

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in ActionSM

Volume 18 Number 1

January 2008

Sunday, January 20 meeting and dinner...

"Sex Across the Curriculum!"

A smash hit at last summer's Minnesota Fringe Festival, this one-woman, multi-character show by Jen Tudor will have you laughing, crying, and thinking. The author and actress portrays a sex education teacher, Mrs. Glasscock, who rebels against abstinence-only teaching. We, the audience, get to act as her students.

"Course Description: Since this is Mrs. Glasscock's last day of teaching, she's decided to cover all the most important topics: politics, pleasure, queer identity, lubrication, mas-

turbation, and religion. Mrs. G is joined by some guest speakers to spread her word. This is what hap-

pens when a teacher has 50 minutes and nothing to lose."

Normally tickets for this show sell for \$15, but you get to see it for free!

Jen Tudor holds a Ph.D. in

speech communication with an emphasis in performance studies from Southern Illinois University. She is an Assistant Professor in the Departments of Communication Studies and Theatre, Film Studies, and Dance, at St. Cloud State University.



Author / actress Jen Tudor explains it all for you.

Upcoming events

Sundays, 9-10 a.m. - "Atheists Talk" on **Air America Minnesota** radio. AM 950 or stream live at AirAmericaMinnesota.com/listen. Studio call-in line: (952) 946-6205.

Sun., Jan. 20, 1-3:30 p.m. - "Sex Across the Curriculum" at [Roseville Public Library](#). (See left.)

Sun., Feb. 17, 1-3:30 p.m. - **Lori Lipman Brown**, director of the Secular Coalition for America. [Ridgedale Library](#).

Mar. 19-23 - **American Atheists** national conference in Minneapolis. (See page 13.)

Meeting: 1:00-3:30 p.m.

Roseville Public Library

2180 Hamline Ave. N.

(Hamline Ave. & Co. Rd. B)

Roseville, MN 55113

1:00-1:30 p.m. - Social time.

1:30-2:30 p.m. - Presentation.

2:30-2:45 p.m. - Break.

2:45-3:30 p.m. - Business meeting, including MNA board nominations.

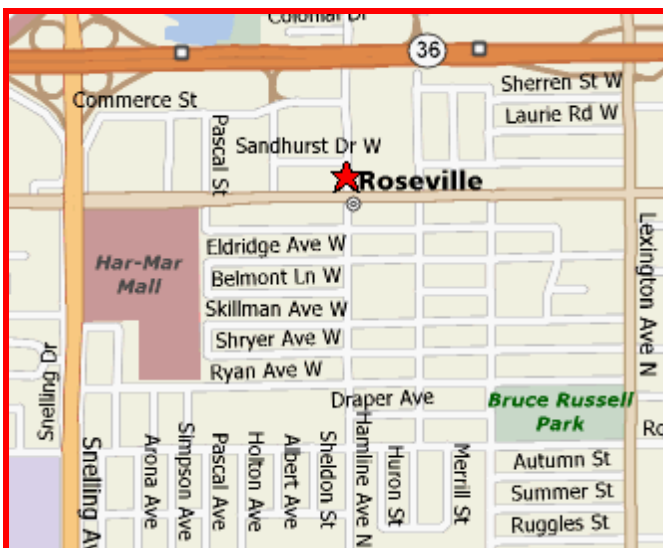
Dinner: 4:00 p.m.

Panda Garden Buffet

1706 Lexington Ave. N.

(Lexington Ave. & Larpenteur Ave.)

Roseville, MN 55113



During the business portion of our meeting we will be accepting nominations for the MNA board of directors (see page 5).

After our meeting, those who wish may join us for dinner at the Panda Garden Buffet.

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**Building Fund:
\$93,663.04**

Honorary Members

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

**MNA Meetup members: 206
Life memberships: 26**

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.

The Minnesota Atheist

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**Minnesota Atheists practices
positive, inclusive, active, friendly
neighborhood atheism in order to:**

- Provide a community for atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

President's Column

The role of religion in public affairs

By George Kane

I still clearly remember watching the evening news on September 12, 1960. Democratic presidential nominee John Kennedy, whose Roman Catholicism conservative Christians regarded with suspicion, delivered to a meeting of Baptist ministers in Houston one of the most memorable orations in the history of American campaign speeches. It proclaimed a clear vision of separation of church and state that rallied the nation around a *Zeitgeist* of secular government.

During that campaign, excerpts of Kennedy's Houston speech became familiar to everyone:

"I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute - where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote - where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference - and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him...."

"I believe in a President whose religious views are his own private affair, neither imposed by him upon the nation or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office... I want a Chief Executive whose... fulfillment of his Presidential oath is not limited or conditioned by any religious oath, ritual or obligation..."

"Whatever issue may come before me as President - on birth con-



George Kane

trol, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject - I will make my decision in accordance... with what my conscience tells me to be the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates."

This year, Mitt Romney's presidential candidacy obliged him to answer conservative Christians who criticized his Mormonism. His response showed, sadly, how far we have descended from Kennedy's ideal

"I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute..."

—John F. Kennedy

of absolute separation of church and state:

"Freedom requires religion just as religion requires freedom. Freedom opens the windows of the soul so that man can discover his most profound beliefs and commune with God. Freedom and religion endure together, or perish alone."

"They seek to remove from the public domain any acknowledgment of God... They are wrong."

—Mitt Romney

"It is important to recognize that while differences in theology exist between the churches in America, we share a common creed of moral convictions. And where the affairs of our nation are concerned, it's usually a sound rule to focus on the latter - on the great moral principles that urge us all on a common course. Whether it was the cause of abolition, or civil rights, or the right to life itself, no

movement of conscience can succeed in America that cannot speak to the convictions of religious people.

"We separate church and state affairs in this country, and for good reason. No religion should dictate to the state nor should the state interfere with the free practice of religion. But in recent years, the notion of the separation of church and state has been taken by some well beyond its original meaning. They seek to remove from the public domain any acknowledgment of God. Religion is seen as merely a private affair with no place

in public life. It is as if they are intent on establishing a new religion in America - the religion of secularism. They are wrong.

"The founders proscribed the establishment of a state religion, but they did not countenance the elimination of religion from the public square. We are a nation 'Under God' and in God, we do indeed trust.

"We should acknowledge the Creator as did the Founders - in ceremony and word. He should remain on our currency, in our pledge, in the

teaching of our history, and during the holiday season, nativity scenes and menorahs should be welcome in our public places. Our greatness would not long endure without judges who respect the foundation of faith upon which our constitution rests. I will take care to separate the affairs of government from any religion, but I will not separate us from 'the God who gave us liberty.' "

Romney's vision is that Americans of all religions must unite in a culture war against secularists who want to keep god out of government.

(Continued on page 4)

MNA Meetup Report

By Bjorn Watland

Since July 6, 2006, Minnesota Atheists have had a presence on Meetup.com. Since then, we have gained over 200 participants in our Meetup group, and who knows how many paid memberships.

Since we already have a website, why would we spend time with Meetup.com to promote Minnesota Atheists? Meetup.com offers a unique format, in addition to our website. For those not familiar with



Bjorn Watland

Meetup.com, organizations set up a site and place themselves in a category and geographical location. So, when someone moves into the area, they can search for their interests.

Not only can we keep people up-to-date on popular events held by Minnesota

Atheists, but Meetup.com offers other benefits. It's useful for event planning, because people can easily RSVP. There is an active discussion board that is open to participants.

You can post any topic you'd like and ask for responses from your fellow atheists. Newly added polls let you voice your opinion on various issues.

Whether you are a dues-paying member of Minnesota Atheists or not, you're welcome to join the Minnesota Atheists Meetup group. I encourage anyone interested in on-line discussions and keeping up-to-date on Minnesota Atheists events to sign up at <http://atheists.meetup.com/493>.

(Continued from page 3)

But any government that promotes god-belief, that favors its god-believers over nonbelievers, and that recognizes a supernatural god as the source of its values is imposing superstition upon its citizens. The culture warriors glorify the role of religion in government by claiming that such policy advances as the abolition of slavery and the Civil Rights movements of the '60s were spearheaded by religious movements. These moral advances, however, are socially valuable only for secular reasons, the benefits that they bring to peoples' lives.

Even if a person's motivation for supporting some policy is religious, in our diverse society his arguments for that policy must be secular. If the policy is adopted because it is ordered by god, then it is nothing more than the superstition of the Christian majority being imposed on everyone with the compulsion of law. We do the nation a disservice if we listen respectfully to religious arguments for political positions, even when they are political positions we support. As critical thinkers, we cannot let supernatural arguments for political ends pass without challenge.

As atheists we support both the Establishment Clause and the Free

Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, and therefore respect the right of each person to his own religious beliefs, free from government dictate. But once a person chooses to introduce his religious beliefs into the debate on government policy, they deserve no more deference than any other ideology. In a secular democracy there is no room for a "ceremonial deism" that justifies political values by claiming the approval of god. If Christians poke god's nose into political battles, they should expect that nose to get bloodied.

In last month's column, I asked readers how they have handled aggressively religious coworkers who try to preach to them. Only Paul Schenk has replied, with two experiences:

"I've had two encounters with co-workers who, upon learning (through unwelcome prying) that I am an atheist, felt moved to convince me of the error of my ways and guide me back to the Blessed Path. One of them, a lad almost young enough to be my grandson, smiled condescendingly, all but patted my head, and said, 'Paul, we need to have a talk.' I said no thanks and that if he tried to press the issue we would be having a talk with the plant superintendent.

End of problem.

"The other man is an assistant lead-person with whom I get along well but who has several times tried to engage me in debate, and how does one challenge the faith of one who has personally felt The Hand of God intervene to prevent his suicide? (The gun was cocked and in his mouth, but he COULDN'T PULL THE TRIGGER! Wow, how's that for proof!) I finally got fed up and told him what I think - that anyone who believes in a benevolent, omnipotent Creator lacks, to a significant degree, one or more of three qualities: an open mind hungry for truth, the intelligence to recognize and reasonably assess evidence, or the courage to face what his intellect tries to tell him. A fairly bright guy and a Vietnam vet, he started to get 'miffed' until I assured him that in his case it was not intelligence or courage I felt he lacked, but - at least on the subject of religion - an open mind. To my surprise, he shrugged, mumbled 'Well, maybe' and dropped the subject.

"Happily, I still get along with both these men and neither tries to 'convert' me now, although I assume they pray for me, which I do appreciate. Hey, it's the thought that counts, right?"

Call for Nominations to MNA Board

Minnesota Atheists will be holding its annual elections at our Feb. 17, 2008 meeting at Ridgedale Library. To be elected, you must be nominated at our Jan. 20, 2008 meeting at Roseville Library.

The officers to be elected are (in order): President, Associate President, Chair, Associate Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors-At-Large. Terms of office are one year. If you do not win the office you are running for, you may run for any other office not yet elected.

Nominees for most positions must have been dues-paying members of Minnesota Atheists for the full preceding year, as of March 1, 2008 (the

start of the term of office). Nominees for the three Director-At-Large positions must have been dues-paying members for the preceding six months.

You must be nominated by another member of Minnesota Atheists (you cannot nominate yourself). You

must sign a statement affirming that you are an atheist (lack a belief in the supernatural).

You need not be present to be nominated (or elected). Shortly after you are nominated, you should submit a statement (up to 150 words) of why you want to be elected. These statements will be printed in our February 2008 newsletter.

If you are interested in running for any office, we encourage you to throw your hat into the ring. We are always looking for new people and talent. Please contact any current board member (see page 2) for more details.



MNA board appoints Assistant Treasurer

Andy Flamm, a past member of the Minnesota Atheists board of directors, has been appointed by the MNA board to act as the Assistant Treasurer. Our current Treasurer, Jack Caravela, will not be seeking reelection in February; Andy plans to run for that position to replace him.



Andy Flamm

Andy is the owner of a small business in downtown St. Paul and is well-

known to Freethought Follies attendees for producing hilarious musical extravaganzas.

The Treasurer's job is very time-consuming, painstaking, and precise and we really appreciate Jack and Andy for volunteering their services.

Electronic MNA Newsletters

Increase the effectiveness of your Minnesota Atheists membership dues – switch to an on-line newsletter.

It costs us about \$22 per year per person to print and mail a paper version of our newsletter. It costs us *nothing* to e-mail an electronic pdf version. You'll receive the electronic version about a week sooner than the paper version and it will be in full color.

If you're interested in making the switch from the paper to the electronic version of our newsletter, please contact editor@mnatheists.org. We thank the many people who made the switch last month.

Freethought Cryptogram

By George Kane

“L UB DMDVTCSLXJ LX YT OBADV CB AWPX ODBOKD WJWLXEC
 QWLCS LCEDKQ, XBC ZPEC WJWLXEC EB-GWKKDU ‘DFCVDYLEC’
 QWLCS.” –VLGSWVU UWARLXE

Last month's answer: “Whenever morality is based on theology, whenever right is made dependent on divine authority, the most immoral, unjust, infamous things can be justified and established.” – Ludwig Feuerbach

Treasurer's Report

By Jack Caravela

Donations: 12/1/07 - 12/31/07

General Fund: \$235.00

Dean Borghorst	\$100.00
Guy Harper	\$ 25.00
Shirley Moll	\$ 10.00
Vern Young	\$100.00

Building Fund: \$10,880.00

Jeffrey Albrecht	\$ 50.00
Kathy Alme	\$100.00
John Annen	\$ 60.00
Dean Borghorst	\$100.00
Jack Caravela	\$150.00
Richard, LaGretta Dean	\$500.00
Thomas Dooley	\$100.00
Deb Doucette	\$ 40.00
Cynthia Egli	\$ 20.00
Erik Englebretson	\$300.00

Dan Feyma	\$ 20.00
Andy Flamm	\$300.00
Eric Frame	\$100.00
Peter Gamache/ Amber Wallin/ Joey Gamache	\$ 40.00
Kevin Hardisty	\$100.00
Kristine Harley	\$100.00
Guy Harper	\$ 25.00
Bruce Honnigford	\$100.00
Geri Jensen	\$1000.00
George Kane	\$200.00
June Li	\$1000.00
Wendy Lyman	\$ 50.00
Christopher Matthews	\$100.00
Shirley Moll	\$ 50.00
Shirley Moll (in memory of Ted Moore)	\$120.00
Rod Monroe	\$900.00
Theodore Nagel	\$250.00
Bob, Marilyn Nienkerk	\$ 50.00

Bill Paulson	\$1000.00
Cathy Prody	\$200.00
Edward Rang	\$100.00
Lee Salisbury	\$1000.00
Jim Salut	\$ 50.00
Dennis Schlutter	\$200.00
Bob Schmitz	\$120.00
Michael Seliga	\$ 50.00
Alvin Shimek	\$1000.00
Iver Shoberg	\$500.00
Tom Stavros	\$ 10.00
Bill Talmage	\$300.00
James Whitney	\$ 25.00
Susan, John Wiik	\$300.00
Jeffery Wolfe	\$100.00

Building Fund Total: \$93,633.04

300 Club

The 300 Club was established by Minnesota Atheists at the suggestion of our member Rod Monroe. Our goal is to get 300 people to pledge to give us \$1,000 each over a four-year period (an amount that averages \$5 per week per donor) to raise a total of \$300,000 for our Building Fund.

The following people have joined the 300 Club so far. We will continue to publish this list as it grows. Numbers in parenthesis indicate multiples of \$1,000. When at least \$1,000 of the pledge has been paid, the person's name will be highlighted in bold.

To join the 300 Club, contact our treasurer, Jack Caravela, at (612) 782-0716 or treas@mnatheists.org.

Rod Monroe

Kathy Alme
Robin Anderson
Anonymous
August Berkshire (2)
Charles Boltuck
Dean Borghorst
Jack Caravela
Dan Carnicom
Richard & LaGretta Dean
Tom Dooley
Cynthia Egli
Norman Ehrentreich
Erik Englebretson
Andy Flamm
Eric Frame
Dorothy French

Kevin Hardisty
Kristine Harley
Guy Harper
Mike Haubrich
Bruce Honnigford
Laura Hutt
Geri Jensen
Ron Julien
George Kane
Brian Knoblock (3)
James Koran
June Haiyan Li
Christopher Matthews
Vanita Mishra
Shirley Moll
Ted Nagel
Bill Paulson
Steve Petersen
Jerry Rauser
Matthew Richardson (3)
Tom Riddering

Lee Salisbury

Paul Schenck (4)

Bob Schmitz
Alvin Shimek
Jon Strand
Bill Talmage
Georgia Tsoi
Bjorn Watland
Jim Whitney
Susan & John Wiik

Rachel Wilson

Fern & Bob Wodtke
Jeff Wolfe
Vern Young

[Your name here!]

**Total pledged so far:
\$60,000.**

Total pledges fully paid so far: \$13,000.

How to Present Atheism

By Grant Steves

What is in a name? Should this group be called Atheist, Freethinkers, Rationalists, Brights, etc? Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith*, recently suggested at an Atheist Alliance International conference that groups should give up these names, because they are lightning rods or like putting a target on our back. This paraphrase of his idea gets at his point.

However, in the recent conference, *Beyond Belief 2007*, he has somewhat modified or clarified what he was reported to have said earlier. He said he was greeted at the first conference with great applause. However, upon completion of his address, he was not rewarded with the same applause but was rewarded with a negative response. His clarification states that if confronted about atheism you should not back down. However, in daily discourse, we should moderate our voice and language.

His clarification came as a response to P.Z. Myers, who argued that we need to keep our identity as atheists, so as to teach what atheism is really about. We need to let people see that atheists are rational, law-



Grant Steves

abiding, and humane beings.

It is understandable that what Sam Harris said originally has some merit, i.e., we must argue specifics and cases and not throw out a name that sets people on edge before they listen to the argument.

How we view our audience is enormously important in the constructing of a message. If we hide behind semantic niceties, we fail to help change the image of atheism and get people to confront their preconceptions, stereotypes, or biases.

If, however, we confront others without careful construction of our message, we play into these misconceptions. When we create a message to be addressed, in particular, to a non-atheist audience, we need to write carefully, accurately, and free of ad hominem attacks.

Satire, humor, and ridicule are all enjoyable; they add spice to a message, but are poisonous to non-atheists. For example, I could say a particular religion is delusional and hypocritical. They may in fact be that. However, I could have said the same thing by giving facts and letting the audience draw that conclusion.

Another example: Mormons believe in baptism of the dead, that Jesus will return to the United States, and that only men will gain a celestial position of authority and not women. My stating these verifiable facts says more than if I were to state my personal opinion of these teachings. John Stewart may insult these teachings as crazy and satirize them on the *Daily Show*. However, he knows he will offend, but that is his business. On the other hand, a serious atheist's essay will get more acceptance by stating the facts and letting the audience draw the conclusion from these facts.

Carefully constructing a message is a form of self-censorship, but it is also a form of persuasion – often called advertising. We must always be cognizant of the audience we address and the purpose of our communications.

The book review by Lee Salisbury, in this issue of the newsletter (see page 16), is an excellent example of exposing error with the light of facts. Positive atheism should seek to elevate our arguments and not pronounce ad hominem attacks.

In-Box

Richard Dawkins on “Atheist Talk”

I just saw the MNA website where the news bulletin of the first Air America “Atheists Talk” will have Richard Dawkins as a guest. This is such a great time for Minnesota Atheists, and Mr. Dawkins' appearance on our radio program is a clear natural progression that shows MNA is slowly beginning to get the mainstream exposure that is necessary for us to continue to grow.

Ever since “Dogma Free Amer-

ica” ceased production, I've been looking for the best show to replace it in my regular podcast schedule, and right at the exact moment, MNA saves the day. Here's hoping I can help out with the program in 2008, and get out of Governor Purdue's theistic clutches. (Not that Governor Pawlenty is much better, but at least I have MNA.)

Thanks!

— Brian M. Knoblock
Georgia

“The time has come to move past religion”

Wow! This was a really fantastic article. Simple, straightforward. This one is definitely going in my archives! (thedailystar.com/opinion/local_story_328041507.html?keyword=topstory)

— Troy Johnson

News & Notes

By George Kane

'Tis the season to be contentious. I am writing in December, so of course there are **nativity scenes** galore appearing on public properties. **Towns in Wisconsin** are keeping the **Freedom from Religion Foundation** busy. Particularly rankling to co-presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker must be the one on the **Sauk County Courthouse** lawn in Baraboo. The two were married at historic Freethinkers' Hall in Sauk City, which was originally used by a congregation of German immigrants who settled in Sauk County looking for religious and political freedom. Annie Laurie noted the irony that the nativity display would be placed on public property in a county where so many of the original settlers were non-religious.

Baraboo resident David Dill complained to the Sauk County Property and Insurance Committee, which is responsible for overseeing management of county grounds, that the display is unconstitutional because it is not balanced by non-Christian and nonreligious decorations. The committee rejected Mr. Dill's complaint by 5-0.

In **Manistique**, however, the City Council rejected a request to place a nativity scene in a public park after the City Attorney warned that insurance might not cover an FFRF lawsuit. In **Peshtigo**, the mayor offered to pay the city's electric bill to illuminate a crèche in a city park, after which the president of the Green Bay City Council paid for a nativity scene to be put up at City Hall. Who pays for the electricity should not be an issue in litigation, however, since the fact that the crèches appear on public property implies government endorsement of Christianity in any case.



George Kane

Meanwhile, for the 12th year, the FFRF has put a **Solstice Message** on display at the State Capitol. The sign reads "At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail. There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds." on the front and "State/Church: Keep Them Separate" on the back.

In past years, the sign at the Capitol has been stolen or defaced, but I have not yet seen any report of an attack this year. In **Olean, New York**, however, a vandal has driven over a 5-foot **Wiccan pentacle** placed next to a nativity scene in a public park. If the perp is caught, city officials say, the vandalism may be prosecuted as a hate crime.

Meanwhile, the **Connecticut Valley Atheists** have provoked complaints to City Hall with their sign in Rockville's Central Park. The sign shows the Twin Towers standing, beneath the words "Imagine No Religion." Christians have complained that their faith is being linked to responsibility for terrorism.

December 11 was a black day for government promotion of religion. **House Resolution 847**, which extolled Christianity, passed by 372-9, with 10 voting "present" and 40 abstentions. Among the usual litany of "whereases," this resolution praised "Christians (who) identify themselves as those who believe in the salvation from sin offered to them through the sacrifice of their savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and who, out of gratitude for the gift of salvation, commit themselves to living their lives in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Bible," as if superstition were praiseworthy. Ironically, the resolution "rejects bigotry

and persecution directed against Christians, both in the United States and worldwide," ignoring that Christianity, which claims to be the one true religion, is the principle source of religious bigotry in America.

The battle over school science standards continues to turn the education and administration of public schools highly political. In mirror image cases, state education managers in **Texas** and **Florida** found themselves in hot water, one for supporting evolution, the other for supporting Intelligent Design.

Texas Education Agency's science director, Chris Comer, forwarded an e-mail announcement for a lecture on science education by Barbara Forrest, a Southeast Louisiana University philosophy professor and co-author of *Inside Creationism's Trojan Horse*. That was a red flag for TEA's "senior adviser on statewide initiatives," Lizzette Reynolds, who served as a legislative director for then-Gov. George Bush and went on to serve in his U.S. Department of Education. Reynolds e-mailed Comer's bosses that Comer's apparent recommendation of the lecture "is an offense that calls for termination or, at the very least, reassignment of responsibilities."

Comer was forced to resign, but a letter signed by 100 biology faculty members at universities across Texas has called for her reinstatement. It condemns any requirement that TEA employees must remain neutral on the topic of evolution.

A month after the Comer incident, Selena "Charlie" Carraway, program manager for **Florida's Office of Instructional Materials**, sent a mass e-mail urging fellow Christians to fight a proposal to include evolution as a "key idea" in the science curriculum. Carraway began her e-mail with

(Continued on page 9)

Cable Report

By Steve Petersen

Because of the Atheists Talk radio program, the taping of the Atheists Talk cable program will go through a change in the coming months. We have studio programs planned for January and February.

However, after that, we will change to taping speakers at Minnesota Atheists events. We will then edit and copy those talks and be able to maintain our cable production and distribution with less personnel. This will free up more talent for the radio program.

Cable Crew: Art Anderson, Brett Stemberge, Shirley Moll, Steve Pe-



Steve Petersen

tersen, George Kane, Matthew Richardson, David Wiesner and Grant Hermanson.

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

Cable schedule

Bloomington: Ch. 16. Tuesday 10:00 p.m.; Wednesday & Friday 4:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m. & 4:00 p.m.; Thursday 10:00 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

Minneapolis: Ch. 17. Saturday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

Rochester: Ch. 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View, New Brighton: Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

Salem, OR: Check local listings.

St. Cloud: Ch. 12. Thursday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jack Richter.

Stillwater: Ch. 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

South Washington County: Ch. 14. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Raleigh Nelson.

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Ch. 15. Friday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

(Continued from page 8)

a self-introduction in which she stated “I oversee the adoption process of books and materials in the state, and I work in close proximity to the folks in the Office of Mathematics and Science, who have been in charge of the revision of the science standards. I say all of this, obviously, to give this e-mail credibility.” It turns out that in Florida it is considered misconduct for any department employee to use their public position to advocate their personal positions. But while Comer was forced to resign for her presumed support for evolution, Carraway merely received a warning for using her office to try to instigate a mass resistance to Florida’s science standards.

The continuing battle over science standards to promote **Intelligent Design** as a scientific alternative to evolution should have ended last year with the decision in Dover, Pennsylvania. If Intelligent Design supporters truly believe that their model is correct, they should begin by convincing the scientific community. Only when Intelligent Design is established as firm science should it be added to

the school curriculum.

Instead, supporters of Intelligent Design are turning to legal challenges to evolution in academia. Nathaniel Abraham filed a lawsuit last month in U.S. District Court in Boston, saying that the prestigious **Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution** dismissed him in 2004 because of his Christian belief that the Bible presents a true account of human creation. Abraham, who is seeking \$500,000 in compensation for a violation of his civil rights, says in the suit that he lost his job as a postdoctoral researcher in a biology lab shortly after he told his superior that he did not accept evolution as scientific fact.

In a 2004 letter to Abraham, his boss, Woods Hole senior scientist Mark E. Hahn, wrote that Abraham said he did not want to work on “evolutionary aspects” of the National Institutes of Health grant. He did not tell anyone his creationist views before being hired by the project.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is the most prominent advocate for women’s rights and freedom of speech in the Muslim world. In consequence, the Somali-born author of *Infidel* lives

under a death sentence proclaimed in a *fatwa*. She had been assured by the Dutch government of bodyguard protection for life. As of October, they have reneged on that promise, and will only pay for her protection when she is in Holland. To contribute to her protection please go to samharris.org/site/security_trust.

In a “stop the presses” moment last month, I appended to News & Notes that an unknown benefactor had died, leaving \$2.6 million to the International Humanist and Ethical Union. It turns out that that report from Suresh Lalvani, if not completely erroneous, is at least premature. “Don’t count your chickens before they are hatched,” as the proverb says.

I close with some hope that the future may be brighter. According to a Barna poll released in December, 40% of Americans from 16 to 29 years old do not identify as Christians. Half of all Americans in that age group consider institutional Christianity in America as “judgmental,” “hypocritical,” and “too involved with politics.”

Winter Solstice Fun!



Our annual Winter Solstice Banquet and Free-thought Follies, hosted by the Humanists of Minnesota this time, were a success again this past December. In addition to the great meal, music, and skits, we collected many gifts for the at-risk teenagers at Katahdin Workshop.

We would like especially thank Ron & Gwen Scribner of the Humanists of Minnesota for taking care of the dinner and ticket arrangements and Jerry Rauser for being the executive producer of the Freethought Follies and leading the Freethought Band.



Top: Paul Heffron (left) and Don Harrer provided the dinner music.

Above: The evening kicked off with a banquet.



Far right: Ron Scribner (with Gwen Scribner) re-enacted a biblical scene in "Abraham and Sarah."

Right: Sue O'Donnell answered the phone at the Flat Earth Society between other skits in "A Ringing Interruption."

Left: Cynthia Egli provided profound wisdom about hairy men in "Take a Pew."



The following skits were performed at the Freethought Follies:

“Take a Pew” Producer, actor: Cynthia Egli. Advisor: George Kane.

“Abraham and Sarah” Producers, actors: Gwen Scribner, Ron Scribner.

“Hu’s the President” Producer: George Kane. Actors: George Kane, Steve Petersen.

“Scammed” Producer: Tom Riddering. Actors: Tom Riddering, Rick Rohrer.

“What I Want for Christmas” Writer: Robert Ingersoll. Actor: Scott Lohman.

“The Wonderful Pollster of Oz” Producer: Andy Flamm. Actors: Norm Barrett, August Berkshire, Nate Curland, Cynthia Egli, Andy Flamm, Mike Haubrich, George Kane, Scott Lohman, Michelle Losey, Tom Riddering.

“A Ringing Interruption” Producer, actor: Sue O’Donnell.

The **Freethought Band** members are: Don Harrer, Paul Heffron, Jodin Morey, Jerry Rauser.

The **Ensemble Singers** providing vocals were Norm Barrett, Mike Haubrich, Jodin Morey, Cynthia Schield, Milo Schield.

The **Program** was designed by Sue O’Donnell. **Photographs** were taken by Richard Trombley.

Happy Winter Solstice and Happy New Year!



Left: Steve Petersen and George Kane fail to communicate in “Hu’s the President.”

Below: A skeptical Rick Rohrer (left) refuses to be SCAMMED by Tom Riddering’s insincere sales pitch for the Society Concerned About Morality.



Clockwise from lower left: Presidential candidates Hillary Clinton (Tom Riddering), Mitt Romney (Mike Haubrich), Rudy Giuliani (Nathan Curland), and Barack Obama (Norm Barrett) were saved from (from right) Ann Coulter (Michelle Losey) and James Dobson (Scott Lohman) by Richard Dawkins (George Kane) and Sam Harris (August Berkshire) in “The Wonderful Pollster of Oz” written and produced by Andy Flamm.





Above: Milo and Cynthia Schield accept the enthusiastic applause for the Ensemble Singers.



Above: Jerry Rauser, the executive producer of the Freethought Follies, leader of the Freethought Band and versatile musician contemplates the score.

Below: The Ensemble Singers, consisting of (from left) Jodin Morey, Norm Barrett, Mike Haubrich, Milo Schield and Cynthia Schield, sang a medley of seasonal songs.

This is the eighth year in a row Jerry has produced the Follies. Most rehearsals take place at his home where he is famous for serving pie and ice cream afterwards.



Speakers at American Atheists conference

The list of speakers continues to grow for the **American Atheists conference in Minneapolis, March 20-23, 2008.**

As we reported last month, the world's most famous atheist, evolutionary biologist **Richard Dawkins** (richarddawkins.net), will be speaking. Dawkins is the author of such books as *The God Delusion*, *The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, and *Climbing Mount Improbable*.

Ellen Johnson, president of **American Atheists**, will speak on **"Enlightening the Vote,"** how and why atheists should "vote their atheism" in this fall's elections.

Jack David Eller will speak on **"Religion is Not What You Believe: How Religion Works without Belief or Meaning to Colonize Experience."** Eller's latest project is a study of religious violence across cultures and religions. He is the author of *Natural Atheism* and the recently released *Atheism Advanced: Further Thoughts of a Freethinker*.

René Salm will speak on **"The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus."** More information on this topic can be found at nazarethmyth.info.

Mary Stanton will speak on **"Return To Sender: Atheist Bill Moore's 1963 Freedom Walk."** Stanton is a historian whose primary research interest is white civil rights activism. She has written four books on the subject, including *Freedom Walk*, which follows white postman Bill Moore on a determined walk from Chattanooga, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi to deliver a plea for racial tolerance to segregationist Governor Ross Barnett. On the third day of his journey, Moore was ambushed and murdered near Gadsden, Alabama.

Eddie Tabash will speak on **"The Threat of the Religious Right to Our Modern Liberties."** Tabash

is a constitutional lawyer who is on the board of directors of the Center for Inquiry.

Lois Utley from MergerWatch (mergerwatch.org) will speak on **"Medicine and Morality: How Religious Restrictions Can Affect Your Health Care."** MergerWatch deals with the dangers of public hospitals merging with religious hospitals, where religious dogma (no abortions, no birth control, no sterilization, no fertility treatments, restrictive end-of-life care, etc.) trumps legal medical care.

Robert Lanham, will speak about his satirical book *The Sinners Guide to the Evangelical Right* (evangelicalright.com). According to a review by The Campaign to Defend the Constitution, "This book is hilarious... [Lanham] didn't skimp on his research. The book provides a telling overview of the religious right's leadership, the beliefs they espouse, and just how incredibly absurd and hypocritical they are."

The conference will conclude Sunday morning with a **"Debate between Frank Zindler and Dennis Prager."** (The topic has yet to be determined.) **Frank Zindler** is the managing editor of American Atheists Press and the author of *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*. **Dennis Prager** is the host of a nationally syndicated radio talk show, which airs live Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon (Pacific Time) from station KRLA in Los Angeles.

Dates & Location

The American Atheists conference will take place in **downtown Minneapolis, March 20-23, 2008** at the **Minneapolis Marriott City Center Hotel** (30 S. 7th St., Minneapolis, MN 55402. Phone: 612-349-4000 or 800-228-9290.)

The special conference room rate for the American Atheists confer-

ence is only **\$99 per night** (single, double, triple or quad).

You must make your reservations directly with the hotel. **Be sure to specify that you are with the American Atheists conference to qualify for the special room rate.**

The hotel is located two blocks from the light rail line, which travels from the Mall of America to the airport to downtown Minneapolis along Hiawatha Ave.

Conference Schedule

Thurs., Mar. 20 – Conference registration in the afternoon. Entertainment in the evening, including our very own **Freethought Band!**

Fri., Mar. 21 – Conference registration and a full day of speakers. There will be a prepaid dinner in the evening open to everyone.

Sat., Mar. 22 – A second full day of speakers. That evening there will be a special prepaid dinner for life members of American Atheists and those who have been members of American Atheists for ten or more years. Partners of such members may also attend.

Sun., Mar. 23 – Debate (see above).

Books and Voter Registration

As always, American Atheists will have a large **book and product room** for your heathen shopping needs. We will also set up a **voter registration table** to make sure the atheist constituency is heard from in the Nov. 2008 elections.

Conference Registration

By the time you receive this newsletter, you should be able to register for the conference through the American Atheists website, atheists.org. Next month we plan to have a registration insert in our newsletter.

Atheists in Print

Congress Votes 'Yes' for Christmas

On December 11, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives passed House Resolution 847 "Recognizing the importance of Christmas and the Christian faith." The following passage is excerpted from an article by Andy Birkey from his Minnesota Monitor blog, December 15, 2007. (To read the full blog entry, go to minnesotamonitor.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=2912.) The article was reprinted in the Twin Cities Daily Planet blog on December 21, 2007.

August Berkshire, public relations officer for the Minnesota Atheists said that the resolution is legal, but it does raise ethical questions. "What business is it of the government to make proclamations regarding religion? Wouldn't the authority to praise a religion also entail the authority to condemn a religion? Do we want our government meddling into religious affairs?"

Berkshire continued, "It also begs the question: Don't these legislators have better things to do with their time? How about balancing the budget so that every Christian, not to mention everyone else, doesn't have a \$30,000 share of the national debt on his or her back?"

Rulings outline religion's place within government

The following letter to the editor appeared in the St. Cloud Times, December 16, 2007.

This is regarding the Dec. 10 Your Turn "Church and state receive power from the same source – God."

Author James Meichsner is correct when he states that the First

Amendment was "never intended to mandate that the church and state should never have anything to do with one another."

The Supreme Court clarified the meaning of the First Amendment in the 1971 "Lemon v. Kurtzman" case. The "Lemon test" spells out the requirements for governmental legislation concerning religion. It consists of three prongs:

1. The government's action must have a legitimate secular purpose;
2. The government's action must not have the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion;
3. The government's action must not result in an "excessive entanglement" of the government and religion.

If any of these three prongs is violated, the government's action is deemed unconstitutional under the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

All laws in the United States must have a secular purpose. That way, they apply to religious believers and nonbelievers alike without establishing a theocracy. As to the existence of and claims regarding any gods, Meichsner offers no proof that any gods exist, much less that any rights or laws are established by any gods.

The Bible is filled with colossal injustice, beginning with the first story where the character of God condemns the entire human race for the sins of two individuals. Fortunately, it is against U.S. law to punish anyone for the sins of their fathers and mothers.

— August Berkshire, Minnesota Atheists, Minneapolis

Many gods originated around Winter Solstice

The following letter to the editor appeared in the St. Cloud Times, December 18, 2007.

When days transition to longer daylight hours and the night begins to shrink, it is called the Winter Solstice. That has always been a time of celebration among the people of the northern hemisphere. This year it occurs on Dec. 22.

Bacchus, Prometheus, Chrishna, Osiris, Horus, Buddha, Zoraster, Jesus, Apollo, Hermes and Ramses, among others, all were gods born at the Winter Solstice. All these gods, according to the myths that surround them, were born of virgin mothers and had gods for fathers.

Nearly all their births were celebrated by celestial music, announced by stars and put on a tyrant's hit list. All were born in humble places such as stables or caves. All taught in parables, claimed to perform miracles, met with violent deaths and rose from the dead.

Whatever makes this holiday season meaningful for each of us, it started with celebrating the rebirth of the sun.

— Tom Stavros, St. Cloud

Focus on the winter solstice holiday

The following passage, featuring two MNA members, is excerpted from the article "The holidays your own way" compiled by Frank Lee and Adam Hammer, St. Cloud Times, December 23, 2007. For the full article, go to sctimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071223/LIFE/112230042.

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Tom Stavros, a 66-year-old retiree, got an early jump on the holiday festivities by hosting a winter solstice party on Dec. 16 for Friends Free of Theism's members and their guests.

"December 25, to me, is mainly a time to get together with family and friends... and celebrate the solstice," said Stavros, an atheist who does not have a physical Christmas tree at his St. Cloud home.

A "Happy Holidays" sign on his front yard greets his party guests, who took up a freewill collection to give to Anna Marie's Alliance for abuse victims, and Planned Parenthood.

"I don't have any decorations in my house – not even a poinsettia," said Jack Richter, a 39-year-old self-described gay atheist from Sartell who co-owns Steppin' Out Theatre Co.

He was raised Catholic and became a Baptist before joining the Friends Free of Theism, but he still plans on exchanging "winter solstice gifts" with friends and family on Christmas.

"I've not had anybody really hostile to me (because I'm an atheist)," said Richter, who will spend

Christmas with his mom, watching PBS specials on the "big bang theory" and evolution.

The responsibilities of an atheist

The following letter to the editor appeared in the Open Forum section of the Brainerd Dispatch on December 28, 2007.

I am an atheist, and I am responsible for many things.

As an atheist, I am responsible for promoting the pursuit of truth. I am neither bound by ideology nor held hostage by dogmata, but rather speak in the simple manner of a child. "Why?" A favorite phrase of 3-year-olds is the underlying question of Atheism. When the answer is, "Because I (or God, or Allah) said so..." the discussion ends.

Often forgotten are the elementary rules of logic:

1. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.
2. That which can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence.

As an atheist physician, I am

responsible for your life. Once again, anyone who comes to me and is injured or ill owes a debt of gratitude to those before us who were not afraid to ask, "Why?" Your ability to survive a heart attack or a fall from your treestand are all much greater today due to the scientific methods of Medicine.

As an atheist American, I am responsible for protecting the Constitution. The United States of America was formed as a secular union. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment forbids the preference of one religion over another, or religion over non-religion. Our founding fathers could not have been more clear.

As an atheist father, I am responsible to love. My ability to do so is augmented by the fact that I am not encumbered with the guilt and shame inherent in the doctrine of religion. The practice of disowning one's offspring seems to be a primarily religious exercise. How sad and patently ridiculous.

I will continue to urge my children to ask "Why?" What will you do?

— Patrick Carey, M.D., Brainerd

Atheist Outreach

Print

Dec. 15 – August Berkshire was quoted in the article "Congress Votes 'Yes' for Christmas" by Andy Birkey in his *Minnesota Monitor* blog, which was reprinted **Dec. 17** in the *Twin Cities Daily Planet* blog. (See page 14.)

Dec. 16 – "Rulings outline religion's place within government" letter to the editor by August Berkshire appeared in the *St. Cloud Times*. (See page 14.)

Dec. 18 – "Many gods originated around Winter Solstice" letter to the editor by Tom Stavros appeared in the *St. Cloud Times*. (See page 14.)

Dec. 23 – Tom Stavros and Jack Richter were quoted in the article "The holidays your own way," compiled by Frank Lee and Adam Hammer, in the *St. Cloud Times* (See pages 14-15.)

Dec. 28 – "The responsibilities of an atheist" letter to the editor by Patrick Carey appeared in the "Open Forum" section of the *Brainerd Dispatch*. (See page 15.)

Cable TV

Dec. – An interview with Jack Richter on atheism will be included in a five-part series on religion, to be aired on St. Cloud State University's University TV Station (UTVS).

Religious Groups

Dec. 7 – August Berkshire spoke to two classes at Northwestern College, a Christian college in Arden Hills.

Lord or Legend?: Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma

By Gregory A. Boyd & Paul Rhodes Eddy

Book review by Lee Salisbury

The book's title suggests Drs. Boyd and Eddy have wrestled with the dilemma of the historicity of Jesus. I beg to differ. Their book is anything but an unbiased objective wrestling with this perplexing question with which many conscientious theologians do wrestle.

This book rehearses only the Baptist arguments while dismissing alleged contrary arguments to allege that Jesus was a historical figure, not a legend.

The authors assert biblical accuracy because of the quantity of New Testament manuscript attestations. They say, "We possess roughly 5,500 ancient Greek manuscripts." Dr. Bart Ehrman, noted theologian trained in the Baptist tradition, gives a more forthright perspective saying, "what is striking is that we find no two of these copies (except in the smallest fragments) agree in all of their wording. There can be only one reason for this: the scribes who copied the texts changed them. Nobody knows how often they changed them, because no one has yet been able to count all of the differences. Some estimates put the number at around 200,000, others 300,000... there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament. (*The New Testament* by Dr. Bart Ehrman, p. 481.) Quality, not quantity, should be the measure of manuscript attestation and by this measure the New Testament comes up severely lacking.

Witnesses?

The authors believe the gospel writers are eyewitnesses. If so, I wish they'd explain how Luke was an eyewitness or found an eyewitness of Gabriel telling Mary she would conceive. Who was the eyewitness of Jesus' temptation by the devil? Who was the eyewitness of Jesus' blood sweating prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane while all the disciples slept? Who was



Lee Salisbury

the eyewitness of the Sanhedrin's interrogation of Jesus or Pilate's private questioning of Jesus while the disciples fled? The many gospel incidents where no eyewitnesses were present leads to a reasonable suspicion that 2nd or 3rd century scribes filled in the story with what they imagined, i.e. fiction.

tion.

If Matthew and Luke were eyewitnesses, why did they have to plagiarize 90% of Mark? Then when Matthew and Luke did add original information such as the genealogies of Jesus, the respective genealogies are laughably contradictory and incoherent.

Matthew's eyewitnesses have Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fleeing to Egypt immediately after Jesus' birth for fear of Herod's plan to slaughter all children under the age of two. Luke's eyewitnesses are unaware of Herod's death squad and have Mary wait out her forty days of purification in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary then present Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem where Simeon and Anna prophesy over the baby Jesus. Everyone rejoices and Jesus' family returns to Nazareth. How could eyewitnesses have Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in two different places at the same time? The gospel eyewitness's have so many obvious contradictions that one can only conclude the gospels are make believe fictional accounts drafted to support various doctrinal goals, not historical accounts.

Josephus & Eusebius

The authors present Josephus' Jesus Testimony as a reputable non-Christian reference to Jesus' historicity. However, the authors ignore the following reasons reputable scholars reject it as a later fraudulent insertion.

First, Josephus' writing style was to write chapter upon chapter about the most insignificant people whereas Boyd and Eddy would have us believe

Josephus changed his writing style and wrote a miniscule four sentences about this Jesus crucified under Pontius Pilate.

Secondly, the Jesus Testimony is totally out of context. The preceding and following paragraphs describe Romans killing Jews. The alleged Jesus testimony of a "wise man... who wrought surprising feats... Pilate... condemned him to be crucified" is inserted between these two paragraphs, an incongruous illogical place for such a happy testimony.

Thirdly, the first sentence of the paragraph following the Jesus testimony states, "About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder..." Why would Josephus call the Jesus Testimony "another sad calamity"? No, Romans killing Jews was the "sad calamity" in the preceding paragraph and Romans killing Jews in the following paragraph is obviously "another sad calamity."

Who in all probability inserted the Jesus testimony? Who would be a better candidate than Eusebius, the Father of Church History, who acknowledged, "however, it may be amiss, if, over and above, we make use of Josephus the Jew for a further witness." (*Evangelical Demonstration Book III*, p. 124). Eusebius excuses lying: "It will be necessary sometimes to use falsehood as a remedy for the benefit of those who require such a mode of treatment." (*The Preparation of the Gospel*, volume 2, p. 619, published by Baker Books.) Eusebius, the Father of Church History sets the standard for much of what passes for Christian apologetics.

Philo of Alexandria

A major oversight of these authors is not mentioning Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (20 B.C.E.-45 C.E.). Philo was a Hellenistic Jew living in Alexandria. Origin preserved Philo's theological writings, which have astounding

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parallels to John's gospel and Paul's epistles (thoroughly set forth in Benson's *The Origins of Christianity and the Bible*, Chapters 25 and 26). Philo wrote about a God of love, Jews who sin go to hell, gentiles who come to God go to heaven, God is a trinity, God creates through His word, God holds all things together by His word, the word is the first begotten Son of God, God draws man through His word, the word is the appointed judge of man. Sound familiar? Philo was contemporaneous with Jesus, yet in all Philo's writings he does not once mention anything about a Jewish Messiah in Jerusalem, a Jesus of Nazareth, a crucifixion, a resurrection, Jewish saints coming out of their graves, an earthquake, or an eclipse. Philo's silence is deafening!

Philo's writings preceded both the epistles and the gospels. The many and profound similarities suggest Philo's strong influence if not plagiarized contributions to the gospel of John and much of Paul's thought. It seems more than coincidental that the oldest fragment of the gospel of John was found in Philo's home country of Egypt.

Justus of Tiberius

Why do Boyd and Eddy fail to mention the first century Galilean historian Justus of Tiberius? He wrote a history of Palestine covering the time of Christ's alleged existence. Justus' work has perished, but Photius, a ninth century Christian scholar who was acquainted with it, says: "He [Justus] makes no mention of Christ, of what things that happened to him, or of the wonderful works that he did" (Photius' *Bibliotheca*, code 33).

Nazareth

The authors' chapter "Excavating Jesus" is simply superficial. Archaeological investigations strongly suggest Nazareth was vacant from the Assyrian siege in 730 B.C.E. until at least the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Artifacts found in Nazareth are 2nd and 3rd century Roman, not Hellenistic as promoted by the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church of the Annunciation where the angel Gabriel allegedly announced to the Virgin Mary her pending conception stands atop Roman burial tombs. Even assuming Nazareth existed at the time of Mary's conception, would a devoted Jew have lived in proximity to corpses, a violation of Jewish laws of purity (Numbers 5:3)? If Nazareth was not settled until the second century, how could there be a first century Jesus of Nazareth?

Miracles?

Boyd and Eddy argue that the supernatural experiences portrayed in the gospels are no excuse to reject the gospel's plausibility. They say, "you will find that the world is full of reported experiences of the miraculous." Yes, televangelists Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, and Pat Robertson continuously report "miracles." Is this what Boyd and Eddy have in mind?

Boyd and Eddy could quickly solve the dilemma of Jesus' historicity and avoid all the work of writing this book. All that's required is to simply believe and act upon the eyewitness reported words of their Lord Jesus: "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:12-13).

Allegedly, the Son of God said what He meant and meant what He said. If so, Jesus clearly defined what it means to believe in Him. The evidence for believing in Jesus demands doing the works Jesus did. If Boyd and Eddy are believers according to Jesus' definition (which they are not), they would heal the blind and the deaf, raise the dead, turn water into wine, cast demons out of the demon oppressed into pigs, etc., etc., etc. – CASE CLOSED! Jesus would be proven to be not only a historical figure but also the resurrected Savior who truly is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:6). Boyd and Eddy can proclaim James' "prayer of faith" and heal whoever is sick (James 5:14-15).

Jefferson & Paine

It would be great fun to sit in on a conversation with Greg Boyd, Paul Eddy, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine. Jefferson wrote America's Declaration of Independence. Paine's "Common Sense," written in 1776, inspired the American Revolution. Both Jefferson and Paine were also students of Christianity and the Bible.

Jefferson wrote, "Question with boldness even the existence of a god; because if there be one he must approve of the homage of reason *more* than that of blindfolded fear." (Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787.)

Paine concluded, "The study of theology, as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on nothing; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing and admits of no conclusion." (*The Age of Reason, Part II*; 1796.)

No American belittles the intellectual capacity of a Jefferson or Paine, yet Boyd and Eddy politely refer to such "legendary-Jesus theorists" and skeptics as "radical" with "clever" arguments.

Other Resources

If the reader desires further consideration to the question of Jesus, *Lord or Legend?*, they must read *The Origins of Christianity and the Bible* by Andrew D. Benson; *The Jesus Puzzle* by Earl Doherty (jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/home.htm); *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture and Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman; *The Myth of Nazareth* by René Salm (nazarethmyth.info); *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew* by Frank Zindler; *Deconstructing Jesus, The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, and *The Pre-Nicene New Testament* by Robert M. Price. Both Ehrman and Price were trained in the Baptist tradition. Excepting *The Myth of Nazareth*, all are available through Amazon.

I'm sure Boyd and Eddy are fine Christians, but in my humble opinion they have busied themselves with stuffing round pegs in square holes.

In God We Doubt

By John Humphrys

Book review by Bjorn Watland

A few of you may remember a BBC program, "Humphrys in Search of God," that investigated the claims of religious leaders of Christian, Islamic, and Jewish faiths. The host, John Humphrys, was unconvinced by the answers he received.

Broadcast on radio at the end of 2006, right in the wake of *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, Humphrys asked tough questions about suffering in the world, even religious violence. How could a God exist who would allow so much violence, even violence in the name of religion? How can belief in God coexist with science?

While Humphrys is not convinced by the major religions, one should note the subtitle of his book: *Confessions of a Failed Atheist*. Humphrys is a genuine agnostic. However, atheists and liberal believers will find value in Humphrys' tale of his search for meaning. Humphrys writes plainly, and is skilled at telling his story from a long career with the BBC, including an assignment as Diplomatic Correspondent in the 1980s. He is open, honest, and not afraid to offend atheists or the religious

The interviews have failed to move him, as ritualistic responses by priests had failed to answer his questions as a young boy, but the letters that followed the program had a much greater effect.

Normally, after a radio program, the BBC will receive a dozen or so letters. The response to Humphrys' program resulted in thousands of letters from atheists, agnostics, and believers. The questions asked are



Bjorn Watland

big questions. God and morality carry strong responses. However, neither side wins him over, and he is critical of strong and weak arguments from both sides.

The arguments from atheists fail for him. While the atheists will use wit and skill, they describe Christianity in ludicrous but true terms. An analogy would be to describe a camping trip as slogging about some mountains as if you were a hobo, having the sunrise ruined by morning mist, and complaining about the breaks in the silence by chattering birds. This type of description would be great for peo-

Humphrys wants atheists to do two things: prove mainstream religion is a malignant force in the world, not just showcasing examples from extremists, and provide an alternative to the millions of believers in the world.

ple who hate camping but does nothing but outrage those who love it. There is little progress or dialog by characterizing Christianity or other faiths in the manner atheists do. It discredits your logical arguments, and the treatment of Christianity in this manner turns off those who may be sympathetic to your opinion.

Humphrys wants atheists to do two things: prove mainstream religion is a malignant force in the world, not just showcasing examples from extremists, and provide an alternative to the millions of believers in the world. "Atheism is easy," asserts Humphrys. "The default position for the human condition is that there is something out there. This cannot all be one big accident. Otherwise, what is the point?"

We recognize kindness, wickedness, and evil. There is no country in the world that would condone murder, theft, or rape, no matter its religion, or lack of it. Atheists assert that the rules that determine morality are created for the benefit of society and not handed down by some ultimate authority. Humphrys uses an old argument that if objective evil exists, there must be a God. Humphrys believes that we should fear fanaticism, but we... "should also fear a world in which the predominant values are materialism and consumerism, and the greatest aspiration of too many children is to become a celebrity."

Through his story he never really answers what will convince him to believe in God or any religion. He has spent his whole life trying to find a good reason to support his skepticism, but he is instead drawn away and toward this idea of "something."

His honesty is refreshing. Like it or not, his feeling about religion and atheism is not unique. There are many out there who are non-religious, but unable to accept atheism or a religion. Should we spend our time telling Christians how their religion is a lie? We have many clever ways of doing that. What should our goals be? Would our position be better understood if we defined things we do believe in, rather than asserting a negative position in opposition to the religious position?

Despite the diversity of atheists, there are a number of points that can be loosely agreed upon, and further debate about moral issues to be made that could make atheism more acceptable to honest doubters, the agnostics.

Things to do, places to go: A calendar for atheists

Sundays, 6:00 p.m., **Atheist/Agnostic AA**, Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Ave. # 55, Minneapolis, Jason Herrboldt, MplsAtheistAgnosticAA@yahoo.com.

3rd Sunday, 1-3:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists monthly meeting**. (See page 1.)

4th Sunday, 8-11 a.m., **Breakfast Social**. Old Country Buffet, Holly Shopping Center, Hwy 47 and Mississippi St., Fridley. Private room. Fern Wodtke, (651) 784-2307.

5th Sunday, **Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund**. Price: \$6.66. (March, June, August, November 2008)

1st and 3rd Monday, 6 p.m., **Freethought Toastmasters Club**. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to Party Room.) Roger Belfay, (651) 222-2782 or George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 pm., **Happy Hour North**. La Casita, 1925 Perimeter Road, Roseville, just west of the Rosedale mall. George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 p.m., **Happy Hour South**. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W. 66th Street (corner of Penn Ave. and 66th St.), Richfield, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

1st Tuesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. Old Country Buffet, Co. Road B2 between Snelling and Fairview, Roseville. Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. New China Buffet, 105 85th Ave. NW, Coon Rapids. Bill Volna, (612) 781-4273.

4th Wednesday, **Meal and a Reel**, Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin Ave. and Lake St.) 6 p.m. meal, 7 p.m. movie. George Kane, (651) 488-8225. Details in Atheists Weekly E-mail.

Thursdays, 7 p.m., **Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)** general meeting. 3d floor Coffman Memorial Union, 300 Washington Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455. Contact cash@cashumn.org.

1st Thursday, 6-9 p.m., **"Atheists Talk" TV taping**. MTN, Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2nd Thursday, evening. **Rochester Area Freethinkers** monthly get-together. Bill Kass, wjkhak@charter.net or (507) 259-4237.

4th Thursday, 6:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists board meeting**. Location varies. George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

To sign up for Atheists Weekly E-mail (AWE), send a request to awe@mnaatheists.org.

To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, go to <http://atheists.meetup.com/493>.

CHECK THE WAYS YOU WANT TO HELP ATHEISM GROW

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**“In America, we are free to disagree
about religious teachings;
we are not free to ask our
government to settle the argument.”**

**– Dan Barker, co-president, Freedom From Religion Foundation,
“Peace on Earth? Keep religion separate” op-ed, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*,
December 22, 2007 (jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=6992)**

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