

## Become a member of the Red River Freethinkers

All memberships to this 501(c)(3) organization are tax-deductible to the full extent as allowed by law.

Your contributions are the main source of income for this organization. Without your continued support, we would not be able to continue producing and distributing this newsletter.

Individual Membership	\$30/year
Family Membership	\$45/year
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Newsletter only	\$10/year

Send dues, along with name, address, phone number, and email address to: Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405 Fargo, ND 58107-0405.

Your membership dues to the Red River Freethinkers for 2009 have been paid.

You are not yet a member of the Red River Freethinkers for 2009.

NOTE: If you received a complimentary copy of this newsletter and would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact any of the RRF officers or send an email to [info@redriverfreethinkers.org](mailto:info@redriverfreethinkers.org).

<http://www.redriverfreethinkers.org>

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 405, Fargo, ND 58107-0405.
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RED RIVER FREETHINKERS

# THE RED RIVER RATIONALIST

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### POINTS OF INTEREST

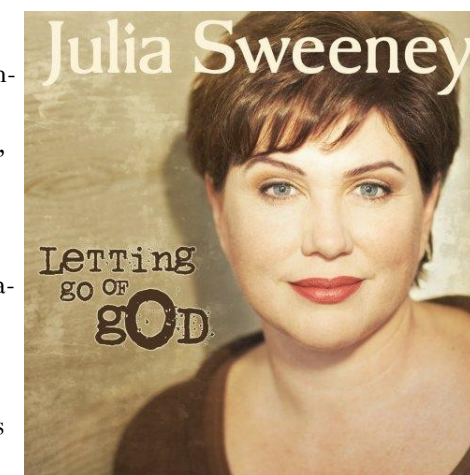
- The September RRF meeting will be a Fall equinox potluck held from 1-3pm on Sunday September 20, 2009 at shelter #4 in Lindenwood Park in Fargo. Everyone is welcome!
- September 24, 2-4pm, Century Theater, Memorial Union, NDSU. PZ Myers will lead a general discussion on promoting free thought in the community
- September 24, 6pm, Free movie night at the Fargo Theater, sponsored by Red River Freethinkers. Showing *Letting Go of God*

## HAPPY FREETHOUGHT DAY

Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker has proclaimed September 24, 2009 to be Freethought Day. As an educational event for the community, the Red River Freethinkers are sponsoring a free movie night at the Fargo Theater. The movie being shown is Julia Sweeney's hilarious monologue *Letting Go of God*.

Julia Sweeney is best known for her Saturday Night Live career from 1990 to 1994. In *Letting Go of God*, Sweeney recounts her Catholic upbringing, her early understanding of religion, and her enlightening

knowledge quest leading her to the conclusion that, "Oh my God, there is no God"! Sweeney's public declaration of her atheism has drawn attention from lots of secular fans who have had similar loss-of-faith stories. The movie is free and will be shown on Thursday September 24 at 6pm.



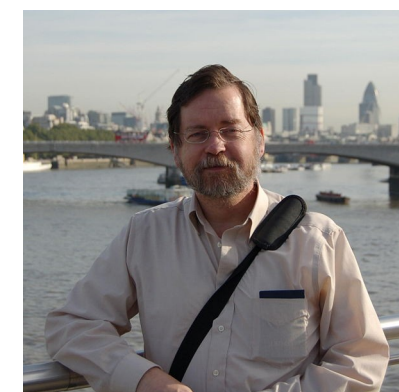
Dr. PZ Myers, an evolutionary biology professor at the University of Minnesota Morris, will be sharing his thoughts and taking questions after the movie.

## PZ MYERS SPEAKING IN FARGO AND MOORHEAD

Evolutionary biology professor PZ Myers is showing his support for free thought in the Fargo-Moorhead area by delivering several talks on September 23rd, and 24th.

On Wednesday September 23rd, Dr. Myers will be delivering a talk "Design and Darwin: Why Complexity Is No Friend of Intelligent Design" to the Center for Inquiry On Campus (CFI) group at Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM). Thursday September 24th at 2pm at the Century Theater at NDSU, Dr. Myers will be presenting "What can we do as atheists to promote

free thought in the community? After free movie night at the Fargo Theater on September 24th, Dr. Myers will be presenting "The Importance of Critical Thinking and Why We Need Freethinkers". After the talk Dr. Myers will be taking questions and encouraging participation. All three of these talks are free and open to the public. Dr. Myers is the American Humanist Association's 2009 "Humanist of the Year".



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## FREETHINKERS AND THE PUBLIC

This month of September is a historic one for RRF. We will hold an event that is among the "most public" of the things we have done. This is the movie, "Letting Go of God" and the lecture by PZ Myers. We can expect some public reaction to this, positive and negative.

Of course, we all deal with the reactions of others in our lives who are not Freethinkers to our views and activities. We all have friends and relatives who have far different views than we do. Those of us who are identified as Freethinkers in public receive occasional pieces of hate mail and anonymous calls. When I have had occasion to see how our members interact with the public, I am always impressed with the warmth and graciousness I see.

I have learned a few things from our members on how to have pleasant and successful encounters with the public. One is to be prepared. That is, anytime you are with other people, a comment might drop into the conversation. Here, especially if the comment is a negative one, an RRF member must make several decisions simultaneously. That is, does one simply smile, ignore the comment and change the subject, or, push back, and, if so, how vigorously? There is no correct response for every occasion.

Perhaps this is why it is called "the art of conversation".

There is another indirect factor that, I believe, helps us weather these sometimes challenging encounters. This is the friendship and support we provide each other. Knowing that each of us has dozens of friends standing with us provides the confidence we need to handle these encounters successfully. One conversation at a time, we are changing the world! ■

**Jon Lindgren**  
Fargo, ND

## CREATION

Creation is a soon-to-be-released movie about the life and work of Charles Darwin. It stars Paul Bettany and academy-award winner Jennifer Connelly as Charles and Emma Darwin.

In the movie, English naturalist Charles Darwin is torn between his deeply religious wife and his own theory that creation may be explained without God.

Many countries around the world have obtained distribution rights for the movie, however, no distributor in the United States has picked up the film because of the intense creation–evolution debate in the United States.

According to a Gallup poll conducted in February, only 39 per cent of Americans believe in the theory of evolution.

See the trailer here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCYafq9ljk>

## WHAT FUNDAMENTALISM?

As a co-founder and member of the board of directors of Camp Quest of Minnesota, I would like to make Rod Dreher ("It doesn't take religion to make a fundamentalist," Aug. 23) aware of the following:

Our stated purpose is to: (1) Promote a sense of belonging to a large free-thought community among the youth participants; (2) Encourage critical thinking in young people to enable them to draw their own conclusions; (3) Promote respect for others with different viewpoints, values and beliefs; (4) Provide a safe and fun environment for personal and social development.

Does this sound like "fundamentalism" of any sort? We don't spend much time talking about gods – an increasing number of young people disbelieve in them anyway. Instead, we teach critical thinking, ethics, cooperation, tolerance and how to learn, grow, take responsibility and have fun in the real world.

Speaking of having fun, we invite Dreher to join the campers in trying to prove that the invisible dragon that we claim exists at Camp Quest of Minnesota doesn't exist. ■

Published letter to the editor  
St. Paul Pioneer Press, August 27, 2009  
In response to "It doesn't take religion to make a fundamentalist," by Rod Dreher, St. Paul Pioneer Press, August 23, 2009

**August Berkshire**  
Minneapolis, MN

## ABRA CADAVER

Baptist preacher Steven Anderson (Tempe, AZ) hates Barack Obama, and he is praying fervently for the President to fall down dead.

Anderson's Sunday sermon (August 16, 2009) was entitled "Why I hate Barack Obama", in which the pastor declared that he was praying for Obama's death, and he called on God to "melt" the president like a "salted snail."

"Why I hate Barack Obama" was similar to another one of Anderson's hateful sermons that he gave on January 18, 2009, two days before Obama's inauguration, in which he declared that "somebody should abort Obama."

The day after "Why I hate Barack Obama", one of Anderson's parishioners showed up at an Arizona townhall meeting, that was attended by President Obama, carrying a bullhorn and an AR15 semiautomatic assault rifle.

I don't understand how those AZ parishioners, presumably some of them with normal intelligence, can continue to believe that this Baptist pastor Steven Anderson guy can be considered to be a Christian, or why his praying for the President's death isn't hate speech that should be called out and condemned. ■

**Jason Schoenack**  
Fargo, ND

## SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND LUNCH SEMINAR SEASON HAS BEGUN

The Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar (SRLS) is underway again for the Fall Semester! SRLS will be meeting in the Mandan Room of the Memorial Union at NDSU all semester (Tuesdays at noon). Although the official meeting time is 12:00 to 1:00, when most people have to run to class or back to work, it is perfectly OK to hang around for more talk and questions or to go to lunch with one of the various groups splitting off.

SRLS WEBSITE: <http://www.ndsu.edu/srls>

## SAVED FROM A MEANINGLESS LIFE BY BILLY GRAHAM, A NAVAJO ELDER AND A FEW BUTTERFLIES FROM NEW GUINEA

I had my semi-de-conversion at 8 or 9 years of age. It can only be a semi-de-conversion as I wondered at and about religion, but had no belief in a god. My parents were 'stout Lutherans.' This meant they saw to it that their five children regularly attended Sunday school and Church services- or else! Our local Lutheran Church had a popular fire-and-brimstone preacher who (much later resigned after his infidelity became general knowledge) once stated in sermon: "God has written it [love and faith in god] in your hearts." I wondered, the love of god is not written in my heart, why am I different? Not long after, a Billy Graham Crusade was aired and I was made to watch. He proclaimed: "One way! There is only one way to salvation! Riches do not matter. Giving to charities- doesn't matter. Good deeds, they don't matter! The only way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is to accept Jesus Christ into your heart as your personal Savior, otherwise you will be damned to Hell for all eternity."

That evening I went to my room to continue reading *The Wonders of Life on Earth*. Two things struck me. First thing, at the beginning of a chapter entitled *The Old People*, was a photograph of an aged Navajo man. I won-

dered, had he heard Billy Graham's message? Second thing, I flipped to the chapter *The Mystery of Heredity* and there was this picture showing variation in birdwing butterflies of New Guinea. Different butterflies were pinned and positioned at various locations on a map of the island of New Guinea. I simultaneously remembered from grade school geography that people lived in New Guinea. People without television lived on that island. People who could not possibly have heard Billy Graham and were going to Hell for eternity and for no other reason than being born in the wrong place! My childhood reaction: THAT'S NOT FAIR!! Gods aren't fair?? That makes no sense. I have been a non-theist ever since.

More than 40 years later, I am amazed at how well my childhood assertion has held up. Perhaps the single most unifying yet underlying theme of religions is that they are manifestly 'not fair.' Whether the principle is 'chosen people,' rights proscribed by gender or infallibility based upon belief, some sort of arbitrary inequality whether of individuals or ideas is always part of religion. ■

**Jerry Fauske**  
Fargo, ND