

The Minnesota Atheist

February Public Meeting: Darwin, Evolutionary Biology, and Race

Anti-science and creationist rhetoric, coming from organizations like the Discovery Institute, often paints Darwin as handmaiden to the Nazis and founder of racist biology. The eugenics movement of the early twentieth century is uncritically melded with Darwin's writings that touched on race, and the genetic determinism of certain aspects of modern biology is uncritically melded with Darwinian theories.

In this talk, Greg Laden will address Darwin's racism (or lack thereof) and explore the relationship between concepts of race and racism and evolutionary biology of Darwin's day as well as that of the twenty-first century.

Darwin was a nineteenth century gentleman who benefited greatly from his position in a world colonial empire, but it was his exploration of that world that led him away from religious dogma and soured him on certain racist concepts. He was the founder of much of the theory that was later to be used in rather nefarious ways, but those uses were never based on good biology. This talk will directly address the relationship between modern biology and modern race theory.

Greg writes and teaches about anthropology, race and racism, the biology of gender, evolution, human evolution, nature, birds, and open source operating systems. He is an active member of the skeptics community and an unabashed progressive liberal. He

often interviews guests for Minnesota Atheists' *Atheists Talk* radio program.

His website is gregladen.com and he blogs at scienceblogs.com/gregladen and freethoughtblogs.com/xblog. He also writes an article every month for 10000birds.com.

After the meeting, we will dine at nearby Panda Garden Buffet. Please join us!



If You Go...

When:

Sunday, February 19, 2012

Where:

**Roseville Library
2180 Hamline Avenue
Roseville, 55113**

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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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: 1,029

Life memberships: 30

Honorary Members

Hector Avalos, PhD
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

Marry Me Minnesota



by August
Berkshire

Several years ago, three same-sex couples, collectively known as the organization “Marry Me Minnesota,” went to court in Hennepin County to apply for marriage licenses. They were refused.

They then went to Minnesota District Trial Court, suing for the right for same-sex couples to get married in Minnesota and for their own marriages, which had been legally obtained outside of Minnesota (in Vermont, Iowa, and Canada), to be recognized as valid in our state. They lost their case.

Then they went to the Minnesota Appeals Court last year. It was at this point that Minnesota Atheists, which had been following the case, stepped in, becoming the *only* organization to file a friend-of-the-court brief on their behalf.

The Appeals Court handed down its decision on January 23, 2012. Below, items in quotes are excerpts from that decision. (The entire ruling can be found at <http://www.mncourts.gov/opinions/coa/current/opa110811-012312.pdf>.) My opinions are in brackets and italics and have my initials.

In short, the Appeals Court ruled that it was proper to sue Hennepin County but not the State of Minnesota, though the appellants should have also sued the Attorney General; the appellants’ freedom of religion was not violated; but the rest of the case will be sent back to the District Trial Court to be re-judged using different standards. This last point was what the appellants had wanted, so they are considering this ruling to be a victory. So far so good! We will continue to help them to win their freedom from religion and to have civil same-sex marriage legalized in Minnesota.

• **“We affirm the district court’s determination that the state is not a proper party...” [to the lawsuit - AB]**

“...the attorney general must be served and is entitled to be heard. But the state’s participation or degree of involvement is discretionary with the state.”

“The state does not issue marriage licenses. Thus, while the state was entitled to be heard because there is a constitutional challenge, it was within the state’s discretion whether to exercise that right. The district court, therefore, appropriately dismissed the state.”

[It is often a legal peculiarity who should and should not be the proper parties to be sued. In this case, both Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota were sued. But the Appeals Court decided that the State is not a proper party – though the State was free to enter into the case if it wanted to (which it

did not). On the other hand, the Attorney General is a proper party. So, no doubt as this case proceeds, the Minnesota Attorney General will be added as a defendant. - AB]

• **“...we affirm the district court’s determination that MN DOMA does not violate the... freedom-of-association provisions of the Minnesota Constitution.”**

“We next address appellants’ argument that MN DOMA violates their freedom-of-conscience rights under the Minnesota Constitution, claiming that they are not able to fully exercise their religion because even if they marry in a church, the state does not recognize their marriages.”

“... the district court then determined that ‘[t]he State’s choice to recognize opposite-sex marriages performed in churches, but not same-sex marriages is a decision within the purview of the State’s power to prohibit certain marriages without unconstitutionally interfering in religious freedoms.’ ”

“The district court’s determination that appellants’ beliefs are sincere is not challenged. The issue is whether the state action – the prohibition of same-sex marriage – burdens that belief. At least one of the three couples has been married in a church and there is no evidence that the state’s failure to recognize same-sex marriages interferes with appellants engaging in a religious marital ceremony. Thus, the district court did not err in determining that the statute does not violate appellants’ freedom-of-conscience rights.

[Minnesota Atheists agrees with this analysis. The problem is not that people can’t have private religious ceremonies, it’s that the State should not be basing any of its laws on religion. What we pointed out in our friend-of-the-court brief was that laws that discriminate against same-sex marriage are theocratic in nature and that there is no defensible secular basis for these laws. - AB]

• **“But because the district court inappropriately dismissed the matter at this early stage of litigation, we reverse and remand the remaining claims.”**

“...the district court erred in dismissing appellants’ equal-protection, due-process, and freedom-of-

President’s Column continued on back page.

Atheist Book Project Update

by Bill Lehto



A*theist Voices of Minnesota: an Anthology of Personal Stories* is on schedule for a September 2012 release. It is shaping up to be a fascinating and diverse collection of atheist experiences and perspectives, all written by atheists living in or from Minnesota. The book, to be published by Freethought House, will be a unique outreach tool for atheism here in Minnesota, which will both cast atheism in a positive light, and be interesting for anyone to read no matter their point of view.

This is a truly collaborative and entirely volunteer effort. All net proceeds from this book will go to support Minnesota Atheists, with authors, editors, designers, and other volunteers receiving no financial benefit. Thank you to everyone who is helping with this project, and to everyone who sent in submissions. Although we were not able to accept every submission for publication, we appreciated them all.

We hope all of you will actively support and promote this book when it is released in the fall. We will keep you updated.

Proposed MNA Bylaws Change

The following change to Minnesota Atheists' bylaws, Article II was proposed at a recent board meeting. We will vote to approve or deny the change at our February meeting (see page 1).

ARTICLE II - LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE, DUTIES OF DIRECTORS

SECTION 1. LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The leadership of this organization shall consist of a board of directors encompassing the following positions: president, associate president, chair, associate chair, secretary, treasurer and up to three directors-at large. (Revised October 18, 1998 and January 21, 2007.) The president, chair, secretary and treasurer shall be authorized to sign checks against the organization's

account for expenses approved by the board of directors. (Revised October 18, 1998.) (January 21, 2007)

Change the last sentence to read: The president, chair, secretary and treasurer, or any other elected member of the board of directors as set by a corporate banking resolution, shall be authorized to sign checks against the organization's account for expenses approved by the board of directors. (Revised October 18, 1998) (January 21, 2007)

The rationale for this change is: As a small organization the almost yearly change in officers causes difficulties in changing our corporate banking resolution. This would make the payment of our bills easier if board members change positions from year to year. This is more of a change for administrative purposes than anything else. The members' assets are still fully under control of the board and only an elected board member would be authorized to sign checks.



Here is the only testable prediction that can be made using the god hypothesis: I predict that whenever science doesn't currently have an explanation for something, that we can say, "god did it" and you won't be able to disprove it.
-August Berkshire

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES' STATEMENTS

Nominations for the Minnesota Atheists board of directors were held during the business portion of our 15 January meeting. Elections will be held during the business portion of our 19 February 2012 meeting.

Candidates' statements are below.



August Berkshire — Nominee for President

We're starting off the year with a bang, with a positive Appellate Court decision on the case we filed a friend-of-the-court brief in, and two billboards in the Twin Cities that have garnered us a lot of press. The more our organization grows, the more the job of the president becomes a facilitator of other members' good ideas. I feel I am part of a team of leaders that extends beyond the board of directors. I am happy to do what I can to continue making Minnesota Atheists more visible, have current members become more active, gain more new members, and encourage new leaders to step forward. Due to term limits, this is the last year in a row that I can be president, and I will do my best to help us have another great year!



Eric Jayne — Nominee for Associate President

It has been a pleasure to serve as a Director-at-Large on the Minnesota Atheists board this past year. I liked being on the board so much that I'm running for Associate President this year! In 2011 I organized de-baptisms, monthly book clubs, an interesting tour of the new Church of Scientology building (followed by much needed cocktails), a live theater event, gift donations to Children's Hospital of Minnesota, the billboard campaign, and I helped MNA to successfully join the Volunteers Beyond Belief program. In 2012 I will continue to organize events and help with board decisions. I will also make myself available to interested MNA members who want to become leaders and organizers for community volunteering and other events. Plus, if you vote for me, I will wash your car! Okay, forget that part about me washing your car. But I hope that you'll vote for me anyway.



Heather Hegi — Nominee for Chair

I'm originally from rural Nebraska and moved to Minnesota in 2009 to further my career goals, but it didn't take me long to start attending atheist events and become an active member in Minnesota Atheists. I find MNA to be an extremely important organization in a day in which atheists are still ostracized and political candidates are elected on faith based ideals. In this group, non-believers can find community, intelligent discussion, and a way to promote their ideals to build tolerance in others; all attributes which I prize highly. I would like to see this group continue making the progress it has been, extend its reach, and continue on the right course. I am honored and excited to have been nominated to run for chair.



Robin Raianiemi — Nominee for Associate Chair No statement given.



Christopher Matthews — Nominee for Treasurer

I am just completing my first year as Treasurer of Minnesota Atheists, and I look forward to serving the organization in this role again in the coming year. In the past year, besides learning to love Quicken, I've been proud to work with members and the board to achieve some great goals. We clearly have more work to do and 2012 looks to be very interesting. I plan to put my natural non-people skills to good use again by making sure every number gets where it's supposed to be in a timely manner. In other words, I'm glad to have this opportunity to help Minnesota Atheists again, and will do so to the best of my ability.



Rick Rohrer — Nominee for Secretary

I would like to continue to serve Minnesota Atheists as its Secretary. I have held this position for two years. I consider taking the minutes at the Board meetings and responding to e-mail inquiries to be important functions, and I am pleased to be able to do them in support of Minnesota Atheists. In addition, I consider my duties as an officer of the organization to be equally important. Together with the rest of the Board, I will work for the good of the organization, managing our resources wisely and moving us in a positive direction.



Caroline Brunner — Nominee for Director-at-large

I have been an atheist all my life, but other than my family, never met anyone who did not believe in some sort of god. The first atheist event I attended was a pub crawl nearly four years ago and have been active in many events since then. I decided it was time to finally give back to the organization that provides vast support to individuals who do not believe in myths and superstitions. MN Atheists provides such an important role to the atheist community. Many people work countless hours organizing the lectures, Meetups, newsletters, radio and TV programs and many other functions enjoyed by atheists in this community. It's encouraging to see increasing numbers of people attend these gatherings. Hopefully there will be a day when science and reason will replace irrational belief of the supernatural world.

See page six for remaining statements.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANDIDATES' STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

**George Kane — Nominee for Director-at-large**

During my 16 years of membership I have served Minnesota Atheists in a variety of roles. I have served on the board of directors for 14 years, eight of those as secretary, but also including a term as president and two years as chair. My other service for the organization includes a variety of outreach beyond our modest community. I am technical director on *Atheists Talk* cable TV as well as a frequent interviewer. I write the News and Notes column on church/state separation issues, the cryptogram and other articles as needed for the *Minnesota Atheist* newsletter. In 2000 I started a Freethought Toastmasters Club in Saint Paul, the second Toastmasters Club in the nation formed especially for the development of Freethinkers. I have been the organizer for many social events such as the spaghetti dinners. Every Friday I send out Atheist Weekly E-mail, which I began over a decade ago.

**Steve Petersen — Nominee for Director at Large**

I am a founding member and have served the membership in a variety of positions on the board and as a volunteer. My basic interests have not changed from day one, which is to enable atheists to be an accepted part of the community. To accomplish this, MNA has worked on being a visible and public group of atheists. In the past few years our ability to be part of the community has been easier because of the social network of communications, and MNA has an important role as activity facilitator. We pay the underlining cost of the *Atheists Talk* radio and TV programs, Meet Up, AWE system, bring in speakers, pay for picnic space, meeting locations, and at the same time we put forth most of these events as free events through the generous support of our members.

Without continued indoctrination, all but the vaguest of religious beliefs would die out. We could still have people who call themselves "spiritual" or who believe that "there s got to be more to life than this" or that "there s something out there." However, it might take quite awhile for a science fiction writer to dream up another dying-and-resurrecting three-part god, and even then we can t be sure that anyone would mistake it for something real. ~ August Berkshire

Minnesota Atheists Billboards



Two Minnesota Atheists cosponsored billboards were installed in the Twin Cities last month, one in St. Paul and one in Minneapolis. The billboard pictured above is on Washington Avenue in downtown Minneapolis. Thanks to Lynn Fellman for submitting this photo.

News and Notes



George Kane

The Supreme Court opened the new year by issuing a landmark ruling on the separation of Church and State. In a unanimous ruling in the case *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, SCOTUS found for the first time that the Constitution requires a “ministerial exception” that protects the personnel decisions of churches and their schools from

interference from the government and its courts.

The case began in 2004 when Cheryl Perich took a medical leave from her position as a teacher at the Hosanna Tabor Lutheran School for a chronic illness. When her leave was over the school did not allow her to return to work, so Perich claimed a violation of her rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission affirmed Perich’s claim, so the church sued. After the school lost in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, the Supreme Court agreed to take up the case.

Lower courts have long recognized a ministerial exception, but this ruling extends this shield to teachers at parochial schools. It does not, however, define exactly which teachers are “ministers.” The Appeals Court ruled that most of Perich’s work involved teaching secular subjects such as reading and math, and only 45 minutes of her school day involved religious activities such as chapel services. The majority opinion by Chief Justice Roberts held that the decision about her employment “is the church’s alone.” A concurring opinion by Justices Alito and Kagan held that the application of a ministerial exemption “should apply to any ‘employee’ who leads a religious organization, conducts worship services or important religious ceremonies or rituals, or serves as a messenger or teacher of its faith.” The danger in this ruling is that parochial schools might now start including some ritual observance to the work of all teachers, and thereby deprive them of any job protections.

This is not the only court ruling in January in support of the Free Exercise Clause. Do you remember the Oklahoma referendum in 2010 on the so-called “Save Our

State” constitutional amendment to prohibit the imposition of Sharia law? It was approved by 70% of Oklahoma voters, even though there was already no possibility of the adoption of Islamic Law.

The amendment was challenged in court by the Oklahoma Council for American-Islamic Relations and the American Civil Liberties Union. Friend-of-the-court briefs against the amendment were filed by such diverse groups as Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, the Center for Islamic Pluralism, the Interfaith Alliance and the Union for Reform Judaism.

A three-judge panel of the appeals court ruled unanimously against the amendment. “Appellants do not identify any actual problem the challenged amendment seeks to solve,” wrote Judge Scott M. Matheson. “Indeed, they admitted at the preliminary injunction hearing that they did not know of even a single instance where an Oklahoma court had applied Sharia law or used the legal precepts of other nations or cultures, let alone that such applications or uses had resulted in concrete problems in Oklahoma.”

The purpose of the amendment was just to officially vilify Islam.

A bill that would require public schools to teach intelligent design creationism, HB1227, has been submitted to Missouri’s legislature. The bill is an astonishing pastiche of factual and logical errors, but it is fun to read it through just for the exercise of refuting it. You can read the text of the bill at <http://freethoughtblogs.com/pharyngula/2012/01/13/is-everyone-from-missouri-this-pretentious/> and marvel at the ignorance it embodies.

Not long ago the Tarek ibn Ziyad Academy foisted a hoax on the state of Minnesota, getting a charter for an Islamic school under the pretext of an Arabic language immersion secular education. Now Highland Park, New Jersey is experiencing the nearly identical fraud, from Tikun Olam Hebrew Language Charter High School. The deception and fraud in the school’s applications for charter and grants is appalling, yet the school has been awarded a \$600,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

To give the appearance of this not being a specifically Jewish school, they claimed on their charter application that the location of the school would be a Catholic church, St. Mary of Mount Virgin in the neighboring town of New Brunswick. The Catholic Bishop denied that there was any

News and Notes continued on page 8.

News and Notes (continued)

such agreement, and insisted that there never would be. Yet the same lie appeared on later grant applications. The school claimed on its application to have a relationship with the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, but the museum denied that. The school also claimed to have good relations with local community groups and stated its intent to build a diverse student body. The groups named denied any such relationship, and scoffed at the implication that low-income black, Puerto Rican and Muslim children would be interested in a Hebrew immersion education.

Even local rabbi Steven Miodownik wrote to New Jersey's Education Commission "Proponents of the Hebrew language charter school have carefully placed a

fig leaf over their agenda of forcing the state to fund their 'free' alternative to private Jewish education, but it is not the job of the State of New Jersey to provide religious instruction for its children; that must be left up to our excellent private schools."

The State of New Jersey seems to have seen through the school's lies, but the U. S. Department of Education is forbidden to verify claims in an application or to use any outside information in its grant decisions. This is intended to ensure that no special measures are taken to either favor or hinder an applicant, but it invites fraud. The federal grant, however, is conditional upon the school receiving a state charter. On January 20 the charter application was denied for the 4th time.

It is a truism that almost any sect, cult, or religion will legislate its creed into law if it acquires the political power to do so. – Robert Heinlein

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

Tcgyjv sdjr dviw mzigi higi hymeziw. Mzi Uyuxi
 enssdjtit mzdm mzir wzncxt jnm ui dxxnhit mn xyqi.
 Mzij ym hdw tywenqigit mzdm mzigi hdw jn wcez
 mzyjv dw hymeziw, djt jiqig zdt uiij. Nji tniw jnm fjnh
 hzimzig mn xdcvz ng mn egr.

-Sdgy Mhdyj

(Answer on page 14.)

January Meeting Review: Shawn Lawrence Otto Explores the Dismal State of Science Policy in America

“Whenever the people are well informed,” Thomas Jefferson wrote, “they can be trusted with their own government.”

With this quote, Shawn Lawrence Otto, author of the newly published book "Fool Me Twice: Fighting the Assault on Science in America," opened his talk before the Minnesota Atheists gathered at the Southdale Library on January 15th. Shawn's talk was a rousing and inspiring critical look at the large and growing gap between science knowledge and public policy, which is very alarming given that most of the major problems facing this country at the national level are science related. Stating that science is never partisan, but that scientific findings always have political consequences, he noted that science is also anti-authoritarian and in this way, ironically, resembles the early days of European Protestantism.

When John Kennedy ran for president, Shawn noted, he was obliged to state that his Catholicism would not be interjected into his governing. Today, many politicians seem obliged to not only promise to interject their religious beliefs into their work as elected officials, but often do so as an explicit contrast to science, and even go farther to make strong and noxious anti-science statements.

Shawn Otto may be known to many of you as the key organizer of Science Debate 2008, an effort to get candidates running for president in that year to engage in a topical debate on science. Shawn notes that Science Debate 2008 developed into the largest political initiative in the history of American science. Today, Shawn is asking candidates to take the "Science Pledge" which affirms the importance of scientific integrity and openness, of knowledge over belief, and, most importantly, the use of science as a foundation for developing public policy, among other things.

According to Shawn, the roots of anti-science sentiment and activism include fundamentalist thinking on the right as

Greg Laden

well as post-modern thinking from the left, which, combined, serve to (incorrectly) frame science as just one of many possible ways of viewing the natural world, and which engenders bad – even unethical – journalism. He notes that the loss of the FCC's Fairness Doctrine, changes in broadcast, cable, and Internet environments, and the elimination of science departments and editorial units from major news outlets have converted news media into places less conducive of, and often hostile to, good science reporting.

The assembled audience received Shawn Otto's talk very enthusiastically, and engaged the speaker in a lively discussion during the Question and Answer period.

Shawn is an accomplished and prolific writer, author and co-producer of the Oscar nominated *House of Sand and Fog* and writer for other film and television productions. He has published articles in *Rolling Stone*, *Science*, *Issues in Science and Technology*, *Salon*, *Huffington Post*, *Minnpost*, *New Scientist*, *Scientific American*, and *Nature Medicine*. He writes the blog "Neorenaissance." He grew up in Golden Valley and now lives on the other side of the Twin Cities in a solar and wind powered home known as "Breezy," which he and his wife Rebecca Otto built as an exemplar of green architecture.



Book Review: Secrets & Wives

The book *Secrets & Wives: The Hidden World of Mormon*

Polygamy, by Sanjiv Bhattacharya, slowly reveals the secrets of a world that not many have had access to. Bhattacharya, a journalist and an atheist, travels through parts of Utah and Texas and befriends and interviews people from many different fundamentalist Mormon sects that practice polygamy.

In the preface of the book Bhattacharya tells us why he chose to say “Mormon polygamy” in the title and throughout portions of the book instead of “fundamentalist Mormon polygamy”. He explains, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) insists there’s no such thing as ‘Mormon polygamy’ because it defines ‘Mormon’ as relating strictly to the membership of ‘the Church’, and there aren’t any polygamists in the Church. But I’m not defining ‘Mormon’ that way – I see it as a broader term, referring to the belief, or those who believe, in the divinity of the core Mormon scriptures” (page ix). I disagreed with Bhattacharya on this point, and I found it confusing to decipher which type of Mormon he was talking about. He would distinguish at times by calling LDS Mormons, “Vanilla Mormons” and referring to some of the sects he encountered as “fundamentalist Mormons.” He was not always consistent, which could lead to confusion on the part of the reader.

Bhattacharya begins his book by telling the fascinating history of the LDS church and its founders through his skeptical atheist eyes. He then sets out on a journey to interview as many people as he can from different fundamentalist Mormon polygamist groups. Bhattacharya’s retelling of the Mormon story, both the “vanilla” and “fundamentalist” varieties, is often humorous, but without any hint of ridicule for the people he

by Jennifer Zimmerman

interviews, many of whom he has friendly feelings or even great concern towards. Bhattacharya expertly questions his subjects until their talking points wear thin and their beliefs are revealed to have no basis in actual evidence. Bhattacharya comes across many interesting stories of polygamy, and even encounters people who are trying to leave, or who have left their groups. The interviews he conducts with these leaving or former members give his account a richer layer of realism and provide fuller explanation of the church for the reader. Bhattacharya spends portions of his book telling his own story, but only enough to explain to the reader where his interest came from and why he set out to write this book.

Bhattacharya describes the groups he encounters and the people who are members of those groups in realistic detail. He paints pictures in our minds of families who live polygamous lives, who truly believe in the words of the leaders of their cults, and who feel that outsiders are a threat to that belief system. These belief systems are quite alien to most of us, yet their followers are no less faithful or devout than any other religion we might be aware of in our own communities. Bhattacharya shows us, through the pages of *Secrets & Wives*, just how many ways one set of scriptures (in this case, the Mormon scriptures) can be twisted to suit the whims of a group’s leaders.

Bhattacharya’s telling of his story of traveling to polygamist cults and interviewing the members was an interesting and entertaining read. *Secrets & Wives* would be especially intriguing for

those who are familiar with life within a cult, or interested in the culture of polygamy.



Image courtesy of Soft Skull Press. Used with permission.

Secrets & Wives: The Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy

by Sanjiv Bhattacharya, ©2011
Soft Skull Press, 352 pages

January Treasurer's Report



Compiled by Chris Matthews

Billboard Fund

Suellen Carroll	\$200
Haiyan Li	\$150
August Berkshire	\$100
Jon De Long	\$100
Danita Hess	\$100
Peter Lane	\$100
Joshua Robinson	\$100
Allison Malloy	\$75
Joseph Denor	\$65
Morgan Christian	\$50
Stephen Fines	\$50
Andy Flamm	\$50
Jeffrey Gunn	\$50
Bill Lehto	\$50
Charles Stephan	\$50
Tim Traynor	\$50
Rachel Wilson	\$50
Robert Young	\$50
Ben Zvan	\$50
Caroline Brunner	\$25
Herbert Davis	\$25
Gary Freitas	\$25
Eric Jayne	\$25
Steve Petersen	\$25
Cash Donations	\$35
Total Billboard Fund	\$1,650

Building Fund

Robert Schmitz	\$50
Total Building Fund	\$50

Radio Fund

August Berkshire	\$100
Nancy Ruhland	\$15
Total Radio Fund	\$115

General/Visibility Fund

Mark Nelson	\$65
David Bicking	\$25
Michael Toft	\$15
Dale Howey	\$10
Meghan Kosowski	\$10
Total General/Visibility Fund	\$125

Total Income:	\$1,940
Current Building Fund Total	\$130,187

Radio Show Fundraising Goal	\$8,215
(for 2012)	
Amount Raised (thru January 22, 2012)	\$115
Amount Remaining to Reach Yearly Goal:	\$8,100

Top Expenses for January

Ads, PR	\$3,000
Radio Show	\$1,025
Newsletter Printing	\$568
Meetings/Picnics	\$250

This Month in Freethinking History...

by James Zimmerman



Abolitionist, diplomat, and author Frederick Douglass was born in February 1818. As the son of a slave woman, he never knew the exact date of his birth. Douglass believed in a god his entire life, and he was quick to note that he did not oppose Christianity as taught in the Gospels. However, it was his observation of religion being used for social and political power that caused him to frequently rail against hypocrites who claimed to show “Christian love” yet carried on or supported the practice of slavery.

In chapter 10 of his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, he wrote: I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,—and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a

religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me. For of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others.

And in the book’s appendix, he said:

I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, the grossest of all libels.

Douglass died in Washington, DC, on 20 February 1895, at or near 77 years old.

Atheists Talk: December and January Radio Report

Atheists Talk is produced by Minnesota Atheists and directed by Carl Hancock. Original music is composed, played, and recoded by Brent Michael Davids. Producers and hosts this month included Carl Hancock, Brianne Bilyeu, Greg Laden, August Berkshire, Scott Lohman, Stephanie Zvan, George Kane, Rachel Reiva, and Steve Petersen. The radio program is broadcast live from KTNF studios in Eden Prairie every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 at AM950. Listen to live steaming through our web page, www.mnatheists.org. 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://minnesotaatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund>. All past programs can be accessed via web page.

If you are interested in helping on the radio program please send a note to radio@mnatheists.org.

Recent shows include:

Doug Pagitt on Atheists Talk #147, Sunday, December 25, 2011 and January 1, 2012.

This was a joint production with Minnesota Atheists and Doug Pagitt who hosts a religious program on Sunday afternoons. It was a two hour pre-recorded program as the station was not open for live programs on 25 December or the first of the year. It was a friendly, wide-ranging discussion of the definition of "god" and the mixing of science and religion. The show featured Doug Pagitt, John Musick, August Berkshire, Scott Lohman, and Stephanie Zvan.

Women in Secularism Conference, Melody Hensley #150 Sunday, January 15, 2011.

2011 was an interesting year for women in the secularism movement. Women were more visible than ever. At the same time, a simple request to respect women's wishes regarding being hit on at atheist events provoked months of discussion, both positive and negative.

In the middle of all of this, the Center for Inquiry announced that they would be hosting the first Women in Secularism conference May 18-20 of this year in Washington, DC. The list of speakers is diverse and highly accomplished. The reaction to the announcement was varied.

This conference is the brainchild of the Executive Director of the DC branch of the Center for Inquiry, Melody Hensley. Melody joined us on this day to discuss the impetus for the conference, the

by Steve Petersen

contributions of women to the secularism movement, and what attendees can expect from the conference.

Stephanie Zvan served as both host and interviewer.

Attack of the Theocrats, Sean Faircloth on Atheists Talk #151, Sunday, January 22, 2012

Sean Faircloth is the Director of Strategy and Policy for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason. In this role he is designing and leading innovative strategies to improve the secular movement. He is a passionate, outspoken advocate for the separation of church and state. In his new book *Attack of the Theocrats* he urges Secular



Americans to recognize and address the harm done to us all by religious privilege that has been written into our state and federal laws.

Before his work at the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason, Sean Faircloth lead for two years as the Executive Director for the Secular Coalition of America. He served five terms as a representative in the Maine Legislature, where he was a member of the Judiciary and Appropriations Committee, and in his final term was elected Majority Whip.

Brianne Bilyeu hosted. Carl Hancock and Scott Lohman conducted the interview see photo, above).

Planning your estate?

Don't forget to include

Minnesota Atheists.

Minnesota Atheists Gift Donation to Children's Hospital

by Eric Jayne

Children's Hospital sent me this letter in appreciation of Minnesota Atheist's generous donation of gifts in December 2011.



Minnesota Atheists Gift Donation to the Bridge

The following letter was sent to Minnesota Atheists as a thank you for the donations given to the Bridge during the Solstice Banquet. Thank you to Shirley Moll for copying the original letter so that it could be included in this letter. -ed.

December 27, 2011
August Berkshire
Minnesota Atheists
P.O. Box 120304
New Brighton, MN 55112

Dear August:

Thank you for Minnesota Atheists' designation of The Bridge for Youth to receive donations from your annual winter solstice party on December 18, 2011. We received \$174 in checks, \$100 in cash, gift cards, feminine hygiene products, towels, toiletries, a backpack, clothes, winter gear, journals, photo frame, sheet set, and a chess set. For more than 40 years, donations from generous people like you have made it possible to for The Bridge for Youth to be there at a critical moment in the lives of homeless and runaway youth.

Gifts like yours make a substantial difference in the lives of thousands of youth and families in our communities. In addition to providing support, housing and counseling to youth and families in crisis, we will also continue to augment our programs and services to help youth struggling with the tight employment and housing markets, and continue developing innovative ways to partner with government and other agencies to meet the needs of as many youth as possible. Providing these resources all day, every day at no cost is an incredible achievement - and The Bridge for Youth could never do it without strong support like yours.

The Bridge has been privileged to work with tens of thousands of youth and families to help them turn crisis in their lives into a chance for change. You play a crucial role in showing youth that this community believes in them and thinks they are a worthy investment. We count ourselves very fortunate to have your support in this effort, and appreciate the opportunity that your support provides us to make a difference every day in the lives of some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Kind Regards,

Daniel Pfarr
Executive Director.

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

During many ages there were witches. The Bible commanded that they should not be allowed to live. Then it was discovered that there was no such thing as witches, and never had been. One does not know whether to laugh or to cry.

-Mark Twain

Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org

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

Join or Renew Membership

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

Donate to Special Funds

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

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

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

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

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

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

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, 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.

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.

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

3rd 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.

5th Sundays, 5:00pm (January, April, July, Sept, Dec). Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner. Old Spaghetti Factory, 233 Park Ave., Minneapolis. Get together for drinks and pasta.

1st & 3rd 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.

2nd and 4th 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.

1st 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.

4th 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/>.

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

3rd 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

3rd 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.

1st 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.

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



President s Column (continued)

association claims on the merits at this stage in the proceedings.”

“The district court failed to address appellants’ challenges under the Minnesota Constitution. A proper analysis is necessary especially because the Minnesota rational-basis test for determining whether equal-protection rights have been violated is more stringent than the federal test.”

Thus, the Supreme Court has provided guidance since *Baker* indicating that moral disapproval of a class because of sexual orientation cannot be a *legitimate* government purpose that equal-protection requires.

[The Minnesota Appeals Court sent this case back down to the Minnesota District Trial Court, so that it can be reheard and judged using more proper standards than the District Trial Court used the first time. Previously, a 1971 Minnesota Supreme Court anti-gay-marriage case called Baker had been used. But the Appeals Court said that the Minnesota State Constitution offers more protections than the U.S. Constitution, and that since 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court has offered increasingly greater protection for gay people. - AB]

“I don’t believe we were born to be
sheep in a flock / To pantomime
prayers with the hands of a clock.”

-from “I Don’t Believe,” by Paul Simon, from his 2006 album *Surprise*

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