

# The Minnesota Atheist

## Who Ended Slavery in America? Christianity and Secularization in Context

Christians have a habit of opposing positive social change, until it occurs, at which point they take credit for it. (Years from now, you can expect them to take credit for legalizing same-sex marriage.)



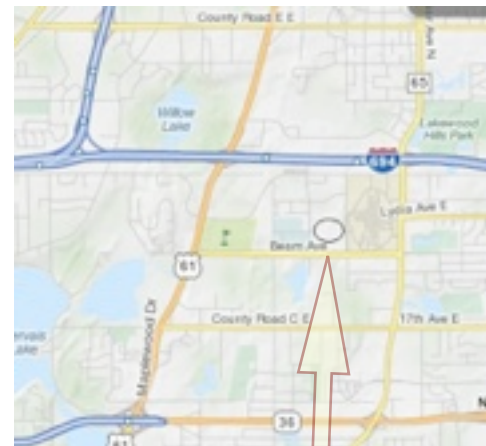
Many Christian scholars have argued that reliance on Biblical principles eventually led to the abolition of slavery by Western civilization. Our October speaker, Dr. Hector Avalos, will show that it was the abandonment of Biblical authority that had a much greater influence on ending a horrific institution that had lasted thousands of years.

The presentation will focus specifically on how Frederick Douglass, the well known African American abolitionist, represented the shift away from using the Bible, and increasingly toward secular humanism to support abolitionist rationales.

The talk is based on Dr. Avalos' forthcoming book, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship*, slated to be published this fall by Sheffield Phoenix Press, one of the premier publishers in Biblical Studies.

Dr. Hector Avalos is a Professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. This is the sixth October in a row that he has generously given of his time to drive to Minnesota

to give us a presentation. There is no one better at methodically dissecting religious arguments. This is an intellectual treat not to be missed!



### If You Go...

**When:**  
Sunday, October 16, 2011

**Where:**  
Maplewood Library  
3025 Southlawn Drive  
Maplewood, 55109  
(west side of Maplewood Mall)

**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-whenever – Dinner



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*The Minnesota Atheist*

Published by Minnesota Atheists,  
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A production of  
 Minnesota Atheists Press.

Minnesota Atheists is an affiliate of  
 Atheist Alliance International, American  
 Atheists, American Humanist  
 Association, Council for Secular  
 Humanism, and International Humanist  
 and Ethical Union.

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.

**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

**Greta Christina: A Diplomatic Firebrand**

**by August  
Berkshire**

Last month we were graced with the presence of one of the nation's top atheist bloggers and speakers: Greta Christina. I use the word "graced" in the good (non-religious) sense of the word, as Greta is one of the most gracious people I have ever met.

Greta's presentation was called "Atheist Anger?" I had asked her to combine two of her talks into one for us, and she was nice enough to do so. The first talk was "Why Are You Atheists So Angry?" and it is based on one of the most well-known posts in the atheist blogosphere: "Atheists and Anger" (<http://freethoughtblogs.com/greta/2007/10/15/atheists-and-an>).

The second talk that she fused was "Diplomats vs. Firebrands" about the different strategies atheists take. It made sense to me that after she talked about why our anger towards religion was justified, that she also talk about what we could do with that anger.

It made for a nice, well-rounded presentation and Greta told me that she might just keep it as part of her standard repertoire.

Greta considers herself a firebrand, and she certainly is outspoken, but to me her words are thoughtful and compassionate, and not ridiculing or alienating. Hers is one of the most successful, constructive channelings of anger that I have ever seen and it's a model from which we can all learn.

The next day we drove to St. Cloud, where Greta spoke to the Secular Student Alliance at St. Cloud State University about "Atheism and Sexuality." She discussed hang-ups that religious people have about sex and how, as atheists, we can liberate ourselves. Greta told me that this is the talk that is the most-requested from her by university student freethought groups.

As we drove back to Minneapolis late that night, it occurred to me that Greta had given

the right talks to the right groups. We older (past age 30) members of Minnesota Atheists have pretty much already told religion to go take a hike when it comes to sexuality. We have adopted the theme of the bumper sticker "Atheists Do It Without Guilt."

On the other hand, many of us have had harmful religious upbringings and/or witnessed firsthand other examples of the damage religion can do. Many of us are angry and we need to know what to do with that anger. So Greta's talk to us was very apropos.

In contrast, when it comes to today's students, far fewer of them have had the bad experiences with religion that older people have had. When I read younger atheists' posts about religion on Facebook, I see more ridicule than anger. I don't think young people think of religion as damaging as much as they think that it's just a stupid waste of time. (Evolution tends to reward efficiency, so that's another reason that god-belief will eventually die out: it's being replaced by things that are much more useful and interesting, like science and computers.)

On the other hand, if young people have been negatively affected by religion at all, it may well be in the area of sexuality, especially if they are from a small town and they desire anything other than heterosexual, married, missionary position sex. (For example, gay-bashing and gay suicide are serious problems in many high schools and some colleges.)

Ten years ago, when I was 42, I looked at the generation 20 years ahead of me and saw their anger, then looked at the generation 20 years behind me and saw people who didn't



*President's Column continued on page 10.*

# The Freethought Follies are Coming

## We are Looking for Singers and Actors!

by Jerry Rauser

Our Freethought Winter Solstice Celebration is on December 18th this year, and planning is underway for the highlight of the evening: the Freethought Follies! The Follies is a joint production of Humanists of Minnesota and Minnesota Atheists.



We have some great wacky comedy skits and opportunities to sing with a vocal ensemble and professional backup band. We are looking for actors and singers of any skill level who are members of our Freethought Community and would like to participate. We are also seeking an experienced vocal ensemble director. If you would like to join the fun, please contact Jerry Rauser at [jrauser@comcast.net](mailto:jrauser@comcast.net) or (763) 535-7637.

### 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 wishes 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!

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 (612) 588-7031

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



## The Rapture II: We're Still Here

On May 21st, 1988, the ground quaked, planes fell from the sky, flames roared over the Earth, and heathens repented in their last remaining seconds. Er, wait. On September 7th, 1994, virulent outbreaks devastated entire populations, continents were swallowed by the oceans, trumpets sounded... Um. On May 21st, 2011, boils... Hmm. Well, there's another rapture penciled in the calendar of Harold Camping, the Family Radio host who made the previous Judgement Day predictions. October 21st, 2011 is now Camping's 'real' rapture prediction, or at least his most current. Come celebrate this non-event the day after with fellow atheists, heathens, and curious left-behinders at The Rapture II: We're Still Here, Saturday, October 22nd at the 400 Bar. Get your tickets in advance from Minnesota Atheists for \$8 or \$10 at the door the day of. Part of the proceeds will go to MN Atheists to the fund of their choosing, so come have some sinister fun and benefit your favorite non-profit at the same time. For those who have been baptized without your consent, Eric Jayne will be taking care of that with his debaptism kit (a hairdryer) and a certificate to prove your non-religious authenticity. And for those who have been circumcised without your consent—well, you have our condolences.



FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

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(Answer on page 14.)

## News and Notes



by George Kane

**N**ew laws to prevent courts from considering Islamic laws in their decisions have been proposed in half of the states. Last November in Oklahoma, a ballot measure to that effect passed with a 70% margin. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) immediately challenged the new law, arguing that it

violates the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, which forbids the government to favor one religion over another. U.S. District Court Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange ruled in their favor, blocking implementation. Although the measure did not mention Sharia, the ballot campaign left no doubt that Islamic law was its target. Supporters warned voters that Muslims were perpetrating a stealth program to undermine America by supplanting our law with Sharia. The case has moved to a panel of judges from the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Lawyers for the Oklahoma Attorney General filed documents with the court defending the referendum's constitutionality, arguing that "(t)he measure bans, equally, all laws from other nations or cultures, including, but not limited to international law and Sharia law." Opponents of the referendum responded that it has the principle effect of stigmatizing Islam and denying Muslims equal protection under the law. They allege that "(t)he measure constrains the ability of Muslims in Oklahoma to execute valid wills, assert religious liberty claims under the Oklahoma Religious Freedom Act, and enjoy equal access to the state judicial system."

**Atheist groups** oppose, on the principle of separation of church and state, implementation of Sharia law in the nations of the Arab Spring that overthrew secular governments. In those cases, there is a real danger that a Muslim theocracy would be set up. But the supporters of anti-Sharia laws in the US

are not secularists, but the Christian activists whom we oppose on every Establishment Clause case.

There are surely no judges who, upon finding that a US law contradicts Sharia, would decide that they had to set aside the law of the nation or their state. Yet there are numerous web sites, such as [creepingsharia.wordpress.com](http://creepingsharia.wordpress.com), [sheikermami.com](http://sheikermami.com), [jihadwatch.org](http://jihadwatch.org), and [shariahinamericancourts.com](http://shariahinamericancourts.com), that claim that Sharia is already taking over the country.

I looked over cases that these organizations cite as proving that Islam is making inroads in US Courts, and found them distinctly unconvincing. Sharia has become an issue in court cases involving marriage and divorce, contract enforcement and the enforcement of rulings by foreign courts. In cases of marital disputes, courts have shown a particular disposition to set aside the judgments of foreign courts that are inconsistent with the public policy of the trial state. For example, a court in Maryland set aside a custody award from Pakistan to the father in a divorce because the foreign court had not taken into account the best interest of the children.

Probably the best evidence of "creeping Sharia" was the initial ruling in a New Jersey divorce case. The wife asked the trial court to grant a restraining order against her husband, to forbid him to harass and assault her, or to force her to engage in nonconsensual sex. The trial court refused to issue a final restraining order against the husband because he believed it was his religious right to have non-consensual sex with his wife, which precluded the possibility of criminal intent, as required by state law. The New Jersey appellate court reversed the ruling, and declared that the trial court erroneously allowed the husband's religious beliefs to excuse him from New Jersey's criminal code. It ruled that "knowingly" forcing sex acts upon his wife was all that New Jersey required to justify a restraining order. "Creeping Sharia" was overturned upon appeal.

If allowed to stand, these anti-Sharia laws would seem to prohibit courts from enforcing private contracts that include Islamic provisions, such as arbitration by a Muslim scholar. I think they will be overturned, although there may be differences between the laws adopted by different states.

## The Burnsville Book Club Discusses Inside Scientology: The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion



by Eric Jayne

The Minnesota Atheists Burnsville Book Club recently discussed Janet Reitman's book *Inside Scientology: The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion*. While reading Reitman's investigative report, many of us at the book discussion discovered the violent history, marketing campaigns, private rituals, and unique vernacular that not only contributed to make Scientology America's most secretive religion, but also quite possibly America's most miserable religion. Reitman's book was so intriguing that I was compelled to visit the local Scientology office in St. Paul to see real-life Scientologists and grab some free proselytizing literature for book club attendees.

The first part of Reitman's book focuses on the biography of L. Ron Hubbard. The reader learns that Hubbard was a successful and ambitious 1930s pulp fiction magazine writer in his 20s before he became a sailor in the U.S. Navy during World War II. After being discharged from the Navy in 1945, Hubbard adopted many esoteric mystical beliefs about the mind and body from Jack Parsons—an eccentric acquaintance he roomed with who practiced occultist magic. A failed yachting business venture, funded through money he swindled from Parsons, left Hubbard broke and depressed. In desperation, Hubbard sought assistance from the Veterans Administration which encouraged him to get psychiatric help. Instead, he relied on the mystical beliefs and practices Parsons taught him which served as the genesis of the beliefs and practices of Scientology today.

The inspired Hubbard got to work in writing a book that, once completed, he claimed would teach his readers to “rape women without knowing it, communicate suicide messages to their enemies while they sleep...evolve the best way of protecting or destroying communism, and other handy household hints” (page 22). After the American Psychological Association declined Hubbard's offer to write a detailed paper on this “groundbreaking discovery” that he called *Dianetics*, an editor of a popular science fiction magazine, enamored with Hubbard's pseudo-psychiatry, promoted as the “most important subject imaginable” (23).

Reitman then explains that Hubbard lost his rights to the Dianetics name and merchandise due to bankruptcy, assisted by a backlash from the psychiatry field and poor

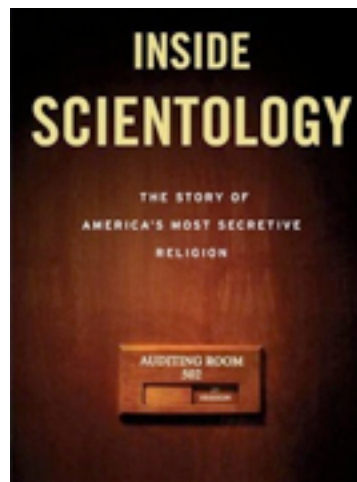
money management. Hubbard responded by creating and marketing Scientology as a way to not only reveal the secrets of the mind as Dianetics does, but also to reveal the secrets of the human soul (which Hubbard identified as a “thetan”). For the rest of his life, the professional associations in the field of psychiatry were his number one nemesis. The IRS later joined psychiatry as a co-enemy after his “church” was stripped of its tax exempt status due to evidence that Hubbard was making such large sums of money.

It was surprising to learn how Hubbard gathered church operatives to spy on and infiltrate the IRS. Reitman also goes into great detail explaining the secret sub-organizations within the church: training camps, education camps, and an overall structure eerily similar to Orwell's Oceanic society. After Hubbard's death in 1986, David Miscavige took over as Chairman of the Board of the Church of Scientology and he effectively led the church to defeat the IRS. Miscavige then enforced stricter loyalty

codes, severe punishments for those who dared to question his authority, and he ordered increased financial contributions from members. He also successfully defeated the court system—thanks to a botched coroner's report—over the death of a young Scientologist by the name of Lisa McPherson, who tragically died while under the sole control of the church's purification program.

Miscavige, being a faithful follower of Hubbard's teachings, re-introduced Hubbard's 1955 “Project Celebrity” campaign as a way to recruit famous people—whom Hubbard identified as “opinion leaders”—in order to disseminate and promote the Scientology doctrine (253). Thanks to a lot of money and resources Miscavige eventually landed Tom Cruise who was (and still is) arguably the biggest,

*Jayne continued on page 16.*



## Book Review: *Spiritual Snake Oil*

Bizarre and illogical beliefs are not limited to organized religions. Paranormal activity, Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*, and transhumanism have all made their mark in popular culture over the last decade. See Sharp's latest release attempts to debunk these and other unsubstantiated fads.

*Spiritual Snake Oil: Fads and Fallacies in Pop Culture*, is another slender volume penned by Chris Edwards (he previously wrote *Disbelief 101*). Edwards promises to "expose the fallacious thinking inherent at the heart of any number of philosophies and fads" that are "simply the same old religious fallacies with new labels" (page 8). And he doesn't waste any time – right in the preface he explains why the supernatural, by definition, can not exist.

The first chapter ("Why Debunk?") begins with Edwards' defense of why it is appropriate to examine cherished and often comforting beliefs. He briefly notes the unhelpful nature of unsubstantiated worldviews, asking how history would have been different if Louis Pasteur, for example, had spent his time chanting 'om' instead of perspiring in his lab. Edwards asserts that while the scientific outlook has always been helpful, the spiritual one has "never been helpful and has instead been a hindrance to understanding the world" (page 9, italics his). He further argues that by giving shamans, gurus, and priests the respect they desire, we foster future generations who will likewise "believe that spiritualistic forms of thinking are respectable" (10). Ideas, Edwards claims, grow best when – like plants – they are exposed to the 'sunlight' of free inquiry and uninhibited by dogma. And for the next nine chapters, Edwards does just that.

For example, in chapter two, Edwards notes the flaw in author Michael Crichton's idea that science can fall for faith-based notions. According to Crichton, "a belief in extraterrestrial life is a speculation indistinguishable from pure faith." Edwards responds "Not quite," and then proceeds to expose the error in Crichton's assertion (22).

But the book does more than just defend against attacks on science. It also responds to arguments

defending the supernatural. For instance, Crichton argues that we should

not dismiss shamans just because they can not perform in a controlled environment, drawing the analogy that many people would be unable to perform sexually or creatively if put under similar controlled environments. But Edwards astutely points out that "it is not the case that were we to ask people to have sex or paint a room with people watching that they would *fail every time*" (23, italics his). Every chapter is filled with similar succinct, logical arguments, including a thorough evisceration of Francis Collins' book *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. Using extracts from the book, Edwards exposes Collins' major arguments as another rebottling of snake oil.

Chapter 11 is "A Compendium of Fallacies." In it, Edwards defines and pithily points out the need to beware of *ad hominem* attacks, the 'appeal to mystery,' Plato's Error, and the 'Outside of Science' fallacy, in which believers assert that religion is useful because it can describe things that are outside of science. "God-believers often state that their deity exists outside of science. I won't disagree," writes Edwards, "to exist outside of science is not to exist at all" (115).

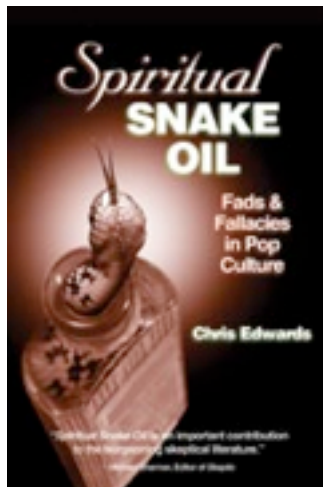
An appendix, in which Edwards clarifies model-dependent realism (the tactic he uses to address various forms of anti-scientific assertions), and an index helpfully round out the work.

If there's anything negative to say about the book, it's that it is too short. Chapter one, for example, begs for a more thorough synopsis of what is to follow. And the final chapter – in which Edwards (extremely) briefly runs through a slough of logical fallacies – could benefit from being doubled in size. However, it's certainly a better problem to have a book leaving us searching for more than having us wish it said less. Edwards debunks the fads pushed on us by bestsellers and TV talk show hosts in a deft manner that makes us more cognizant of those slippery salespeople, and the fact that he does it in a mere 100 pages is

certainly nothing to gripe about. Buy this book and allow it to whet your mind for more.

by James Zimmerman

Image courtesy See Sharp Press. Used by permission.



*Spiritual Snake Oil*  
by Chris Edwards, © 2011  
See Sharp Press, 146 pages



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

by Steve Petersen

*A*theists 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 streaming can be accessed 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.



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:

**“Marry Me, Minnesota Courts!”** #129, August 21, 2011. August Berkshire interviewed plaintiff Doug Benson and lawyer Peter Nickitas.

On March 6, 2009, three same-sex couples walked into the office of the Hennepin County local registrar in Minneapolis and applied for marriage licenses. They were denied. They sued and lost in Trial Court. Now they are headed for the Appellate Court, and Minnesota Atheists has filed a friend-of-the-court brief on their behalf. August interviewed Doug and Peter for an update on the case.

**“Atheists at the Fair”** #130, August 28, 2011. Minnesota Atheists members, August Berkshire, George Kane, Cynthia Egli, and Lynn Fellman, joined host Steve Petersen live from the Minnesota State Fair (see photo, above).

**“Humanists at the Fair”** #131, September 4, 2011. On the program were Humanists of Minnesota members Audreg Kingstrom and Mark Thoson. Scott Lohman hosted.

**“Koran Curious”** #132, September 11, 2011. Mike Haubrich was the interviewer; Scott Lohman hosted. Our guest, CJ Werleman, was not able to get a reliable telephone connection to do the interview, but Mike and Scott discussed the subject based on their knowledge of CJ’s published work.

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four planes and slammed into the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon, an event that “changed everything.” This program aired on the tenth anniversary of that attack, which provoked a whiplash of anti-Muslim bigotry. The discussion clarified that, for most Muslims, Islam is a religion of peace. The law must respect their free exercise rights as equal to those of the followers of any other religion.



## *Political Advocacy Guidelines*

*The following resolution was passed by the Board of Directors at its September meeting.*

### **Guideline for Political Advocacy in the Newsletter**

As a 501(c)3 non-profit, educational organization, our tax-exempt status requires that we not endorse or oppose political candidates for election. We also recognize that while we are a community united in support of separation of government from religion, members of Minnesota Atheists hold diverse positions on other social, political, and economic issues.

The Minnesota Atheists newsletter is published for the education and entertainment of members, and to apprise them of the organization's events and activities. It is a vehicle of our expressive mission to advocate for separation of church and state in accord with the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The newsletter should not be used for political advocacy that is not based on this expressive mission.

Issues that fall within our expressive mission include not only cases of government endorsement of religion, but also political arguments that are based upon religious dogma. *Minnesota Atheists' Public Policy Positions* identify other issues on which the board has approved a position.

Articles submitted for the newsletter that advocate for political positions outside this policy may be rejected at the discretion of the Editor. At the Editor's discretion, an article may be submitted to the Editorial Board for a vote on accepting it for publication. If the Editorial Board cannot decide whether the article is acceptable it should be referred to the Board of Directors. An article that does not comply with this policy may nevertheless be published as long as it is accompanied by a disclaimer that states that it does not represent the official position of Minnesota Atheists.

### **PRESIDENT'S COLUMN (CONTINUED)**

have chips on their shoulders towards religion. And I saw that I was somewhere in the middle, as I suspect many of you are.

As an atheist leader, I have tried to lean more to the diplomat than the firebrand, while at the same time never backing away from being a proud atheist.

There is almost always more than one way to say the same thing. As Greta said, we must each pick the style that suits our natural

temperament. We would also do well to follow the advice she quoted from Gandhi:

"I have learned through bitter experience the one supreme lesson: to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmitted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmitted into a power that can move the world."

*Both of Greta Christina's recent presentations in Minnesota were recorded. They will eventually appear on our website and on our "Atheists Talk" podcast on iTunes.*



*Minnesota Atheists awarded two Certificates of Appreciation during the September meeting. Mike Haubrich (center) presented certificates to Greg Laden (left) and Scott Lobman (right).*



*Our September meeting was well attended. In the above photo, Kammy Lyons is seen introducing Greta Christina.*

*Both photos are courtesy Steve Petersen.*

## Book Review: *The Knowledge of Good and Evil*

Kleier's latest novel takes readers on a globetrotting hunt for answers to life's toughest questions. A lapsed Christian and his skeptical fiancé are trying to uncover the knowledge of good and evil by searching for clues in classic works of art and architecture all while eluding assassination attempts from a secret Catholic order. Clipped, noir-ish sentences and short chapters, meanwhile, move the narrative along at an appropriately hurried pace. If you think this sounds akin to Dan Brown's Robert Langdon Trilogy, you're not alone; a quick look at online reviews shows that most readers, whether they enjoyed Kleier's novel or not, also find the similarities striking.

But while Brown's protagonist travels the world seeking clues for murders and kidnappings, Kleier's story goes further – much further. The knowledge of good and evil, in this case, is that spoken of at Genesis 2:17, one of the verses quoted in entirety prior to the prologue. Ominously, Kleier dedicates his book to “all who confront dark nights of the soul” (page 5), and Ian – the main protagonist – certainly leads the way in confronting the ultimate dark night, as he dies no less than four times in the course of the story. Ian's deaths are premeditated and carefully controlled; he is attempting to learn what happens after we die without having to pay the ultimate price.

The book begins with a note explaining that there were to be a number of photos, paintings, and illustrations, but that this idea was nixed in favor of placing all the images on the book's website. Throughout the book – though mainly between pages 100 and 250 – readers come across superscript numbers corresponding to images on the website. The publishers recommend not viewing “the images prematurely” (9). This is frustrating for a number of reasons; primarily that readers are not likely to be within arm's distance of a computer while reading all 416 pages. Also, since the webpage contains small icons of each image, it's nearly impossible to not view the images prematurely. Don't worry, though, it's perfectly okay if you never visit the website; the images, though they enhance the narrative, are not critical to the story.

Religion is on display here with all its shadowy secrets and illogical claims. Early in the story, for example, we learn that Ian believes his worst sin was

by James Zimmerman

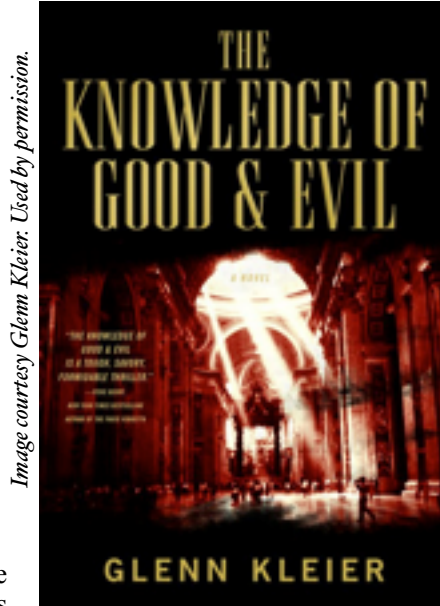


Image courtesy Glenn Kleier. Used by permission.

*The Knowledge of Good and Evil*  
by Glenn Kleier, ©2011  
TOR Books, 416 pages

asking a man on death row to appear to him after death as proof of the afterlife (54). Soon after, while looking across a hilly landscape, Ian asks, “Why does a God who creates the majesty of nature allow it to be destroyed by a tornado? Why create the miracle of human life, then allow it to be cruelly snuffed out?” His priest responds with typical stupidity: “These are unanswerable questions, best left unasked” (55). Pressing harder than most parishioners dare, Ian snaps back that such an answer makes no sense: why would God give humans the ability to think critically but then refuse to allow us to even ask our most pressing questions?

Ian's fiancée, Angela, meanwhile, is a lousy non-believer. Along with Ian, she is co-host of a television show that debunks supernatural claims. But when Ian points out

that they've escaped assassination attempts four times, arguing “you have to admit, at some point we cross the line from luck to miracle, right?” Angela pauses, realizing she has no criteria for miracles. (245). Later, Angela reflects on recent events: If the ultimate reality they seek is “truly able to end hatred and strife around the world, it was priceless.” Angela finds herself “Wanting to Believe” (297, capitalization Kleier's).

After dozens of brief chapters, it comes as no surprise that Ian finally succeeds in tapping into the secrets of Christianity's heaven and hell. But don't be put off by this validation of Catholicism: Kleier's descriptions are thrilling, edge-of-your seat tales, and he paints the afterlife in all the morbid, monotonous, monstrous ways the Bible and church doctrine suggest. After passing through limbo – where Ian meets up with a former serial murderer – he descends to hell searching for his parents who, we are told, have been consigned to the pits of Hades for having given their lives to save their son (that's right – sacrificing your life, even if it's to save the life of your child, is portrayed as the worst possible offense against the sacredness of life).

While entering hell, Ian encounters a former professor of literature, who confesses his sin was that he viewed the

*Book review continued on page 12.*

## Letter to the Editor

by **Robert Rozanski**

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

**T**he *Minnesota Atheist* was right to put a disclaimer before Eric Jayne's "Freethinkers Don't Drink Tea" opinion article (September issue, page 8). Partisan political discussions should not be a part of our organizations mission, but if they are I am happy to participate.

Mr. Jayne exudes a rather narrow and predictable political bias with more than a tinge of intolerance.

The people I meet at organized atheist activities are almost exclusively "left-liberal". It seems an "article of faith" that anyone who attends these events is assumed to fit within this paradigm. I often hear the recitation of the catechism of acceptable social and political positions that make one an initiate. I shudder to see my fellow atheists sniffing in superiority. It's similar to the wink and nod we see Perry and Bachmann give their evangelical brothers and sisters. For me the same spine tingling discomfort accompanies both of these knowing assumptions of shared "code" and righteousness.

What emerges is the social comfort of package deal worldviews. Atheists must be left-liberal democrats with noble motives and compassion. Free market advocates must be saber rattling religious social conservatives aching to persecute the poor and minorities. This is so much easier. The world makes sense and we can stay in our comfort zones.

I have been to Tea Party events. They are not the monolithic, troglodyte infested riots portrayed by Mr. Jayne. And they are not all Republicans.

About the only thing held in common is advocacy of less government and fiscal constraint. However, the Tea Party began as a populist, grass roots, decentralized movement and has experienced the co-opting of their "brand" by

self-serving Republican politicians and social conservatives (Surprise!) who manipulate content for their own purposes. (The so-called "Tea Party Express" that Bachmann uses as a backdrop is just the GOP in drag.) Democrats step up the rhetoric and call them racist, black lynching, sons of bitches that they want to send straight to hell. This is not exactly well-reasoned debate. Mr. Jayne joins in and compares this group with the Great Leap Forward and declares it a religion, which in our circles is enough, using the "code", to automatically inspire our knee jerk derision and render them unworthy of further consideration.

The net result is that the Republicans kill the Tea Party, shunning social liberals and freethinkers while atheists chase away economic conservatives.

There is a lot in Mr. Jayne's article with which one can take issue. He, along with the rest of us, should look into the mirror just a little before spewing such self-righteous rhetoric and attempting to demonize the "other".

After all many global warming zealots, to use Mr. Jayne's words, hold a "non-negotiable core belief" with an "anti-rational dogma and devotional followers who lap up ideological sermons served up by personalities with strong egos." Al Gore comes to mind.

Maybe we could all benefit from sipping a little tea as a nice change from drinking the Kool-Aid.

*(See page 10 for Minnesota Atheists' policy on political advocacy in this newsletter. -ed.)*

## Knowledge of Good and Evil (continued)

bible merely as another piece of literature. He also meets up with a man, condemned for his doubts, who complains, "St. Thomas himself had doubts! An *apostle* who Knew Christ *personally*. ...And here we are, two thousand years removed, nothing to go on but a book of ambiguous, secondhand Scripture?" (330). Ian responds that it was a test of faith, and the professor argues, "which faith? Ten thousand religions in the world, each

claiming to be right!" (330). Kleier's work of fiction thus performs a fascinating feat: it does not assert that religious dogma is false, merely that, if it is true, then we have much, much more to fear when we die than if we believe in nothing at all...

# September Treasurer's Report

**Building Fund**

Vernon Young	\$200
<b>Total Building Fund</b>	<b>\$200</b>

**Legal Fund**

Patricia Bianconi	\$10
Paul Gramstad	\$25
Dean Borghorst	\$50
Jerry Rauser	\$50
Jim Salutz	\$50
Tim Traynor	\$50
R. Hewetson	\$75
Steve Petersen	\$100
Nathan Curland	\$250
<b>Total Legal Fund</b>	<b>\$660</b>

**Radio Fund**

5th Sunday Fundraiser	\$48
John Lindlan	\$25
Benjamin Zvan	\$40
<b>Total Radio Fund</b>	<b>\$113</b>

**General/Visibility Fund**

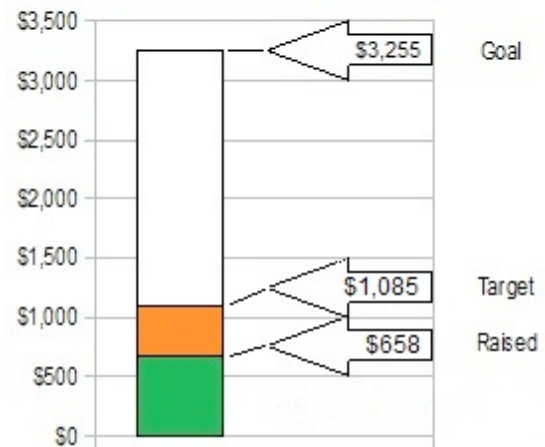
(anonymous)	\$10
Arthur Schunk, Jr.	\$5
Joe Crump	\$6
Dale Howey	\$10
Meghan Kosowski	\$10
Justine Hartz	\$12
Timothy O'Neill	\$15
Michelle Tjernagel	\$36
August Berkshire	\$250
<b>Total General/Visibility Fund</b>	<b>\$354</b>

**Total Income:** **\$1,327**

**Current Building Fund Total** **\$129,955**

*Compiled by  
Chris Matthews*

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



Amount Raised in first 7 weeks: \$658  
 Amount Remaining to Reach Goal: \$2,597

**Top Expenses for September**

Radio Show	\$820
Newsletter Printing	\$680
Meetings and Picnics	\$610



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

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)

# September Cable Show Report



by Steve Petersen

For the September programs George Kane interviewed Todd Torgkelson. The first program was on Ghost Stories. Todd has spent most of his adult life first attempting to prove ghosts were real and when the facts proved otherwise Todd became a skeptic and a debunker of ghost proponents. The second was a review of activities of the Minnesota Skeptics, who can be found on Meet Up.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, or have an idea for a program please contact Steve Petersen at [achair@mnatheists.org](mailto:achair@mnatheists.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 Television:** 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.



FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

Design must be proved before a designer can be inferred.-Percy Bysshe Shelley

# 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

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, 1:00pm-4:00pm. Minnesota Atheists Public Meeting. Various libraries. Business meeting, educational program and dinner afterwards at a nearby restaurant.

5<sup>th</sup> Sundays, 5:00pm 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, 8605 Lyndale Avenue South, Bloomington, 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).**

### Inside Scientology (continued)

most recognizable celebrity in America. Although she doesn't get into it too much, Reitman should satisfy your appetite for salacious celebrity gossip as she explains how Miscavige contributed to breaking up Cruise and Nicole Kidman as well as his part in Cruise's wedding to Katie Holmes.

The book concludes with the current influence the mainline church has throughout the world as well as the current circumstances and sentiments of recently defected Scientologists who either left Hubbard's teachings completely or who started their own denomination of Scientology divorced from Miscavige's control.

As mentioned earlier, I visited the local Scientology office in St. Paul for some real-life interaction. Located downtown on the skyway level of the First Bank Building, the first thing I noticed was a table displaying Dianetics books, audio books, pamphlets, and posters. The rest of the room was adorned with promotional posters depicting Hubbard's books and smiling faces hovering over captions celebrating Scientology. A young man behind a desk greeted me and asked if he could help me. I was then greeted by an older man and a middle-

aged woman. All were extraordinarily friendly and asked how they could help. I was honest and told them I was interested in collecting free stuff to hand to people in the atheist book club. They gave me a bag and filled it up with complimentary DVDs, booklets, pamphlets, and specialized personality quizzes. The woman adamantly told me to stay away from all websites and information pertaining to Scientology except for scientology.org and dianetics.org. I kindly thanked her for the information and she encouraged me to come back with friends for a free introductory session. Not surprisingly, there were very few at the book club discussion interested in her offer when I brought it up. Those who were interested wanted to go just for fun.

Although Scientology has some violent and scary elements, and it's completely detrimental to those in need of mental health therapy, I deeply appreciated the helpful Scientologists at the St. Paul office. They truly enhanced the Burnsville book discussion that, to be honest, was not very kind to their beliefs. If you're interested in joining our book discussions please visit the Minnesota Atheists Meetup page for more information. We meet at 7pm the first or second Wednesday of every month at the Davanni's on Country Road 11 and Country Road 42.

“It would be more consistent with the true interests of man, that he should be destitute of all theological ideas, than that he should yield to the reception of such incoherent and unjust opinions of the divine character. Atheism is far preferable to that theology which includes folly, cruelty, and ferocious fanaticism.”

-Elihu Palmer, in his 1801 book *Principles of Nature*

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