rests. It is because of these qualities that we freethinking atheists, no matter how fiscally conservative we might be, reject the recent neo-political religion known as the “Tea Party.”

The recent debt ceiling fiasco and the August 11th presidential Republican debate revealed the reckless power of the Tea Party dogma. On the night of that televised debate, candidates were asked if their opposition to tax increases is so strong that they would reject a deal that reduced the federal deficit with 10 times the amount of spending cuts as it had in tax increases. Every candidate raised their hands affirming that they would. I can't imagine a more unreasoned, dogmatic position than to suggest that taxes are so awful, so vile that it's worth refusing a federal deficit reduction compromise with a 10 to 1 ratio of spending cuts to revenue. To be sure, this is not a Democratic vs. Republican issue but as a purely rational vs. anti-rational issue.

*Note: Editorial; Eric Jayne's opinion does not necessarily reflect that of Minnesota Atheists. -ed.*



by Eric Jayne

Most policy-makers from both major parties are afraid to question and challenge the no-tax doctrine and those that do recommend some tax increases (no matter how modest) are severely ostracized. The fear and rigidity manufactured by the Tea Party faithful has made the mere mention of “tax” a heresy. There is no vulnerability to this belief because any contrary evidence or attempt at a reasoned dialogue is dealt with a hearty serving of devotional faith-based passion. This is popularized by personalities who peddle a socio-economic utopia to their followers where taxes are completely banished.

Like all religions, the Tea Party religion has a spectrum of orthodoxy and among some groups it has been a supplement to their theistic religious beliefs. While some Tea Party Patriots are strictly secular fiscal libertarians, others are fiscal libertarians who seem to subscribe to social dominionism. In other words, along with a strict adherence to a laissez faire economic theory they believe that Christians should rule the nation. Minnesota Representative Michele Bachmann is a good example of this type of Tea Party Patriot, while Texas Representative Ron Paul epitomizes the strictly secular Tea Partier.

It's worth noting, however, that for all of his apparent intellect and ability to distance himself from social conservatives even Rep. Ron Paul's freethought is shackled to the Tea Party doctrine. In spite of the warnings and overwhelming scientific evidence of the cause and damaging effects of global warming (or the more innocuous sounding “climate

*Jayne continued on page 8.*

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

Yxkgxf rug uyq cuf lgrfn cg dyef kgh jfvafwf

yjqhniacafq uyq cuf lgrfn cg dyef kgh sgddac axthqcasfq.

-Wgvcyanf

*(Answer on page 14)***News and Notes (continued)**

Although atheist groups denounce Islam for the same reasons we denounce Christianity, most have opposed the efforts of Christian groups to ban mosques, as they have done so through the apparatus

of government. We support not only the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, but also the Free Exercise Clause, which their lobbying and petitions seek to undermine. If the law is used to define permissible belief, we know that it will surely be used against us.

**Freethinkers Don't Drink Tea (continued)**

change") Rep. Paul factors out the science in order to square his Tea Party belief by saying: "Much of the 'pain at the pump' Americans now feel is due to federal policies designed by environmental alarmists to punish traditional energy production – like oil, coal, and natural gas – in hopes of making energy sources they favor more 'economical.'"

Rep. Paul suggests the free market is the only worthy gauge to monitor and deal with energy production even if science tells us that continued use of fossil fuels will have a detrimental impact on our planet. In Rep. Paul's view, scientists are "alarmists" and any tax or regulation that serves to mitigate the negative effect fossil fuels have on our planet is an unfair government intrusion that punishes the oil, coal, and natural gas industries. This, according to teaparty.org, is an intrusive government (along with "gun

ownership is sacred" and "English as a core language is required") is a "non-negotiable core belief".

Whether it's the laissez faire Tea Party movement in the United States or the communist Great Leap Forward campaign in China, political extremes (whether on the right or the left) are religions complete with an anti-rational dogma and devotional followers who lap up ideological sermons served up by personalities with strong egos. Freethinkers will not mistake Tea Party beliefs for reasonable cogent arguments. Instead, it is important to employ the same techniques used to reject all other systems of unchecked belief. Science, enlightened reason, open dialogue, skepticism, and evidence will lead us to cast the Tea Party religion onto the heap of all the other overzealous faiths. Unfortunately, religions wield enormous power and it looks as though we freethinkers have one more to contend with for some time to come.



# Project 42 Returns

by Jon Lindgren

**W**e're doing it again! The Red River Freethinkers are excited to announce that the 2011 Project 42 Freethought Convention will be on Saturday, September 24, 2011, at the Ramada Suites and Convention Center in Fargo.

The event will include five world-class speakers:

• **Michael Shermer**

The Founding Publisher of Skeptic magazine ([www.skeptic.com](http://www.skeptic.com)), the Executive Director of the Skeptics Society, a monthly columnist for Scientific American, the host of the Skeptics Distinguished Science Lecture Series at Caltech, and Adjunct Professor of Economics at Claremont Graduate University.

• **PZ Myers**

A public critic of intelligent design (ID) and of the creationist movement in general and is an activist in the American creation–evolution controversy. Author of Pharyngula, one of the most acclaimed science blogs of all time, a biologist and associate professor at the University of Minnesota, Morris.

• **Richard Carrier**

Renowned author of *Sense and Goodness without God* and *Not the Impossible Faith*, as well as numerous articles online and in print. With his Ph.D. in ancient history from Columbia University, he now specializes in the modern philosophy of naturalism, the origins of Christianity, and the intellectual history of Greece and Rome.

• **Richard Haynes, aka “Brother Richard”**

A writer and public speaker from Atlanta, GA. Former minister turned nontheist, he maintains the blog LifeWithoutFaith.com, is cohost of the highly popular podcast AtheistNews.org, and is executive director of AtheistNexus.org.

• **Robert M. Price**

American theologian and writer. He is professor of theology and scriptural studies at the Coleman Theological Seminary, professor of biblical criticism at the Center for Inquiry Institute, and the author of a number of books on theology and the historicity of Jesus, including *Deconstructing Jesus*, *The Reason Driven Life*, *Jesus is Dead*, and *Inerrant the Wind: The Evangelical Crisis in Biblical Authority*.

We could really use your help getting the word out about this convention. Please tell your group

members, friends, family, clergy, dry cleaners... anyone you can about this exciting event in Fargo. This section of the country has gone far too long without the voice of reason being heard.

With your help, not only will this event be a smashing success, but it will also make it possible for the Red River Freethinkers to host even bigger and better events like this in the future.

The website for the convention is [www.project42convention.org](http://www.project42convention.org). It has speaker and ticket ordering information, as well as details on where the name “Project 42” came from.

We have other excellent events planned for this weekend, in addition to the main convention day:

- Friday September 23 (7:00pm – 9:00pm) - Free movie night
- Saturday September 24 (9:00am – 5:00pm) – Main convention day
- Saturday September 24 (after the convention) - Free admission to moderated debate entitled "Theism vs. Atheism: Which is the More Reasonable Worldview?"
- Sunday September 25 (9:00am – 11:00am) – Panel discussion with the convention speakers
- Sunday September 25 (1:00pm – 4:00pm) – Optional Sunday workshop for organizers and activists

For any questions, please contact us:

Jon Lindgren, RRF President

[jon.lindgren@redriverfreethinkers.org](mailto:jon.lindgren@redriverfreethinkers.org)

Trevor Nelson, Convention Director

[trevor.nelson@redriverfreethinkers.org](mailto:trevor.nelson@redriverfreethinkers.org)

We hope to see you in Fargo in September!

*The Red River Freethinkers, a nonprofit, educational and advocacy group, was founded in 1997 and is based in Fargo, North Dakota. Their focus is on providing educational opportunities and on fostering the growing secular community in and around the Red River Valley area. Their web site is [www](http://www).*

Planning your estate?

Don't forget to include

Minnesota Atheists.

## *Atheists Talk: June - August Radio Report*

by Steve Petersen

*Atheists Talk* Radio is produced by Minnesota Atheists. Carl Hancock directs. Producers and hosts include Mike Haubrich, Greg Laden, August Berkshire, Scott Lohman, Stephanie Zvan, and Steve Petersen. Shirley Moll helps with radio ads. The radio program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 at AM 950. It is broadcast from KTNF studios in Eden Prairie. Live steaming can be done through our web page, [www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org). Original music is composed, played, and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. The six month cost is \$5,320. Each donation to support the program is greatly appreciated. To donate, send in a donation to our PO 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 our web page.

At the business meeting on September 21st, we will honor many of the past years volunteers. If you are interested in helping on the radio program please send a note to [radio@mnatheists.org](mailto:radio@mnatheists.org). Recent shows included:

**June 26 (#121) "Liars for Jesus,"** an interview with Chris Rodda. Interviewer: Scott Lohman, Host: Mike Haubrich.

Revision of history to modify the present is an old trick on the populace. The Founding Fathers did not intend for the United States to be an officially Christian Nation, but there is a movement afoot to lie about our basic freedom to disbelieve or believe and be full citizens. Chris Rodda came in to discuss efforts at thwarting such revisionist history.

**July 3 (#122) "Pandagon,"** an interview with Amanda Marcotte. Interviewer: Mike Haubrich, Host: Scott Lohman.

Amanda Marcotte is a feminist, atheist blogger and columnist whose views are nuanced and thoughtful. She recently noted that for all her work on feminism, her posts on atheism earn her the most negative attention.

**July 10 (#123) "The Atheist Camel Rants Again,"** an interview with Bart Centre. Interviewer: Scott Lohman, Host: Mike Haubrich.

Providing an oasis of reason in the desert of religious thought, Bart Centre's alter-ego, Dromedary Hump offers an atheist perspective at his blog The

Atheist Camel, clarifying the muddles of theists, religion and politics, belief, God, gods, and the supernatural. In this show, Bart discussed his latest book, *The Atheist Camel Rides Again* (a review of the book appears on page 6).

**July 17 (#124) "Deconstructing Biblical Ethics,"** an interview with Hector Avalos. Interviewer: Mike Haubrich, Host: Scott Lohman.

Hector Avalos, PhD, Professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University, has been deconstructing the monolith of respect that we are supposed to afford the Bible in several books and collections. Avalos' method lays out a careful and critical examination of the book itself as well as the apologetics approach that believing scholars use to misrepresent the ethics of this collection of authoritative scriptures.



*Above: Interviewer Scott Lohman, left, establishes camaraderie with guest David Paxson during the August 14th show.*

**July 24 (#125) "The Ledge,"** an interview with Matthew David Chapman. Interviewer: Mike Haubrich, Host: Scott Lohman.

*The Ledge* is a feature film that sets an atheist against a fundamentalist in a deadly love triangle. The plot and subplots examine in a taut, well-paced drama the conflicts that lie beneath in a

*Radio Report continued on page 16.*

# July and August Treasurer's Report

*Compiled by  
Chris Matthews*

**Building Fund**

Nicole Leahy	\$10
Martin Vitums	\$10
Vernon Young	\$100
Bob & Marilyn Nienkerk	\$250
Laura Hutt	\$500
<b>Total Building Fund</b>	<b>\$870</b>

**Legal Fund**

Steve Petersen	\$50
Harry Carpenter	\$100
Paul Redleaf	\$100
Rachel Wilson	\$100
Christopher Matthews	\$1,000
<b>Total Legal Fund</b>	<b>\$1,350</b>

**Radio Fund**

Thomas Stavros	\$10
James Barri	\$20
Paul Gramstad	\$25
Paul Heffron	\$25
Prudence Johnson	\$25
Steve Petersen	\$50
Arthur Searcy	\$50
Benjamin Zvan	\$60
J. Futch	\$100
George Kane	\$100
Atheists For Human Rights	\$150
Mark Nelson	\$200
Louis J. Appignani Foundation	\$1,000
<b>Total Radio Fund</b>	<b>\$1,815</b>

**General/Visibility Fund**

(misc)	\$50
Nicole Leahy	\$10
Trina Dienger	\$12
Victor Bruno	\$12
Anne Hanna	\$20
Dale Howey	\$20
Meghan Kosowski	\$20
Jim Salutz	\$50
Paul Larson	\$100
<b>Total General/Visibility Fund</b>	<b>\$294</b>

**Total Income: \$4,329**

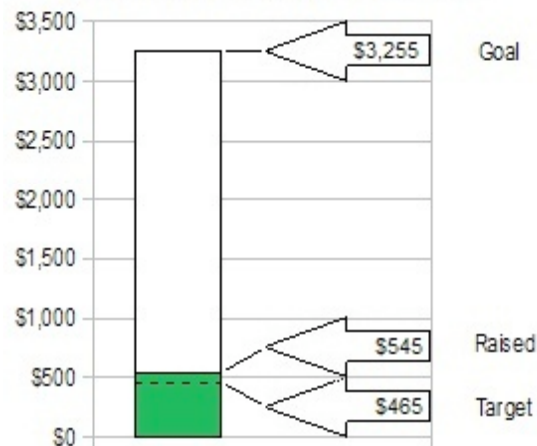
**Current Building Fund Total \$129,755**



**Radio Show Fundraising Goal**  
for 6 months ending July 31



**Radio Show Fundraising Goal**  
for 5 months ending December 31



**Radio Fundraising**

Amount raised in first 3 weeks:	\$545
Amount remaining to reach goal:	\$2,710

**Top Expenses for July/August**

Radio Show	\$1,845
Newsletter Printing	\$666
May Day event	\$390
Printing (non-newsletter)	\$266
Parades, booths, etc.	\$160

# Book Review: *The End of Christianity*

by James Zimmerman

The first thing you will notice when picking up Prometheus Books' latest anthology *The End of Christianity* is the blurry cross dominating the cover. Whether the book is sitting on your desk or in your hand at a coffee shop, one thing is certain: everyone around is going to think you're reading some Christian devotional. When reading the book in public, I folded over the cover, trying to hide the bold image.

John Loftus assembles a bevy of scholars noted for debunking Christianity in this 2011 release, including Drs. Hector Avalos, David Eller, Robert Price, and Victor Stenger. In the introduction, Loftus informs readers that this is "the third book in a series." His biography is the first book in the series, followed by the 2010 anthology *The Christian Delusion*. Having read neither of these two books will put the reader at an immediate disadvantage. The protracted introduction, in which Loftus both directly addresses Christians and refers to them in third-person, includes frequent references to the OTF. Loftus claims this is his "signature argument" and under the heading "Getting on Board with the OTF," Loftus states that this argument will play an "important role" in the book (page 9). For the next eleven pages, he defends the OTF using various arguments but, unfortunately, he never bothers to inform readers what the OTF is. Apart from defining the abbreviation ("Outsider Test for Faith"), the specifics of the test are, it would seem, left up to the readers' imagination. Perhaps Loftus introduces and explains the OTF in the earlier books in the series. But if that's the case, readers are not directed back to them in order to familiarize themselves with what is, evidently, going to play "an important role" in the next 400 pages. It is an enormous mark against this anthology, then, that the introduction – far from establishing the topic at hand – simply serves to leave readers feeling like Outsiders.

Loftus also wrote chapter three: "Christianity is Wildly Impossible." Here he again makes readers feel they're missing something. After a brief aside that an all-powerful

god could have created the universe to "all but eliminate both human and animal suffering," Loftus parenthetically notes "sorry, no room to revisit this here – after all, this is the third book in a series" (97). This is frustrating to say the least.

Though it's Loftus' goal to have Christians read this book, his chapter might be the one that prevents them from completing it. One subheading, for example, is titled "Defending the Faith Makes Brilliant People Look Stupid" (92). And on page 99 he states that what follows will be his attempts to throw cold water in the faces of believers "to wake them up from their dogmatic slumbers." Even if doubting Christians are willing to ignore or laugh along with such inciting phraseology, they are likely to be put off by halfway arguments, such as Loftus' claim that "if in our world miracles do not happen, then they did not happen in first-century Palestine, either. And that should be the end of it" (80). Sorry, Loftus, that's not the end of it. Dinosaurs don't happen in our world either, but that doesn't mean they didn't happen in 75 million B.C.

Other contributors make similarly weak arguments. In his chapter "The Absurdity of the Atonement," Dr. Ken Pulliam introduces his polemic by asserting, "unlike the doctrine of the Trinity or the Person of Christ, there has never been a consensus among Christians as to what the cross means and how it saves" (181). While I agree that there's little agreement in Christendom on the redemptive power of their favorite phallic symbol, I'm not quite certain how this contrasts to the trinity. Pulliam starts on shaky ground if he believes all Christian denominations agree on the trinity or Jesus' personhood.

Chapter five – "Can God Exist if Yahweh Doesn't?" – begins well. Dr. Jaco Gericke writes unambiguously as he delineates the nature of the Old Testament's god. In a piercing statement, Gericke notes, "in trying to be even more biblical, we all discovered what the Bible actually says and as a result lost our faith" (137). This terse sentence is sure to give believers pause. Soon after, however, Gericke asks, "how can God speak 'Let there be light,' when there's no Hebrew language yet? Did he speak classical Hebrew for all eternity?" (139). As in the above Pulliam examples, Christians of all flavors would surely jump on this – the bible doesn't state that Yahweh spoke in classical Hebrew; the bible writer simply wrote it in the language of the time, much as Gericke rewrote the famous words in English.

Another example appears on page 312, where Dr. Victor Stenger explains the problems with life after death phenomena. He notes the anecdotal

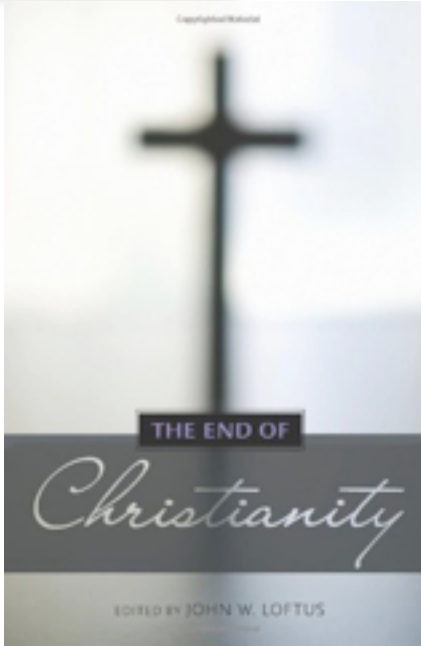
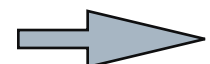


Image courtesy Prometheus Books. Used by permission.

*The End of Christianity*  
by John Loftus, et al, ©2011  
Prometheus Books, 438 pages



## *The End of Christianity (continued)*

nature of paranormal claims and then asserts “until the skeptics are convinced, the hypothesis will remain unproven.” By this logic, the hypotheses of the moon landing and Obama’s birth certificate likewise remain “unproven.”

The weakest links in the book are Dr. Keith Parson’s “Hell” and Dr. David Eller’s “Is Religion Compatible with Science?” (chapters 10 and 11). Since this is specifically a book focusing on Christianity, it’s unclear why Eller spends over four pages defining religion in general (258-262). And since many Christian denominations have long since dispensed with hell, Parson’s chapter will be entirely irrelevant to them. For those stalwart bible-literalists, Parson wastes three pages offering descriptions of hell from extra-biblical sources (such as Dante, Jonathan Edward, and James Joyce). Any honest Christian – and they are the target audience (20) – who sloughs through those pages, is sure to be put off by Parson comparing former Vice President Dick Cheney to Hitler and Stalin (238) and calling Sarah Palin a fool (246). Such mud-slinging is needless, even hypocritical; Parson’s later decries apologist Jerry Walls as “insufferably arrogant” for saying “only the irremediably wicked” reject Christ (253).

The rest of the book fares somewhat better. The preeminent chapter appears in section two: “Putting an Ancient Myth to Rest.” Valerie Tarico devotes 24 pages to explaining why the god of the bible is “hopelessly human” (155). She’s definitely the right person for the task: she’s a psychologist, and she writes with wit and humanity, supplying examples from her personal life to show how ancient Israel’s god was a mirror of their emotions. This is a god, she says, who throws a fuss in the form of mice and hemorrhoids (see 1 Samuel 6). He’s bellicose, homophobic, and capricious – just like his ‘creators.’ For an omnipotent being, anger is unnecessary, Tarico argues. She asks why He would need it: “To make him more powerful? More able to focus? To break through inhibitions or fear?” (169). Even more indicting, Tarico astutely notes that emotions have a physical component and evolved to give social creatures the ability to navigate among members of their species. She writes, “it is a testament to our narcissism as a species that so few humans are embarrassed to assign to divinity the attributes of a male alpha primate” (176-7). Tarico’s perceptive conclusion is that the bible writers simply looked at their world and made “their best guesses” (177).

Philosopher and historian Richard Carrier wrote two of the final chapters. Chapter 12 begins promising, but quickly gets bogged-down in the mathematics of Bayes’ Theorem. Here,

again, we see statements that are sure to fall flat with Christians, especially on page 284 where Carrier declares that Christians can not assert that the physics that caused the universe were a product of intelligent design because “that has not yet been demonstrated.” In the final chapter, Carrier presents his case for the natural existence of morality. The chapter has an intriguing title – “Moral Facts Naturally Exist (And Science Could Find Them)” – but likewise gets weighed down in algebraic statements, including an appendix that further breaks down the arguments into esoteric equations. Nevertheless, Carrier does write the best paragraph in the book. Summing up his arguments, Carrier says that the “threats of hell and the bribery of heaven stunt moral growth by ensuring believers remain emotional children.” He remarks that mature adults are good people, and

they don’t need religion to convince them to be good. Being good is what they already want to be. In contrast, naïve Christianity is a perfect vehicle for manipulating masses of people toward any wicked end for which a Christian purpose can be conceived. The Holocaust, the Inquisition, antebellum slavery, and the genocide of American Indians are the most notorious examples. But war (of any sort) is the most common example, as well as (presently) the use of Christianity to turn the American people against helping the poor and instead toward promoting the libertine policies of the rich (a more blatant perversion of the teachings of Christ can hardly be imagined, yet behold its success). (339)

Coming at the end of the book, Carrier’s indictment is a fitting climax.

Following the appendix are copious notes. The book, however, fails to include an index, making it difficult to use as a reference. The last page is a “Commitment Page” offering readers the chance to put their newfound disbelief into writing. Loftus acknowledges that this echoes the commitments found in Christian books (20). Overall, *The End of Christianity* is an uneven mix and readers will get the feeling it’s trying to shove too much into its 400 pages. Loftus proclaims, “with this book Christianity has been debunked...The case is now closed” (9). Time will tell if Loftus is correct, or if he expands his trilogy to a tetology.

Find us! We are on the web at [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org) and on Meetup and Facebook:



[www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists)



[www.facebook.com/pages/Minnesota-Atheists](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Minnesota-Atheists)

# July Cable Show Report



by Steve Petersen

In July, we recorded a two-part program on deism. James Zimmerman headed up a discussion with Ryan Sutter exploring the origins of deism and its basic ideology. Sutter explained the impact scientists and philosophers, such as Isaac Newton and John Locke, had upon the religiosity of the early eighteenth century. He explained why deism was adopted so readily in America, and how the Puritanical bend of colonial religious leaders even lent itself to opening the way for deism. During the second part of the program, Sutter and Zimmerman continued their discussion by focusing on Kerry Walters' new book *Revolutionary Deists*. They provided brief overviews of some of the deists sketched in the book including Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine) and offered their criticisms of the book's concluding arguments.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, or have an idea for a program please contact Steve Petersen at [achair@mnaatheists.org](mailto:achair@mnaatheists.org) or 651-484-9277.

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

**Podcasts:** MinnesotaAtheists.org. Available via Itunes. Made possible by Grant Hermanson.

**Cable Schedule:**

**Burnsville/Eagan Community Tele-vision:** Channel 14. Times vary; 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, Moundsview/ 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.



*At times, camaraderie between host and guest is just an act for the cameras, as this pair of photos vividly depicts.*

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

Anyone who has the power to make you believe absurdities has the power to make you commit injustices. -Voltaire

# Minnesota Atheists

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

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

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- \_\_\_\_\_ \$35 - Individual Membership  
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All memberships include the newsletter. To pay by credit card or PayPal, please visit our website.

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

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

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

## Things to Do, Places to Go: A Calendar for Atheists

In addition to these regularly scheduled events, there are many more events every month. Please subscribe to Atheist Weekly e-mail on our web site, [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org), and join our Meetup group.

Sundays, 9:00am-10:00am *Atheists Talk* Radio. AM 950 KTNF in the Twin Cities or stream live at <http://www.am950ktnf.com>. Contact us during the show with questions or comments at (952) 946-6205 or [radio@mnatheists.org](mailto:radio@mnatheists.org).

Sundays, 6:00pm-7:00pm Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous. Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Avenue South Suite # 55, Minneapolis Meet in the basement. Open to all genders.

2<sup>nd</sup> Sundays, 1:00pm Minnesota Atheists Little Canada Book Club, Caribou Coffee 3354 Rice St, Little Canada, MN 55126

3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays, September through May, 1:00 – 4:00. Minnesota Atheists Public Meeting. Various libraries. Business meeting, educational program and dinner afterwards at a nearby restaurant.

5<sup>th</sup> Sundays, 5:00 pm Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner. Old Spaghetti Factory, 233 Park Ave., Minneapolis. Get together for drinks and pasta. A collection is taken for the Radio Fund

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays 6:00pm Freethought Toastmasters. Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W, St. Paul 55113. This group meets the 1st and 3rd Monday of every month. George Kane, [chair@mnatheists.org](mailto:chair@mnatheists.org).

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays, 5:00pm-7:00pm Freethought Dinner Social. Davanni's, 6345 Penn Avenue South, Richfield, MN. For more information call Bob or Marilyn Neinker at 612-866-6200

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesdays, 11:30am-1:00pm Freethought Lunch. Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Bob or Marilyn Nienkirk at 612-866-6200.

4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays, 7:00pm Maple Grove Book Club. Byerly's Meeting Room - 12880 Elm Creek Blvd N Maple Grove, MN 55369

Every other Tuesday, 7:00pm Secular Bible Study. Various locations. See the Meetup page <http://www.meetup.com/Secular-Bible-Study/>

1<sup>st</sup> Wednesdays, 7:00pm Minnesota Atheists Burnsville Book Club. Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville MN 55337. Meet in the Party Room.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays, 11:30am-2pm Lunch at Dragon House Restaurant. Dragon House Restaurant 3970 Central Avenue Columbia Heights. Private room reserved. Bill Volna 612-781-1420

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays, 6:30pm Minnesota Atheists Monthly Board Meeting. Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue, St. Paul, 55113. Open to all members. George Kane, [chair@mnatheists.org](mailto:chair@mnatheists.org).

1<sup>st</sup> Thursdays, 6:00pm-9:00pm *Atheists Talk* television show. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main Street, Minneapolis. Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277.

**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).**

### ***Atheists Talk: June-August Radio Report (continued)***

society that assumes faith provides a firmer foundation for ethics and morals than does a secular, atheistic worldview. Matthew Chapman wrote, directed and co-produced the film, which debuted at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

**July 31 (#126) "The Science of Global Warming,"** an interview with Kevin Zelnio and John Abraham. Interviewer: Greg Laden, Host: Mike Haubrich.

John Abraham is a Professor of Mechanical Engineering (Heat Transfer and Fluid Mechanics) at St. Thomas University. He responded to a presentation made by Christopher Monckton at Bethel University. Monckton is a leading denialist who contends that scientists are lying about global warming, but Abraham showed how this charge is false.

**August 7 (#127) "The New Atheist Books,"** co-hosted by Mike Haubrich and Scott Lohman

Scott and Mike discussed the two big watershed books for the New Atheism: Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* and Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*.

**August 14 (#128) "World Population Balance,"** an interview with David Paxson. Interviewer: Scott Lohman, Host: Steve Petersen.

David Paxson is a national leader on the issue of population growth and stabilization and founder and president of World Population Balance. He believes that as people learn the realities about the current impact of rapid population growth upon declining global resources, they will take fair and humane action to help stop world and national population growth in order to maintain a viable planet for our children of the future."

How is it not more plausible to assume, given the untold quantities of misery on this earth, that God created the world to torture any living beings that happen to have the misfortune to dwell on it?

-S.T. Joshi, from his new book *The Unbelievers*, page 215

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