

Secretary Lilie Schoenack made an appearance on PeaceTalk radio (96.3 FM in Fargo) to answer questions and to share a Freethinker's perspective with our community. In December, NDSU's secular group AASH hosted Minnesota Atheists' past-President, August Berkshire, who delivered a free informational talk on campus entitled "Exploring Atheism". Also in December, Kent Harrop along with Brian MaGee launched the weekly radio talk show "The Amplified Atheist" on KNDS on 96.3 FM.

Many thanks to August Berkshire, Bill Treumann, Brian MaGee, Chuck Solly, Carol Sawicki, Charles Sawicki, David L. Johnson, Davis Cope, Nathan Schoenack, Jason Schoenack, Jerry Fauske, Jon Lindgren, Lilie Schoenack, Pekka Mykkänen, Trevor Nelson and many others for their contributions to the success of our Red River Rationalist newsletter during 2009.

This has surely been a great year for the Red River Freethinkers, and now we look to the future. Historically, Freethinkers have worked with, and within, a wide variety of groups on common goals, but sometimes have found it challenging to discover common ground with some other groups. Group differences represent a real challenge to making positive progress for our community, and Freethinkers should accept this challenge in 2010. We should resolve to work with our friends, including those among the faithful, to help our fellow

humans who are in need right now. And at the same time, we should persevere in defying any group out there that would insist that their specific ways are the only good ways for humanity, and would strive to impose those ways on all others. Freethinkers want to help humanity, and helping people to think for themselves is one of the greatest things that any group can do to help our fellow human beings.



American political leader, popular orator, and famous Freethinker Robert Ingersoll (1833 –1899) once said, "When I became convinced that the Universe is natural, that all the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom." "And then my heart was filled

with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain ... " "And then I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still." ■

Jason Schoenack
Fargo, ND

Articles in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the Red River Freethinkers organization

The mission of the Red River Freethinkers is to advocate for a skeptical view of the role of religion in society and to promote critical examination of religious authority and dogma

Red River Freethinkers is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Family membership	\$45/year	Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter. Send name, address, phone number, email address and dues to Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box
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RED RIVER FREETHINKERS

THE RED RIVER RATIONALIST

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GRASP THE TORCH, AND HOLD IT HIGH

The year 2009 was a good year for the Red River Freethinkers. January 2009 marked the Red River Freethinker's first full month as an official 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Also in January we got a new American president who has since then acknowledged and included "nonbelievers" in his speeches and addresses on several occasions. Minnesota college professor

Dr. PZ Myers was named American Humanist Association's "2009 Humanist of the Year". We've seen our RRF membership grow and diversify during 2009 and we've have many 'letters to the editor' from our members published in the Fargo Forum. David Johnson's much-

anticipated book "Corpsman Up!: A Marine Medic Struggles with War, God, and Patriotism" was published in February. This Spring and Fall the "Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar" (SRLS) meetings, facilitated

by Dr. Davis Cope and Dr. Dennis Cooley at NDSU, continued to be highly-attended and shockingly controversial. Finnish newspaper reporter Pekka Mykkänen traveled to Fargo,

ND and attended a Red River Freethinkers meeting to interview several members about the curious pervasiveness of religion in the United States. Mr. Mykkänen's interesting and thought-provoking article was published in Finland's daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat in June. The Red River Freethinkers increased their visibility this year for current and potential members by becoming an affiliate member of American Atheists in

September, making it easier for people to find the Red River Freethinkers online.

Working with Red River Freethinker's president Jon Lindgren, Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker proclaimed September 24, 2009 to be "Freethought Day" in Fargo, marking the first of many annual events to be hosted by the Red River Freethinkers. The 2009 event in September featured a free showing of Julia Sweeney's



movie "Letting Go of God" for the public at the Fargo Theater, followed by a talk delivered by self-described fire-breathing atheist and author of the wildly-

popular science blog Pharyngula, Dr. PZ Myers. After his talk, Dr. Myers took questions and continued to share his perspectives until late into the night at the Radisson lounge in downtown Fargo.

During his visit to Fargo, Dr. Myers gave free talks at both NDSU and MSUM, educating hundreds of students and members of the

community on the topics of critical thinking, atheism, biology, and why we need Freethinkers. Attendees came from hundreds of miles away to attend these events which were covered by the press in print and on TV. MSUM's secular group "Center For Inquiry: On Campus" has been active all year, and NDSU's "Atheists, Agnostics, and Secular Humanists" (AASH) has been active as well. This past Fall, a few determined students on campus at the historically-conservative Lutheran Concordia College in Moorhead began work on creating a new secular group there called "Concordia Atheists". In November, Red River Freethinker's



POINTS OF INTEREST

- The January RRF meeting will be in the Presentation Center at the Plains Art Museum at 704 1st Ave N in Fargo on Sunday January 17, 2010 from 1 to 3 pm. Everyone is welcome!
- Thank you to everyone who donated money and non-perishable food items for the Emergency Food Pantry during our Winter Solstice potluck at the Fargo Public Library in December. All of your contributions will help our less-fortunate friends who are in need right now. THANKS!

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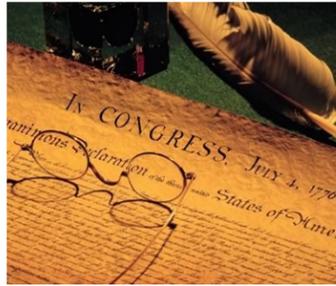
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Science Religion and Lunch Seminar

Every Tuesday in the NDSU Memorial Union from 12-1pm
<http://www.ndsu.edu/srls>

THE UNITED STATES WAS FOUNDED AS A CHRISTIAN NATION

Isaac Asimov once stated: "Properly read, the Bible is the most potent force for atheism ever conceived." Perhaps the best way to dissuade Christians from the proposition that we were founded as a Christian nation is to insist that they read the Declaration of Independence- *the* founding document of the United States of America.



This is the third in a series of essays concerning common canards advanced against atheism. The present essay turns out to be far simpler than the previous writings, perhaps because all we need do is read what our founding fathers wrote. Below is the first paragraph of the Declaration of Independence.

"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitles them, a decent request to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

Christians immediately see "Nature's God" and say 'case closed' and stop reading. But if one continues reading, we find that "... a decent request to the **opinions of mankind** requires that they should declare the causes ..." In other words, Nature's God was not enough. They sought justification for their Declaration in the opinions of their fellow human beings and 'Nature's God' has the connotation of belief in a deity. Deism is not Christianity. In past centuries, deists were burned at the stake and sentenced to death by Christian 'courts.' Next paragraph:

"WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men,

deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

We again find the deistic reference "their Creator" not a Christian one; but also and again we see the appeal to human beings: "Governments ..., **deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.**" That's it. Case closed against a foundation in Christianity. Governments derive their authority and powers from the people and not by divine right. In fact, the point here is that the governance of men was separated from religious beliefs even before our Constitution and

Bill of Rights, before the phrase 'wall of separation between church and state' was even penned it was implicitly recognized in our Declaration of Independence. Continuing on: "whenever any form of government becomes destructive ... it is the **right of the people** to alter or abolish it." No reference even to a deity here, only a statement of human rights and of obligations to other humans. Then follows the extensive list of grievances none of which contain a word concerning religion or deities, after the list there is only one remaining paragraph to the Declaration of Independence.

"WE, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in GENERAL CONGRESS, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all Allegiance



to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of the divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

What do we find, again the deistic reference- not one word about the Christian god. There is an appeal to "the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions." This is an appeal that they, as mere men have made the right choice and are honorable and not self serving in their actions. We do see "... in the Name, and **by the Authority of the good People** of these Colonies ..." Finally, in the very last sentence of our Declaration of Independence, there appears:

"... and for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of the divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

The divine Providence reads as deism, not Christianity. Yet the founding fathers still pledge their honor, their fortunes and their very lives because they well knew that 'the divine Providence' was not enough to protect them from the mortal armies of King George V of England. Personally, it would lead one to believe that our founding fathers, deep in their hearts, knew something all atheists already know, but I digress.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Starting Sunday January 17, the location of the Red River Free-thinkers' monthly meetings will be the main conference room on the first floor of the Plains Art Museum. The Plains Art Museum is located at 704 1st Ave N in downtown Fargo (701 232 3821). This will provide more space and more comfortable accommodations for our monthly gatherings. We will have access to the room's audio-visual equipment, such as microphones, sound system, and ceiling-mounted projector, to use as needed. The museum also has a small gift shop and a café.

Jesus gets no name recognition in our Declaration of Independence. Not one word about eternal salvation if 'The Just Cause should fail.' The proper argument, based on the evidence, is that the United States was founded by deists who believed in the rights and responsibilities of man. One could claim that the United States was founded as a Jewish nation, but only because the default Abrahamic religion sans Jesus is Judaism. And often we see the statement that the United



States was founded in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but there were no people of Jewish descent among the founding fathers. The only tradition here is the nearly two thousand year old one of persecution of Jews by Christians. In this context, the correct phrase is Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. If Christianity is claimed, sans Jesus, then Islam must be included, sans Muhammad since Islam is the lineal descendant of Judaism and Christianity. Failure to include the other major Abrahamic religion would, be, you know, discriminatory. There is no question that our founding fathers were religious men, but the appeal to authority for justification and actions was to human authority, the appeal to the divine was for clarity of motives and the appeal for divine protection was backed up by pledging their lives to a cause. Of course Christians could claim that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.' But that leads us to next month's essay where we will discuss the burden of proof. ■

**Gerald Fauske
Fargo, ND**

The Plains Art Museum began as the Red River Art Center in 1965 and was housed in the former Moorhead, Minnesota, post office. The Museum renovated a turn-of-the-century warehouse in downtown Fargo, North Dakota, and opened to the public in October 1997. ■

**Jason Schoenack
Fargo, ND**

