

*IN THIS ISSUE*

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***No Chapter Meetings during the summer***

***Join us at the Free-thought Picnics***

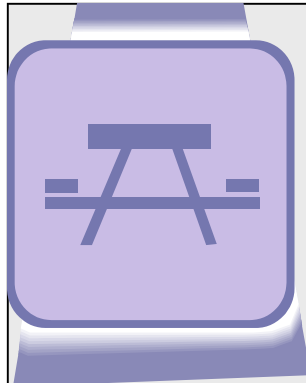
***July 19  
August 16***

**Noon to 3:00 p.m.**

**Columbia Park**

***HUMANISM:***

*A better life for all through education, democracy, free speech, reason and science, without reliance on arbitrary dogmas, revelations and faith.*



***This summer, join us at the  
Freethought Picnics!***

***Sunday, July 19  
Sunday, August 16***

Lots of friendly people.  
 A play area for the kids.  
 Lively discussions for the adults.  
 Bring games, instruments etc.

Bring some picnic food to share. The shelter area has electricity, sink and electric hot plate. (Don't forget to bring your own beverage, plate and utensils.)

**COLUMBIA PARK** is located in northeast Minneapolis.

- ▶ Take Central Ave NE (MN Hwy. 65) to Columbia Pkwy. (Between 36th Ave. and 37th Ave.)
- ▶ Turn west onto Columbia Pkwy.
- ▶ Proceed along Columbia Pkwy. (0.35 miles).
- ▶ After you go under the railroad bridge, you will see the park on your left.
- ▶ Take the first left onto the service road (you will see a sign for "800 Columbia Blvd."). Proceed to the second parking lot on your left (0.2 miles). (You should see us by the shelter on the hill!)

## PRESIDENT'S

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June is the month that the GLBT community celebrates their existence. Now a column on this would have been different if written last month rather than waiting for this one, unless one wants to look at what those who still want to repress and convert the community are saying. R. Albert Mohler is the president of the Southern Theological Seminary, flagship school for the Southern Baptist Convention. This is the branch of Baptists that broke away to support slavery in the time of the Civil War. Mohler also is host of a radio program available on our local Salem station, KKMS. Mohler has an interesting piece on the GLBT celebration and on President Barack Obama's proclamation on GLBT month. While the Obama administration is seeming to tone back its push for opening up or correcting GLBT rights in our country, Mohler is upset about one of the words that Obama

used in his proclamation.

Here's a quote from his blog post: "Nevertheless, the most morally significant dimension of President Obama's proclamation is the use of the word "pride." With the stroke of a pen, a vast moral judgment was communicated."

Do you see his problem? Somehow Mohler is upset with the work 'pride'. "This poses a big problem for citizens who believe that homosexuality is inherently sinful. Can we find pride in what we know to be sin? That question contains its own answer. There is no way that biblical Christians can join in the chorus of gay pride. The Bible is straightforward in its consistent identification of homosexual acts as inherently sinful. Homosexual acts are not singled out as the only form of sexual sin. The Bible condemns any number of heterosexual sins, ranging from fornication and adultery to a catalogue of forbidden acts and relationships."

Mohler and his fellow homophobes are angry that GLBT people take "pride" in who they are. They show that they still do not grasp that sexual orientation is biologically based. Science is showing that orientation is not something that you can "catch" like a cold virus. As science research progresses, it appears that genetics and a number of other biological factors affect ones orientation.

But people like Mohler still deny that it is biologically based. Mohler believes that homosexuality is not part of who someone is: "In signing this proclamation, President Obama put the issue right before us all. During the 1980s the gay rights movement began using the "pride" language in an effort to defy negative moral judgments about homosexuality. Calls for gay liberation

*(Editorial, Continued on page 7)*

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Humanists of Minnesota is a nonprofit educational corporation and has been granted a 501(c)(3) tax exemption as an educational, scientific and charitable organization. Donations to Humanists of Minnesota are tax deductible. HofM is a chapter of the American Humanist Association (AHA) and an affiliate of the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies of the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH). Address inquiries to the Humanists of Minnesota, P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997, or call (651) 335-3800.

E-mail us at [president@humanistsofmn.org](mailto:president@humanistsofmn.org) or visit our web site: [www.humanistsofmn.org](http://www.humanistsofmn.org)

# Announcements

## DISCUSSION GROUPS

**Mondays, 5:00-7:00 p.m.**, Richard Dick Memorial Happy Hours, Ol' Mexico Restaurant, 1754 Lexington Ave., Roseville (just north of Larpenteur). Tables on terrace level. Call Paul Craven, (763) 788-8918.

**1st and 3rd Mondays, 6:00 p.m.**, Freethought Toastmasters Club, Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. Call George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

**1st Sunday, 9:00 a.m.-noon**, Lake Superior Freethinkers monthly meeting. Radisson Hotel Duluth, Viking Room. For information contact Bill van Druten, (218) 724-4176).

**2nd Sunday, 10:00 a.m.-noon**, Critical Thinking Club St. Paul, Kelly Inn, Hwy. I-94. Contact George Kane, lhutt@comcast.net. (\$10 brunch, \$3 coffee/speaker only)

**2nd & 4th Mondays, 5:00-7:00 p.m.**, Happy Hour South, Davanni's, 66th St. & Penn Ave. S., Richfield. Call Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

**2nd Thursday, evening**, Rochester Area Freethinkers. Downtown Rochester Public Library, Meeting Room A. Contact Bill Kass, wjkhak@charter.net or (507) 259-4237.

**3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.**, Freethought Lunch, Dragon House, 3950 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights. Call Bill Volna, (612) 781-4273.

**4th Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-noon**, West Metro Critical Thinking Club, Ridge Point Apts. Bldg. meeting room, Minnetonka. Contact Mark Paquette at think-rsvp@markpaquette.com. (contributions accepted)

**Sunday Brunch, 10:30 a.m.-noon**, Post-'Atheist Talk' Radio program. Q Cumbers Restaurant, 7465 France Ave S., Edina.

## OTHER EVENTS

**2nd Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.**, Board of Directors meeting. Open to all members. Contact Scott Lohman.

**Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.**, Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) general meeting. 3rd floor Coffman Memorial Union, 300 Washington Ave. SE, Minneapolis. Contact cash@cashumn.org.

"Humanist Perspectives," a weekly program produced by the Council for Secular Humanism, airs at **8:30 p.m. Wednesdays** on MTN Channel 16.



## Remember to Tune In to Radio 950 Sundays at 9:00 a.m.!

*Humanists of Minnesota is a sponsor of "Atheists Talk," a one-hour program on KTNF radio AM 950 produced by Minnesota Atheists. We also produce a number of shows during the year hosted by our President, Scott Lohman.*

## Maple Grove Discussion Group

*Saturday, July 11, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.: "Scientology" with Forrest and Robin Harstad. Champps Americana, 13521 80th Circle No., Maple Grove. Breakfast \$16.50, coffee only \$5. Register at landforsale@visi.com or call Laurie at 763-420-4757.*

## Is your Membership Up to Date?

*If you are receiving a paper copy of this newsletter, check your address label for the expiration date on your subscription. Please renew when due, using the form on the back!*

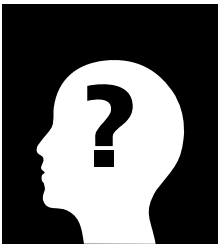
"Humanist Views," the TV interview program produced by Humanists of Minnesota, could be showing on your local cable channel! "Humanist Views" is currently showing in:

Minneapolis Channel 17 9:30 p.m. Fridays

Arden Hills	}	Channel 98
Falcon Heights		7:00 p.m. Sundays
Lauderdale		3:00 a.m. Mondays
Little Canada		11:00 a.m. Mondays
Mounds View		
New Brighton		
North Oaks		
Roseville		

St Louis Park Channel 16 TWTh 12:00 a.m.,  
8:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m.

If you would like to help distribute "Humanist Views" to your local public access cable channel, contact Scott Lohman.



## *Historical View on Religions and Humanism*

*by Dr. Mark Welter*

A year's membership in Humanists of Minnesota has been a fulfilling experience in all respects but one – the negative comments about religion. This effort will attempt to convey that the Group is needlessly critical about the conventional faiths. Indeed, a closer examination of their origins reveals that the validity for established faiths is at best suspect; and, further, that a more complete account of the past favors the Humanists, not the traditional religions.

Almost all histories of the standard faiths are captives of a well-known truism: "History is written by the people who win the wars." Confined to this paradigm, sacred narratives are shaped into exclusive, self aggrandizing accounts. When, for example, the typically omitted 3000 years of high civilization that preceded the Bible are examined, the principles of contemporary religion become questionable.

Conspicuously omitted from abridged theologies is the man who can arguably be described the first Humanist as well as the father of modern religious dogma, Zoroaster the prophet. The Persian priest, who lived about 1000 years before Christ, challenged the prevailing belief of his day, which Norman Cohn describes as the "Combat Myth".

This ancient philosophy claimed that the sole purpose of life was to serve the ruler (emperor, pharaoh, or king) by building great edifices (pyramids, temples, ziggurats) and by placing daily offerings before unseen gods. In return, citizens were promised "divine protection" from floods, plagues, droughts. Only the ruler could plead with the mysterious deities to prevent chaos; the commoners' mission was to faithfully serve their masters. Life was bleak. There was no hope for the future, no higher purpose for existence, and the system could never be changed.

Around 1000 BCE, Zoroaster challenged this self-serving, status-oriented theology. The Persian sage taught that "happiness" was up to all people regardless of class, occupation, or gender. Worship of, and servitude to, royalty and their nebulous gods was not needed.

Over the millennia, Zoroaster's teachings became the essence of Western religious dogma: "Do good; avoid evil, and a better world will follow was the cen-

tral tenet, and the Persian's teachings were almost indistinguishable from modern theology: There would be an Armageddon – a Second Coming and a final judgment. At this event, all personal actions would be revealed by an "apocalypse" (or "unveiling"), and people would be rewarded or punished according to their records.

Ahura Mazda, Zoroaster's one supreme god, replaced all previous gods. But the "Lord of Life", Zoroaster cautioned, had a near-equal rival, Ahriman ("all evil"). All people had free choice. They could decide between the two. No rituals, no cults, no ceremonies, and no clergy were needed. Happiness and (later) salvation depended one's own effort, not upon the gods.

The Persian's teachings were especially popular in Babylon by the sixth century BCE when they were introduced to the Jews during the Captivity, 586-539. A pre-post comparison of Scripture testifies to the power of Zoroastrian theology. Before Captivity, the Jews worshiped Yahweh but recognized other gods as well (henotheism). After introduction to the all-powerful Ahura Mazda, Yahweh was declared the one True God in post-Exilic Second Isaiah and Ezekiel.

Prior to 586 BCE, no apocalyptic visions appeared in the Torah; after, divine apparitions (usually an angel) were common (see Daniel 12: 1-10). And before, Yahweh was the source of both good and evil; after, a "Devil" appears, and he (Ahriman) is blamed for misfortunes and misbehavior. In later Scripture, especially in the New Testament, the Evil One becomes a competitor for human souls, a Greek concept brought into the Middle East by Alexander the Great's conquests, c.330BCE.

The corollary for Humanists is compelling. The religions they question – and are questioned by -- have neither historical nor theological validity. Their dogma is borrowed from "pagans." It was not "revealed" by Supreme Beings. And the sources of Deities and Devils are equally unmistakable: Ahura Mazda became Yahweh, Jesus, and Allah in the Apocalyptic faiths, while Ahriman became Satan (or the "Adversary") in Judaism, the Devil in Christianity, and "Ibis" in Islam. Finally, the Second Coming, Armageddon, and Judgment Day with its Apocalypse became both the central theology and eschatology for all three faiths.

Not surprisingly, some traits of the pre-Zoroastrian Combat Myth have prevailed. The clergy, which Zoroaster contended was unneeded, became the clerical hierarchy of modern times. The Final Judgment

*(Opinion, Continued on page 7)*

## *Pictures from the June Freethought Picnic*

*By Nathan Curland*



*CASH Activities Director, Nick Wallin welcomes the group (attendance ~60)*



*Members and Guests attend to the proceedings*

**The June Freethought Picnic was sponsored by Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)**



*Tom Riddering and Jodin Morey host informal jam session!*

***“Faith in God means believing absolutely in something with no proof whatsoever. Faith in humanity means believing absolutely in something with a huge amount of proof to the contrary. We are the true believers.”***

***Joss Whedon,  
2009 recipient of the Outstanding Lifetime Achievement Award in Cultural Humanism***

### ***Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings***

***West Metro Chapter. Saturday, July 25, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “Traveling Around the World in 60 Days” by Dale Stenseth. Ridge Point Apts. Meeting Room, 12800 Marion Ln. W., Minnetonka. Contributions appreciated. RSVP think-rsvp@markpaquete.com.***

***St. Paul Chapter. Sunday, July 12, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “The Confederate Flag: A Symbol of Heritage or Hate?” by Todd Torkelson. Kelly Inn, Hwy. I-94, St. Paul. Breakfast \$10, lecture only \$3. RSVP lhutt@comcast.net.***

***Stillwater Chapter. Monday, July 13, 7:00 p.m. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.***



## Mailbox

*(The following was submitted by our President in response to an Opinion piece in the Star Tribune.)*

Katherine Kersten, Opinion 7 June 2009, does show that there a discomfort with religion these days. However it's more a change in temperament, than anything all that new. There has always been tension with religion in the United States.

Many of the original colonies were formed by religious refugees on the run from larger more repressive religions. There were different dominate religions in different colonies: Protestants in New England, Quakers in Pennsylvania, and Catholics in Virginia. The challenge was allowing religious freedom when the new country formed. The United States Constitution is a radical document in that the United States is one of the first countries to form without a state or official government religion. The first amendment has allowed religion to flourish in the United States, when the state religions of Europe are dying. Our first amendment allows both freedom of religion as well as freedom from religion.

Kersten seems to be annoyed that atheism is getting more attention than in the past. For years, even with our First Amendment, atheists have not been on the same level playing field. State constitutions had, for years, clauses forbidding non-believers the ability to hold office without saying a religious oath. New generations are not quite as uptight about being called atheist, humanist, or being known as a non-believer. With the current batch of conservative religious leaders retiring and dying off, there is a chance for the religious debate of ideas to open up. With the older leaders locking their debate on abortion, gays and evolution with rigid patriarchal positions that show intolerance for rationality and understanding, their fading from the stage will be a welcome relief.

Kersten also uses mis-definition and misunderstanding of atheists and humanists to make her points. Materialism can be defined to mean that there is nothing beyond the physical, it can also be defined to be the accumulation of objects and wealth. Naturalism is much better word, in that atheists and humanists do not believe in the "supernatural" however that is defined.

Kersten also implies that non-believers engage in "anything goes" due to not believing in an all powerful "lawgiver". This is far from the case, since as humans have evolved to be social animals, responsibility for ones actions and their consequences became very important. While there are no longer active statistics kept about the religions of prisoners, atheists have always been under represented in prison populations. Human ethics are best when derived from human needs and interests and seasoned by experience.

Kersten rolls out the old "if there is no god, there is no meaning" canard. Humanists and atheists make their own meaning in life. We can derive meaning from being a parent, a worker, an artist as well as finding meaning in understanding the world around us. Meaning is created not found.

"Social Darwinism" is not something created by atheists. The phrase "survival of the fittest" was actually coined by Herbert Spencer. Atheists and humanists work make our world better for all, not just the "cream of the crop".

Kersten also brings out the old argument regarding body counts and political regimes. While the regimes she mentioned were quite deadly, they were totalitarian regimes that would have killed many regardless of the religious beliefs of the leaders. They are plenty of bad governments led by religious leaders that were equally deadly. Besides, when was the last time you saw a headline about an atheist suicide bomber.

There are plenty of people to quote about the bad sides of religion (Nietzsche gets used quite a bit). But there are also plenty of wonderful human beings that are more positive about society in which religion is no longer the power. Thomas Jefferson said: "Question with boldness even the existence of a god; because if there be one, he must approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear." A well balanced society is one that uses the best of belief and non-belief.

Scott Lohman  
Chairman, Humanists of Minnesota

### *RELIGION - -*

*Is what the common people believe true,  
What the wise know is false,  
And what the rulers find useful.*

*-- Seneca*



## ***CFI Board ‘Ousts’ Paul Kurtz***

On June 2, the Center for Inquiry (the controlling body for the Council for Secular Humanism with whom HofM is affiliated and the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry) issued a press release announcing:

“ \_ in support of its two-year succession plan Dr. Paul Kurtz, the visionary leader and founder of all three organizations, will become chair emeritus. Kurtz in this capacity will continue as a voting member of the boards of directors for the balance of his terms ending in 2013. In his new role Kurtz will have time to concentrate on writing and numerous public speaking engagements on behalf of the Center for Inquiry as the founder and face of the organization. “

On June 4, Paul Kurtz sent a letter to his friends and contacts declaring that he “was unceremoniously ousted as Chairman of the Center for Inquiry/Transnational on June 1, 2009.” He went on to describe the action as a power play and expressed concern that the direction of CFI will change.

Ronald A Lindsay, CEO and President announced that Board member Richard K. Schroeder has been named chair of the three boards, and board member Jonathan Kurtz has been named to the new position of vice chair of the three boards. ■

*(Editorial, Continued from page 2)*

became calls for gay pride. The new theme brought political, strategic, and psychological advantages. The assertion of homosexual pride is the ultimate rejection of normative heterosexuality.”

Mohler must not have read about the fact that homosexuality is found in every animal species. He probably gets the willies when he hears about “gay penguins” raising a chick. He probably missed the recent reports that even Dr. William Masters, of the famed sexuality research team of Masters and Johnson, created his data and lied about being able to “change” people from being homosexual to heterosexual. Mohler and other conservative Christians of his age and era will continue to be bigots over this issue. However he should look carefully at the younger generation of evangelicals as many of them are showing signs of tolerance and acceptance of their GLBT fellow citizens. There are surveys showing a gap in the tolerance of GLBT people between older evangelicals and younger ones. Time is on our side. So people like Mohler, Dobson and even professional homophobe Matt Barber will need to watch out as they will soon be as extinct as the dinosaurs. ■

*(Opinion, Continued from page 4)*

and the Combat Myth were revised and dramatized in Revelation, which has been used to intimidate, to motivate, and to manipulate the masses. And the Day of Reckoning was, of course, commercialized into many endeavors: books (see the Left Behind series), movies, and videos. Similarly, a plethora of cults, sects, and doomsday forecasts emerged in the millennia since Zoroaster’s Day. Indeed, today millions await the latest “Armageddon,” the 2012 Mayan calendar and its familiar predicted consequences.

Said differently, “The only true history is total history.” And when the complete picture is exposed by “total (pre-Biblical) history,” the burden of proof for the existence of a “God” falls on the conventional faiths, not on the Humanists. Accordingly, the need for mutual negatives pales into “the fog of insignificance.”

### *Bibliography*

*Bullock, Robert. The World Bible. History of both dogma and historical comparisons.*

*Cohn, Norman. Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to come. Best on Zoroaster.*

*Riley, Gregory. River of God. Outstanding! The best overall source on cross-cultural religious exchanges. Both the history and the genealogy of religions are delineated.*

## **HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS**

**Editor**, Nathan Curland

**Editorial Committee** - Brad Bolin, Gwen Scribner, Matt Labo, Suzanne Perry

**Photographer** - Richard Trombly

Articles, letters, event notices and other writings are welcome. Send to: [editor@humanistsofmin.org](mailto:editor@humanistsofmin.org) with the word “newsletter” in the subject line, or to P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997. (E-mail submissions are preferred.) All submissions must include the writer’s full name, postal address, telephone number and e-mail address. All submissions become the property of this newsletter and cannot be returned. Submission deadline is the 22nd of the prior month.

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July 2009

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\*Full time students at an accredited institution can receive a complimentary subscription

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(for special announcements, blogs etc. Keeps you in touch!)

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Second Member at same address: \_\_\_\_\_