

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in ActionSM

Volume 18 Number 3

March 2008

Sunday, March 16 meeting and dinner

Mormonism

Is Mormonism a mainstream Christian denomination or a cult? That became a crucial question in the presidential campaign of early Republican front-runner Mitt Romney. Romney answered that he was a brother-in-arms with all Christians against secularism. Romney decided to enter the race for the presidency after urging from Gordon B. Hinckley, the now deceased president and prophet of the Mormon Church.

Romney's candidacy has opened the door to political office for Mormons beyond their enclave in Utah. Aggressive proselytizers, Mormons are one of America's fastest growing



Bjorn Watland

denominations. What is the source of this growth, and what will be their impact on issues of separation of church and state?

These are among the questions that Bjorn Watland will address at our March Public Meeting. Bjorn has had a major impact on Minnesota Atheists in the last year. He is our Webmaster, and has

just been elected to our Board as a Director-at-Large, along with his fiancé Jeannette Sorensen. The two have recorded the commercial for AWE heard on our radio program.

Once again we will be meeting at the Ridgedale Library from 1:00 to

Upcoming events

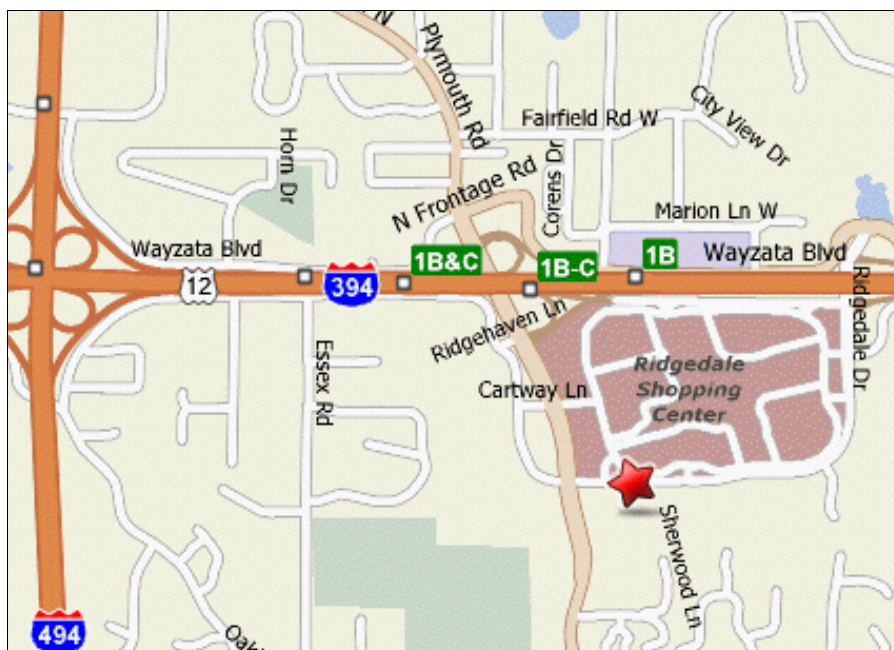
Sundays, 9-10 a.m. - "Atheists Talk" on **Air America Minnesota** radio. AM 950 or stream live at AirAmericaMinnesota.com/listen. Studio call-in line: (952) 946-6205.

March 16, 1-3:30 p.m. - Bjorn Watland discusses "Mormonism" at the Ridgedale Library (see left).

March 19-23 - American Atheists national conference in Minneapolis. (See insert.)

March 30, 4:00 - All-You-Can-Eat Spaghetti Dinner, fund raiser for the Building Fund. Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W, St. Paul 55113. Requested donation \$6.66.

April 20 - 1-3:30 p.m. - Lee Salisbury discusses the historicity of the resurrection. Roseville library.



3:30. See the insert map. At 4:00 we will have a Chinese buffet at the nearby Wanderer's Garden.

Ridgedale Library
12601 Ridgedale Dr.
Minnetonka, MN 55305
Sunday, Feb. 17, 1:00-3:30 p.m.

4:00 p.m. - Dinner
Wanderer's Garden
13059 Ridgedale Dr.

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**Building Fund:
\$98,855.37**

Honorary Members

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

**MNA Meetup members: 221
Life memberships: 27**

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

Democratic atheism shapes the future

By August Berkshire

In 2001, a number of Minnesota Atheists leaders realized that too much power in the hands of one person can be a recipe for disaster. Consequently, a slate of candidates in our 2002 elections ran on a platform that included the following proposed bylaw changes: That a person can serve no more than three consecutive combined years as either the president or the chair, and that the president can not simultaneously be the newsletter editor. After that slate of candidates won the 2002 elections, those changes were implemented.

I served as president from March 2002-February 2005, then stepped off the board entirely to become the newsletter editor for the next three years. During these past three years, George Kane has served as chair for two years and president for one year. Thus he could not run for chair or president this year (though he will be eligible again next year). Since I was to become the next president, I could no longer continue as newsletter editor.

Grant Steves volunteered to be our next newsletter editor, but for personal reasons having nothing to do with Minnesota Atheists, has had to withdraw his offer. George Kane has volunteered to be our interim editor while we search for a new permanent editor. Please let us know if you would like to apply for the job!

During the past six years I think our board of directors has had a healthy amount of turnover. Some "veterans" have remained or stepped off and returned, while several people new to our organization have joined to bring a fresh perspectives and energy. Minnesota Atheists is not about any par-



August Berkshire

ticular person or group of people; it is an organization that will hopefully continue to thrive long after we are gone. Sharing power and ideas and encouraging new people to participate is the only way that will happen.

Our "Atheists Talk" radio program on Air America Minnesota has been an overall success. At first some of our segments were too short, so now we are generally allowing at least a half hour per interview or discussion. There have also been some technical glitches that we have had to overcome. However, the feeling of those involved is that we have been constantly improving and that we have a show we can be proud of.

The program has been responsible for a huge increase in visits to our website and a significant increase in membership. Special thanks go to Bjorn Watland who has devoted a lot of time making our website more interactive and easier to use for donating money.

Speaking of donations... we could use more of them to help support our radio program. Our six-month contract cost us \$9,100 and we have only raised about \$3,000 so far from the sale of advertising.

Lori Lipman Brown of the Secular Coalition for America visited Minnesota for nine days in late February. In the course of her stay, she spoke to the following student groups: Agnostic and Atheist Society (St. Olaf, Northfield), Campus Atheists and Agnostics (Minnesota State University, Mankato), University of Minnesota-Morris Freethinkers, and Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH) (University of Minnesota-Twin Cit-

ies).

In visiting these student groups, it became apparent that they had little or no contact with each other. Consequently, at the suggestion of MNA member Mary Myers, we will try to host an all-Minnesota student get-together at the upcoming American Atheists Conference. This will probably occur Saturday evening, while other conference attendees are at the American Atheists Life and Legacy Members Dinner. Check your American Atheists Conference packet and our website and AWE for further details.

As far as we know, the student groups mentioned above are the only ones that exist in Minnesota. If you know of others, please contact us so we can help support them.

Finally, Lori Lipman Brown and I had the privilege of speaking to three classes at Northwestern College, a Christian school in Arden Hills. We were well received and had a great time there. Our conversation with several of the students continued afterwards at Pippins restaurant.

Every time I speak at a Christian college, I become more convinced of several things: 1) The vast majority of these students, while dedicated Christians, are open to hearing and discussing other points of view in a thoughtful manner. 2) They respect our right to be atheists and to not be discriminated against or have religion forced on us. 3) They value the American ideals of separation of state and church and have a "live and let live" attitude that almost always extends to atheists and gays. (We must admit that there are some atheists who do not have a "live and let live" attitude towards religious people.) 4) They are as genuinely concerned about the

(Continued on page 4)

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welfare of the poor and our environment as any of the rest of us flaming liberals. 5) That the percentage of Christians who are good and decent is about the same as the percentage athe-

ists who are good and decent. There are bad apples in both groups, but they are by far the minority. 6) That the Minnesota Atheists attitude of non-ridiculing, positive, friendly neighborhood atheism works. We

need to continue to tear down walls, rather than put up barriers. My attitude is that we have already won the intellectual war, now we just have to spread the good news.

Board of Directors Election Results

The election of the Board of Directors for 2008 was held at the February Membership Meeting. The withdrawal of members whose names had been placed in nomination left only one candidate for each position. The following officers were elected by unanimous vote.

President: August Berkshire
 Associate President: Cynthia Egli
 Chair: Steve Petersen
 Associate Chair: Bruce Honnigford

Treasurer: Andy Flamm
 Secretary: George Kane
 Director-at-Large: Kristine Harley
 Director-at-Large: Bjorn Watland
 Director-at-Large: Jeannette Sorenson

The new Board takes office in March. President-elect August Berkshire thanks the outgoing officers, Treasurer, Jack Caravela, Secretary Matthew Richardson, and Directors-at-Large Ron Julien for their service to

Minnesota Atheists. They will each continue to be a valuable contributor to our community.

Minnesota Atheists' bylaws prohibit an individual from holding the positions of President and Editor at the same time. At their February meeting, the Board of Directors appointed George Kane as the interim Editor of the newsletter and as the Public Relations Officer (PRO).



Treasurer's Report February 1-28, 2008

Building Fund: \$2,590.00

Jim Barri	\$10.00
Guy Harper	\$50.00
Kevin Hardisty	\$40.00
James Koran	\$200.00
Jerold & Joyce Larson	\$1,000.00
Christopher Matthews	\$50.00
Steve Peterson	\$25.00
Matthew Richardson	\$140.00

Leonard Sojka	\$25.00
Bjorn Watland	\$25.00
James Whitney	\$1,000.00
Steven Wilson	\$25.00

Radio Fund: \$310.00

Joseph Buhner	\$25.00
Steve Peterson	\$25.00
Bjorn Watland	\$25.00

Rachel Wilson	\$210.00
Steve Ziolkowski	\$25.00

Visibility (General) Fund: \$335.00

Jim Barri	\$10.00
August Berkshire	\$200.00
Steve Peterson	\$25.00
Vern Young	\$100.00

Minnesota Atheists Building Fund



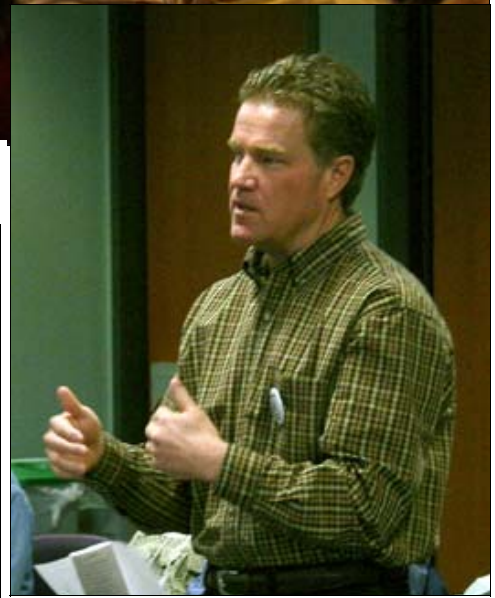
February meeting featuring

Lori Lipman Brown, Director of the Secular Coalition for America



Above: Lori Lipman Brown presents an update from the Secular Coalition for America at the Ridgedale library.

Right: Rod Monroe asks Lori a question.



Above: During the break, members discuss Lori's presentation. Standing from left, Bob Nienkerk, Norman Ehrenreich, August Berkshire, Steve Petersen, Cynthia Egli and George Kane.



Right: Bob Nienkerk questions Lori after her speech.

Fern Wodtke 1930 - 2008

A life well lived

By Steve Petersen and Shirley Moll

On February 4th, 2008, the members of Minnesota Atheists lost a great friend and supporter, Fern Wodtke. Fern had been a fixture with Minnesota Atheists over the past 10 years. In fact, in 1999 we presented Fern with our Friendly Neighborhood Atheist award. She greeted people with a smile, laughter and graciousness. She baked brownies, fruit and nut breads for meetings and social functions. The last event she was able to attend was the 5th Sunday Breakfast this past December. Fern also hosted the 4th Sunday breakfast at Old Country Buffet in

Fridley for the past 10 years.

Fern broke the god spell at an early age. It was through her confirmation studies that she decided there was no god, and she lived her life free of religious dogma. When we look back at Fern's life, we see a life well lived.



She was married to her best friend and partner for 60 years, Bob Wodtke, who preceded Fern in death by 10 months. They had one daughter, Diane, who preceded both Bob and Fern in death. Fern was also the proud grandparent of Brett and Brad

Welch. Fern was an award-winning crafter of crocheted gifts that she sold at shows over the years. Fern also designed and made a Moses outfit for a Jesse Ventura doll. We then took the Moses doll and produced a photo of Ventura parting the sea of church and state. Fern had one other talent

that included being an expert Chinese Checkers player. Several of us have the distinction of never being able to win against Fern. When Fern played Chinese Checkers, she turned into a ruthless determined person who was thrilled at victory. It was a honor to have the distinction to have lost to Fern. At our next 5th Sunday dinner we will hold the first Fern Wodtke Chinese Checkers Memorial Tournament and the winners will receive Fern's crocheted gifts.

On February 8th, many of us gathered to share our sadness and to celebrate Fern's life. The following announcement of Fern's death was written by Brett Welch. It puts into perspective the depth of Fern's love of life and family.

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Fern Wodtke

1930 - 2008

Wife to Bob Wodtke

Sister to Charles Gustafson

Grandmother to Brad and Brett

Welch

In December 2007 Fern came down with a stomach flu and a depression came over her. She decided to take some time for herself in January to get better, and since she hadn't gone to a doctor in 60 years, she thought she could handle everything herself as she always had before. Although her depression lifted, her ability to eat further declined. For her last two weeks she was only able to eat liquids, and within the last week she could only get up and move with the assistance of myself and Brad. When her (and our) limits had been reached, she agreed to let us take her to the hospital on Saturday February 2nd. That day they discovered that she had cancer in her liver (it was twice its normal size) and throughout her entire abdomen. She elected to pass away peacefully on painkillers (pain only began to emerge the day we brought her in). Even up to this point her mind and memory remained sharp and on the mark. On Sunday she declined further, only able to emerge occasionally and briefly from her drugged and sleepy state to present her gentle smile. She died peacefully early on Monday, February 4.

Although the cancer was the physi-

cal cause, I don't doubt that the stress of Bob's death last August and the previous ten months of his illness contributed to her eventual decline in health. Their flawless 60 year marriage together was an amazing accomplishment. Bob's passing was truly devastating, and its eventual effects on her were, perhaps, inevitable.

If my grandfather was a person who expressed his love and compassion through his actions on behalf of others, then I can say that Fern expressed her caring and concern for others with a loving smile and gentle words. She loved to engage in endless conversation with others, whether listening and providing soothing words for friends and family in despair, or witty, sharp, and sarcastic comments for those engaged in silly pursuits. She was able to dish out at any given moment razor sharp, witty, mock, insults with anyone who dared. This was usually with me, resulting in those who did not understand our unique relationship to put their hands to their mouth in shock, nod their head disapprovingly, or laugh uproariously. At the same time, her caring and love had no boundaries. I have never met anyone who so loved and cared about everybody - friends, family, or strangers on the news. She always had hugs, kisses, and tears in abundance for anyone; and was always there to listen when someone needed a compassionate friend to confide in. To be in Fern's presence was to be enveloped by pure

love and joy. She had such an exuberance and zest for life. Although she traveled little the last couple decades, she enthusiastically listened to others' travels, and through her non stop watching and listening to news and her encyclopedic memory and instant recall of obscure information, she was able to wow others with her energetic personality, utterly precise memory, and gift of gab. She was the complete personality. She was my grandmother, my (replacement) mother, and my best friend. Although I have tried to emulate her in her dedication and love of others, I know I have fallen short of her perfection. She is a much better person than I will ever be. She was so, so beautiful. I will always hold her deep within my heart. And I will always miss her. She was truly the best, and one of a kind. There will never be another like her.

--Brett Welch



Volunteer Needed for Newsletter Editor

I have accepted the position of editor of the newsletter because August Berkshire's intended successor had to withdraw for personal reasons. While I am flattered by the confidence of the Board and committed to the success of the organization, I am pessimistic that I will be able to serve for

long because my job situation is uncertain. I am concerned that my job search will require my full attention.

I am willing to continue as editor as long as I remain employed, so a volunteer may have the opportunity to assist for a couple of months. The new editor will be ably assisted by

Tom Riddering, who does composition and layout in Microsoft Publisher, and the editorial board of Kristine Harley, Vanita Mishra, Grant Steves and Erin Ahlstrom.

If you are interested in this position, please e-mail me at editor@mnatheists.org. --George Kane



"Atheists Talk" Radio Report

By August Berkshire

As we go to print, we will have completed eight programs of our 26-week contract. Those programs have been:

Jan. 13 – News: House Resolution 888; Atheist History: Robert G. Ingersoll; "Whale Transition Species" with PZ Myers; "The God Delusion" with Richard Dawkins.

Jan. 20 – Discussion on "What is atheism?"; "Sex Across the Curriculum" with Jennifer Tudor.

Jan. 27 – News: U.S. Constitution and the Bible; "Science, Evolution and Creationism" with PZ Myers; "The Reason-Driven Life" with Robert M. Price.

Feb. 3 – Freedom From Religion Foundation with Annie Laurie Gaylor; Discussion of Religious Cults.

Feb. 10 – Discussion of American Atheists.

Feb. 17 – "Parenting Beyond Belief" with Dale McGowan; Secular Coalition for America with Lori Lipman Brown.

Feb. 24 – Secular Coalition for America with Lori Lipman Brown; Discussion on "Secular Ethics" with Scott Forscherler.

Mar. 2 – FriendlyAtheist.com blog, "I Sold My Soul on eBay," and Secular Student Alliance with Hemant Mehta; "Unintelligent Design" with PZ Myers.

We have many ideas for future programs and guests and we welcome your input as well. Contact us at 612-588-7031 or radio@mnaatheists.org to let us know how

we're doing and to suggest a guest or program.

We had to purchase our time slot (Sundays, 9-10 a.m.) for \$9,100 and then try to sell ads to defray the cost. So far we have only sold about \$3,000 worth of ads, so your contributions are greatly appreciated (please specific

Above: Sending a message of secular sanity, (from left) Scott Lohman, Bruce Honnigford and Cynthia Egli.

Below: (from left) George Kane and Grant Steves.



that they are for the radio program). The good news is that we have seen a substantial increase in membership.

Another way you can help is to listen to the radio program live (AM 950 or AirAmericaMinnesota.com/listen) and call (952-946-6205) or e-mail (radio@mnaatheists.org) a question to us. We want to hear from you!



A recent Minnesota Atheists Meetup outing visited the Minnesota Science Museum. (From left) Georgia Tsoi, Carl Hancock, Shirley Moll, Mike Haubrich, Jeannette Sorensen, Bjorn Watland and Steve Petersen. (Rear) T. Rex.

Student Gathering at Conference

Minnesota Atheists will sponsor a student get-together Saturday evening, March 22, at the American

Atheists conference. It will be held at the same time as the American Atheists Life and Legacy Members dinner. This is a chance for atheist high school and college students from

across Minnesota to get to know one another, share ideas, and network. Further details will be announced at the conference and in a flyer in the American Atheists conference packet.

Freethought Cryptogram

By George Kane

HKBXQ, C TCTR'L OMPKJ CR OMLE. C OMPKJIT CR
OCJMFBIQ.

— OCXI EZFXMAIL, IGYBMCRCRV NEU EI TKIQ RKL TJKY
KZL KH LEI JMFI HKJ LEI JIYZABCFMR RKOCRMRLCJR
HKJ YHIQCTIRL.

Solution to last month's cryptogram: You cannot control your destiny. You can only contain it.
By: Cris Collinsworth, NFL commentator.

News and notes...

By George Kane

The New York Times on January 29 confirmed President Bush's claim that whoever succeeds him as president will keep his faith-based initiatives in place. The Times reported:

Hillary Clinton has declared that there is no contradiction between "support for faith-based initiatives and upholding our constitutional principles." John McCain has supported the idea especially as it relates to improving educational programs for disadvantaged children. Barack Obama describes faith-based programs as a "uniquely powerful way of solving problems" especially where former prisoners and substance abusers are concerned.

When Lori Lippman Brown, the Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America spoke at our February meeting, I asked her if the next president could disband the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. She replied that it would be politically impossible, because Congress would accuse him of removing the "level playing field" for religious groups. She believes that the only reason that Congress would allow the office to be closed is if it became convinced that money given to religious organizations has been corruptly misused.

The U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals declined this week to reconsider a ruling that threw out a lawsuit challenging the practice of sectarian prayers in sessions of the Indiana House.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana had asked the full court to rehear the case after a three-judge panel ruled 2-1 in October, in *Hinrichs v. Bosma*, that taxpayers who sued over the prayers did not have the legal standing to do so.

The ACLU will probably file a new lawsuit, with plaintiffs who come into

contact with the prayers and who therefore might have legal standing. A lower court has already ruled in their favor on merit. They still have a 90-day window to decide whether to appeal the overturn on standing of the verdict in *Hinrichs* to the U.S. Supreme Court.

At Irasburg Village School in Vermont, parents are complaining about a language arts teacher, Wally Rogers, who has been feeding his classes Christianity with a heavy hand. Rogers posted the Ten Commandments on his classroom wall, filled the class' bookshelves with Christian themed books, and put links to Christian sites on his page on the school's web site. Students are even given handouts in class such as "Why Jesus

VA Hospitals across the nation are removing faith-specific symbols from their chapels...

is Better than Santa Claus."

It reminds me of the conduct of David Paszkiewicz in the Kearny, New Jersey public high school case that young Matthew LaClair brought into the national spotlight. Once again the administration has refused to explain what actions it has taken in response to complaints from parents. The school allowed the teacher to single out the students who were children of the complaining parents, exposing them to reprisals from their "Christian" classmates. One parent commented, "It's like they're trying to sweep us under the carpet like we're going to go away, but we're not." The parents have contacted the ACLU, which will monitor the administration's response.

In Philadelphia, the city Redevelopment Authority transferred blighted property to a Catholic religious organization to build a non-denominational school. One of the prop-

erty owners appealed the condemnation, arguing that the transfer of ownership benefited a private religious entity and was not for a public purpose as required by law. However, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in January upheld the condemnation by the Redevelopment Authority, noting that "The principal or primary effect of the redevelopment plan . . . is to eliminate blight in this particular neighborhood." It called the benefit to a religious organization only a "secondary effect." Writing for the minority, Justice Max Baer (no Jethro he) called the transfer of land to a religious organization at below market value "direct financing of religious education with the primary effect of advancing religion."

James McElroy, the attorney who represented atheist Philip Paulson in the case against San Diego over the Mt. Soledad Cross

will receive substantial legal fees from the city. Last week, the City Council voted to pay him \$760,000 to settle the case. This is still \$200,000 below the payment ordered by the trial judge.

It has been a long time coming. In 1953, Veterans Affairs Hospitals adopted a policy that states, "Chapels will be appointed and maintained as places for meditation and prayer for members of any faith group or denomination." The policy further requires that "the labeling of chapel buildings or the erection of chapels for the exclusive use of a particular faith group is contrary to policy."

VA Hospitals across the nation are removing faith-specific symbols from their chapels, as the VA finally decided to enforce its own policy. Christians and Congressmen are objecting, so it will be interesting to see if the VA sticks to its guns.

Charlene Hastings, a transgender

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woman filed a claim in December in San Francisco Superior Court against Seton Medical Center in Daly City, California. She alleges that the Catholic-affiliated hospital discriminated against her when it would not allow her plastic surgeon to perform breast augmentation surgery.

Hastings completed gender reassignment surgery in fall 2006 to become female at another hospital. Shortly after, she requested the breast augmentation surgery be performed at Seton Medical Center because her surgeon was affiliated with the hospital. The hospital denied her request and an official told her that "God made you a man," according to the complaint.

A spokesman for the Medical Center said "the hospital does not perform surgical procedures contrary to Catholic teaching; for example, abortion, direct euthanasia, transgender surgery or any of its related components." Shannon Minter, legal director for the Center for Lesbian Rights, said the Unruh Civil Rights Act protects Hastings against discrimination based on gender identity, adding that there is no exception for religious-affiliated businesses.

Danish police arrested two Tunisians and a Dane of Moroccan origin for plotting to kill Kurt Westergaard, a 73 year-old caricaturist who drew a cartoon of the Muslim prophet Mohammed wearing a turban that looked like a bomb. In a show of support for the cartoonist and for the principles of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, newspapers all over Denmark reprinted the cartoon, which was originally published in the *Jyllands-Posten* on Sept. 30, 2005.

What US newspaper has yet stood for principle and published the cartoons? That's right, readers. *The Minnesota Atheists Newsletter*.

This column previously reported that **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** was forced to leave America after Holland decided

to stop paying for security for the former legislator when she is out of the country. The outspoken critic of Islam has now applied for French citizenship, and proposed that the European Union establish a fund to pay for security for victims of *fatwahs*.

The idea of an EU fund has the support of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Is there any chance that the United States might also establish a security fund, as part of its War on Terror? Hirsi Ali's employer is the American Enterprise Institute.

Last October, Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh, a 23-year-old college student in Afghanistan, downloaded from the internet an article on the role of women in Islamic societies. I don't know if he merely forwarded the article to others, printed it off and passed it out as a flyer, or had it published in the newspaper for which he works as

The trial court sentenced him to death for distributing literature that was offensive to Islam.

a reporter, but Kambakhsh learned that there are severe penalties in Afghanistan for distributing "blasphemous" material. The trial court sentenced him to death for distributing literature that was offensive to Islam. The court and the Attorney General for Balkh province threatened reporters with arrest if they objected to the sentence.

Afghanistan is the nation for which we launched Operation Enduring Freedom, at a cost so far of \$127 Billion, to liberate it from Islamic Jihadists. But while America claims to be spreading democracy in the Muslim world, the separation of church and state appears no longer to be a value we promote.

It seemed like a lot of hype, last year, when the Discovery Channel aired a documentary that claimed that a bone box found in Israel contained the physical remains of Jesus and his family. It seemed too easy to dismiss

the claim as a fanciful or fraudulent grab for headlines, but now it is attracting the attention of serious academics. A leading New Testament expert from Princeton Theological Seminary, Prof. James Charlesworth, organized a conference in Jerusalem this January, bringing together over 50 archeologists, statisticians and experts in DNA, ceramics and ancient languages, to give evidence as to whether or not the crypt of Christ had been found.

Although some academics continue to deny the possibility, leading New Testament scholars such as Professor Jane Schaberg (Mercy), Professor Claude Cohen-Matlofsky (University of Toronto), Israel Knohl (Hebrew University) and Professor James Tabor (University of North Carolina at Charlotte) all indicated that they thought it was "likely" that the Talpiot tomb was indeed the lost tomb of Jesus.

A revelation from the conference was that the author and producer of the History Channel documentary, Simcha Jacobovici, was not the first to conclude that the Talpiot Ossuary held the bones of Jesus and family. Ruth Gat accorded that honor to her husband, a major figure in Biblical archaeology, who originally discovered it. She stated, "The reason he never published his opinion," she said "was because, as a Holocaust survivor, he feared that the announcement might spark anti-Semitism around the world. As a result, he took his secret to the grave."

Andrey Feuerverger, Professor of Mathematics and Statistics from the University of Toronto, who had done the initial statistical study that concluded a 600:1 probability in favor of the tomb being the Jesus family tomb, announced that his statistical model has now been peer-reviewed and accepted by the leading statistical journal, *Annals of Applied Statistics*, and has since been published in their February 2008 issue.

Web Report

We have a few new features of the website since the last newsletter. Forums now allow you to discuss with other people in an open way. Because our forums are open, anyone can add to the topics. Also, we have a new Atheists Talk Video section which showcases the latest videos right on your computer. Don't forget that the latest Atheists Talk Ra-

dio program is always available from our site, as well as *iTunes*. You can make easy donations to Minnesota Atheists through our site as well, in-

cluding choosing which fund to donate to, and now you can become a monthly contributor. Your feedback of the website is always appreciated. Remember, this is your website, and it can only get better with your input. Send your comments and suggestions to web@mnatheists.org

—Bjorn Watland

Remember, this is your website, and it can only get better with your input.

In-box

A while back, I was reading one of the many Minnesota Atheists weekly newsletters. I discovered that your organization is in the process of saving money to purchase a building for Atheists and Freethinkers to congregate and philosophize. I thought to myself, "Great idea! Like a *Free Thought Hall*, like the FFRF has." Here is some money for your organization.

As I have said, even though I'm states away, your organization and all of its weekly activities I read about gives me solace after being bombarded on a daily basis by fairy tales being passed off as truth to the younger generations on the television and the radio.

Keep up all the great work your organization does; it helps more people than you know – *that's* the truth.

"The high minded man must care more for the truth, than for what other people think." – Aristotle

— Rick Calissi, Pennsylvania.

First, let me say I defend atheists and agnostics whenever I can. I am so happy for the atheist community gaining a voice in this country. The terrible bigotry, hate and discrimination launched at you is unbelievable.

I am also happy to know that people are finally standing up to the various religious groups of this coun-

try and saying, "Enough of forcing your faith based views onto us." I am a theist myself, but I believe religion to be private and personal, to be kept out of discussions unless real evidence can be forwarded for ones points...not scriptures and private revelations of "God told me."

I heartily agree too that the Constitution shows us a religion-free framework to base our American way of life upon. Science is wonderful and I think quantum theory is simply amazing.

I just wanted you to know that you do have friends amongst the theists and some who will stand up with you even if that means standing against my fellow theists.

Hurray for your new radio show...I've listened to each one so far! And I hope you have Mr. Dawkins on more and perhaps Sam Harris?

Thank you so much!

— Danielle, Inver Grove Heights

Love the new radio show/podcast— I download it every week! Great interviews and discussions. Also, thanks for putting details of books, etc. on the Web page. Very helpful.

Best wishes,

—Andy Sutton, Staffordshire, England.

I appreciate very much your Sunday morning radio program.

Because we only have two choices for news/talk radio in the Minneapolis area, it is great to have atheists on the air. KSJN runs the repulsive *Speaking of Faith*, while KTNF runs infomercials most of the weekend.

I thank you sincerely for your part in the resurgence of public and argumentative atheism. Religion is not benign, and thanks for speaking on my behalf.

—Steve Stewart

Did you miss your AWE?

If you subscribe to Atheist Weekly E-mail (AWE) and do not receive it on Friday afternoon, please let me know. Your attention is needed to keep our distribution list up to date.

If you do not subscribe to AWE, but would like to receive a weekly listing of upcoming events of interest to the atheist community, also let me know at NUP@minn.net.

— George Kane



The Secular Supper group meets monthly at one of the members' homes for dinner and socializing. If you are interested in participating, contact Tom Riddering at volkfolks@comcast.net. Clockwise from center, Joseph Homrich, Cynthia Egli, Arthur Schunk, Nathan Curland, Tom Riddering, Vanita Mishra and Jean Riddering.

Conference Volunteers Needed

We are looking for volunteers to help with various tasks at the upcoming American Atheists national conference, March 20-23. If you can help with any of these, please contact August Berkshire at 612-338-4548 or augustberkshire@gmail.com.

- Unloading a truck and transferring boxes of books on Thursday afternoon.

- Speaker pickup at airport Thursday, 4:45 p.m.
- Speaker pickup at airport Thursday, 5:30 p.m.
- Three people to act as escorts for special guests on Thursday and Friday.
- Staffing Minnesota Atheists table during breaks.
- Staffing Camp Quest of Minnesota table during breaks.

- Staffing voter registration table during breaks.
- Staffing raffle ticket sales table during breaks.
- Video recording atheist oral histories: Volunteers to ask a set of questions and others to give their histories. (You may miss one conference speaker.)

Catch top movies at "Meal and Reel."

Are the Academy Awards a mystery to you, because you haven't seen any of the nominated movies? Join us for "Meal and Reel" on the fourth Wednesday of each month. In the

past year we've seen "There Will Be Blood" with Best Actor Daniel Dey-Lewis; "La Vie en Rose" with Best Actress Marion Cotillard; Best Animated Film "Persepolis;" 2007 Best Foreign Language Film winner "The Lives of Others;" and other films nominated for major awards. We

meet at a restaurant before movie for dinner and conversation, then take in the best movie that month playing in one of Minneapolis' Landmark Theaters. Check AWE and the web site for restaurant, movie and times.

Discovery Institute's unintelligent designers have no scruples

By Lee Salisbury

Published in the *Stillwater Gazette*

This past Saturday one of the C-Span book reviews featured Dr. John West's book, *Darwin Day In America: How Our Politics and Culture Have Been Dehumanized in the Name of Science*. Dr. West, a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute argued that the domination of science in American society has led to the corruption of our morals.

I must admit my astonishment at West's proposition. He reminds me of the preacher who proclaimed, "You don't need to read nuttin but the bible." Dr. West verges on suggesting that ignorance and stupidity produce good morals. When talking about the theory of evolution, that is essentially his position. The Discovery Institute's mission is to fabricate reasons to deny the 150 years of research that stands behind the theory of evolution, because it contradicts a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis. Has Dr. West ever heard of Galileo?

Dr. West and his Discovery Institute constituents are among the less than 1% of Ph.D.s in science combating the 99% of Ph.D.s in science who consider evolution a fact. West is scrambling for a reason that would make Intelligent Design (ID) credible. Thus, Dr. West asserts that science, and particularly Darwin's theory of evolution, must be responsible for the corruption of morals.

West goes on to make the incredible claim that Darwin's evolution is responsible for anti-Semitism. Darwin's *Origin of Species* first appeared in 1859. If West's assertion were true, then there should not have been any anti-Semitism prior to 1859.

On the contrary, anti-Semitism



Lee Salisbury

goes back at least 1,500 years. It has ranged from individual Christian expressions of hatred and discrimination against individual Jews to organized violent attacks by mobs on Jewish communities. Extreme instances of persecution include the German Crusade of 1096, the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290, the Spanish Inquisition, the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497, and various other pogroms.

Martin Luther, student of the bible and namesake of Lutherans, wrote a pamphlet in 1543 entitled "On the Jews and Their Lies." Luther sets forth the Christian obligation to destroy the Jews. He writes that Christians should "set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them." ... "Their houses also be razed and destroyed." ... "Their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them." ... "Their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb." ... "safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews." ... "usury be prohibited to them and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them." ... "If we wish to wash our hands of the Jews' blasphemy and not share in their guilt, we have to part company with them. They must be driven from our country" ... "we must drive them out like mad dogs."

Martin Luther was a virulent anti-Semite long before Darwin was born.

His hatred of Jews was grounded in the loving words of Jesus and Paul written centuries years before Darwin.

The Discovery Institute has all the appearances of respectability. They are Christians whom one assumes would never violate God's Commandment against lying, "Thou shall not bear false witness." Yet, they lie with abandon. They are the victim of what happens when ideology supersedes common sense. The Discovery Institute is so consumed with their ideology that they have lost all concern for honesty and truthfulness. They have no scruples and depend on the gullibility of their constituents to propagate their nonsense.

All the immorality Dr. West ascribes to Darwin is undeniably justified in and by the bible. West's problem is not the fault of science, but of blind allegiance to religious ideology.

Further, West's reasoning illustrates the logical fallacy of "appeal to consequences." This fallacious argument concludes a premise (typically a belief) to be either true or false based on whether the premise leads to desirable or undesirable consequences. It is an appeal to emotion and a logical fallacy, since the desirability of a consequence has no bearing on the truth-value of the premise.

The scientific method of thought, described by Aristotle, reinvigorated by the Enlightenment and paid for with the blood of many martyrs made possible our deliverance from the Judeo-Christian doctrines that justify slavery, oppression of women and anti-Semitism. America's enemies are not external but within our midst and must be exposed at every turn.

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.

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, hawthorn64@hotmail.com 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@mnatheists.org.

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

CHECK THE WAYS YOU WANT TO HELP ATHEISM GROW

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

JOIN OR RENEW MEMBERSHIP

- \$35 - Individual membership
- \$45 - Household membership
- \$75 - Sustaining Fund membership
- \$20 - Student (by e-mail) (send copy of fee statement or high school ID)
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All memberships include newsletter

- \$25 - Newsletter subscription only

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Sundays, 9-10 a.m. AM 950 radio or stream live at
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**"...to argue with a man who has
renounced his reason is like
giving medicine to the dead."**

— Robert G. Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p.127

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