

# New York City Atheists

Serving the tri-state area • An affiliate of American Atheists

April 2003

(212) 330-6794 PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013

<http://nyc-atheists.org>

## Events

### April Atheist Meetup

Casual dining or drinks with your fellow freethinkers.  
Tuesday, April 15, 2003, 7–9 P.M.  
Expected location: Mustang Harry's bar/restaurant. Call (212) 330-6794 to confirm.

352 7th Ave. (Between West 29th–30th Sts.; just south of Penn Station)  
Location chosen by registering and voting at <http://atheists.meetup.com>. Atheist Meetups in Westchester, Long Island, and northern NJ will be promoted in e-mail if enough people register.

### Street Fair Tabling

Saturday, April 19, 2003  
Earth Awareness Day Festival,  
Waverly Pl. btwn Bway & 5th Ave.  
Visit our table, or e-mail [atheist@foody.org](mailto:atheist@foody.org) or call (212) 330-6794 to help volunteer

### April Meeting

Saturday, April 26, 2003, 1–5 P.M.  
(Last Saturday, not Sunday, of month)  
Source of Life Conference Center  
352 7th Ave., 16th flr.  
(Between West 29th and 30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)  
Donation requested

### More Street Fair Tabling

Sunday, April 27, 2003  
Third Avenue street fair, btwn East 23rd–34th Sts.  
Visit our table, or e-mail [atheist@foody.org](mailto:atheist@foody.org) or call (212) 330-6794 to help volunteer

### May Atheist Café Night

Thursday, May 8, 2003, 7–9 P.M.  
Java & Jazz  
868 Broadway between West 17th–18th Sts., north of Union Square

## Atheists in NBC Foxhole

By Dan



American Atheists organized a protest rally outside the NBC studios near Rockefeller Center on Saturday, March 15. It was over Tom Brokaw's repeating of the "no atheists in foxholes" comment. We had a dozen or so people show, including American Atheists president Ellen Johnson. There were signs and leaflets that were handed out to passers-by. The reaction was, as usual, mixed. I was surprised by the number of people stopping to show support. And of course, the religious nuts who either diverted their eyes or made the sign of the cross as they walked by. Only a couple stopped to argue. One told me he would pray for me, so I told him I would have a shot of Jack Daniel's for him. Which I did, last night at Yogi's before the Allman Brothers concert at the Beacon. Actually, it was a shot of Gentleman Jack. I wonder if he really prayed for me?

I held a blank sign. When someone would note that my sign was blank, I informed them that they only needed to believe there was something on my sign and they would see it. They only needed to open their hearts to what was on my sign. I am sure there were many people who thought I was merely an idiot holding his sign backwards, but I had fun with it!

After the rally a few people went to the new Center for Inquiry offices at Rockefeller Center. I did not have time to hang around, so I missed out. I work three blocks away, so I may conduct a surprise inspection one of these days.

## Scouting Not "For All," Says Downey

Boy Scouts of America

Accompanied by slides, video, music, fellow activists to whom she gave awards, and family, including a visiting Australian nephew who had just become an atheist, Margaret Downey wowed the March meeting of New York City Atheists with her saga of fighting for inclusion of atheists in the Boy Scouts of America.

Downey began her public activism at age forty when her son was ejected from the Boy Scouts for his lack of belief in a god. "We committed the terrible sin," said Downey, "of telling the Boy Scouts of America that we believed in 'Good,' not 'God.' Adding one more *o* didn't seem to be a big deal but it was to the Scouts."

After Downey filed a discrimination complaint against the Boy Scouts in January 1992, her case took eight years to go through legal channels. Though she lost the case when the Boy Scouts were declared a "private organization," she felt empowered knowing that "even though the Scouts had been awarded this right of association through the United States Supreme Court, their bigoted policy would cause them to self destruct and become just another American hate group."

She also described how James Dale, a gay Eagle Scout, also lost in a 5-4 Supreme Court decision, and how media focused only on the gay issue and not also on exclusion of atheists. "On the bright side, Dale's case clarified exactly what the Scouts had become -- a private, self-righteous, closed organization.

"What we nontheists commonly hear is that unlike the gay community, we nontheists have a choice," said Downey. This is a misconception that needs to be

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corrected! Once we achieve a level of reason and have developed a philosophical contentment regarding nonbelief in the supernatural, we do not have a choice. It is our duty to conscience that prevents us from being philosophically corrupt. It is no more easy for a fundamentalist to claim an atheist lifstance than for an atheist to adopt fundamentalism. . . . We must demand more attention to both the gay and nontheist issue."

Downey chronicled weak opposition by Unitarian-Universalist and Reform Jewish groups against Scout discrimination, and of her success in getting producer Steven Spielberg, then a member of the Boy Scouts' board of directors, to dissociate himself from the group. She urged donors to United Way to specify which participating charities should receive funds, and to inform United Way which such groups no longer deserve support.

Downey, also founder of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, said that she created the Anti-Discrimination Support Network specifically to oppose anti-atheist bigotry by the Boy Scouts, but that the latter group will address other issues in the future. She distributed a Scouting For All petition to sign, postcards to mail to President Bush, and other information, some of which will appear in the May issue of this newsletter, and at this month's sidewalk tabling.

After the presentation, Downey answered several questions about the challenging tone of some of her cartoons, about alternatives and lack of alternatives to the Boy Scouts, about oaths for public office and even that of a notary public, United Way, and the deep infiltration of the Scouts in Mormon and Roman Catholic communities. Following some business announcements and brief discussion of religious influence in schooling and health care, we broke for socializing.

A reporter writing a story for the *New York Resident* on atheism in New York City spoke to many members afterward. The *Resident's* article should appear a week after this newsletter's publication, accompanied by a photo of one of our summer picnics.

## NYC Atheists Tables This Month

To promote atheism and build our mailing list, will table at two Manhattan street fairs this month. The first fair is the Earth Awareness Day Festival, on Waverly Place between Broadway and 5th Avenue, on Saturday, April 19. The second is the Third Avenue street fair between East 23rd and 34th Streets, on Sunday, April 27, 2003.

Other future events besides tabling, such as a variety of partisan political events, could target the politically active and aware.

Please visit our table, or e-mail [atheist@foody.org](mailto:atheist@foody.org) or call (212) 330-6794 to help volunteer for either day.

We plan to show Founding Fathers quotes that support church-state separation, compiled by NYC Atheists member Lenni, and to distribute information about NYC Atheists and upcoming events of many local freethought groups, plus literature donated by freethought groups. We may show a few images/names of celebrities or philosophers such Bertrand Russell, Isaac Asimov, and Penn & Teller.

We prefer to begin with a "vanilla" presentation instead of a controversial/challenging one. A general "separation of church and state" will cover many issues. Tabling volunteers are not expected to be experts or debaters, just offer literature and invite to meetings.

Our new eight-foot banner displays the name "NYC ATHEISTS" plus our phone number and new Web site domain name, <http://nyc-atheists.org>. NYC Atheists member Frank is selling the group at low cost a 60" x 30" table and three folding chairs.

Also recommended: a 3-inch three-ring binder to hold multiple slogans printed in landscape layout. The binder could be set on the table to stand like a flipchart, and we could try out multiple slogans and see which seemed to generate the best/worst/most/least response.

## Meetups, Café Nights

NYC Atheists members who can't make our monthly weekend meetings now have two weeknight alternatives, an Atheist Café Night on the second Tuesday of each month, and an Atheist Meetup on the third Tuesday of each month. The café is alcohol-free, and both events offer food.

The next Atheist Meetup will be on Tuesday, April 15, 2003, 7–9 P.M. We expect it to be at Mustang Harry's bar/restaurant; call (212) 330-6794 to confirm. The location is 352 7th Ave. (between West 29th–30th Sts.; just south of Penn Station), the same location as our weekend meetings. The location chosen by registering and voting at <http://atheists.meetup.com>. Atheist Meetups in Westchester, Long Island, and northern NJ will be promoted in e-mail if enough people register.

The next Atheist Café Night will be on Thursday, May 8, 2003, 7–9 P.M. at Java & Jazz, located at 868 Broadway between West 17th–18th Sts., north of Union Square.

## Treasury Report

Early March's treasury balance was \$483.89. We spent \$60.93 on newsletter postage, \$29.76 for March meeting refreshments, \$205 for the May room rental (actually June 1, to avoid the preceding Labor Day weekend), \$250 for the June 25 room rental, and \$30 for additional charges to previous meetings. Members donated \$224 at the March meeting and \$165 by mail. As of early April, the treasury balance is \$297.20, excluding the cost of this newsletter's postage.

Please consider donating to New York City Atheists. Membership and our monthly newsletter are free, but we depend on donations to maintain meetings and mailings. Donations, which are non-tax-deductible, are reported in this monthly Treasury report, anonymously unless requested otherwise. Make your check payable to "Josh Karpf" and send it New York City Atheists, PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013.

## Irving John Yablon (1921–2003)

by Warren Allen Smith

Irving John Yablon, a generous supporter of freethought, atheist, and humanist causes, died of stomach cancer on March 10 in the Bronx, New York City.

A highly disciplined activist devoted to nontheistic causes, Yablon was a key member of Agnostic AA New York City (<http://www.agnosticAA NYC.org>), an organization for recovering alcoholics that meets regularly in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan. The organization holds meetings for recovering alcoholics and offers a distinct alternative to the emphasis on religion and "higher power" commonly encountered in most Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

Yablon was noted for attending nationwide conferences of atheist, freethought, and humanist organizations. He was one of the original members of the Secular Humanist Society of New York City, helping found the group. He also was an activist member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, American Atheists, and the Tom Paine Foundation.

When the pope arrived in Missouri in 1999, Yablon joined freethinkers there who picketed his visit. In New York City he often picketed, sometimes at the United Nations, sometimes at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and at other times he passed out freethought literature from card tables in Central Park and around New York City.

A memorial was held in the Bronx on March 13.

*In later correspondence, Smith adds:*

What amazed me [at the memorial] was that people just kept arriving, all from groups representing ex-alcoholics (even a Christian group): Sober Agnostics, Agnostics at Noon, Village Agnostics, We Humanists, We Agnostics of the Bronx, etc. A thoughtful person from Atheists United was on hand to tape the eulogies,

almost all of which were about John's devotion to anyone with an alcohol problem. It was clear that John was viewed as an atheist, including the person whom John had chosen to lead the memorial, the tall black atheist, ex-alcoholic, and ex-Christian minister.

In his eulogy, one of the people was certain John was looking down upon us as we were assembled, leading a few nods of heads sidewise rather than up and down. I literally counted over 100 individuals, and many remarked they'd never before seen so many at a wake.

I am not a fan of open caskets and will try to remember Irving (as most of the non-alcoholics called him) as the person in the photo rather than as the wax-like T-shirted figure in the casket. What I did appreciate was the combination of sincere tears and laughter. Irving's language could be salty, but his devotion (even to sweeping floors and arranging small tasks and treating hopeless alcoholics as loveable) came through clearly.

Had I spoken, I would have mentioned that Irving was a veteran of the Air Corps during World War II, during which he repaired aircraft. He was a long-time repairman and mechanic for the New York Central Railroad, often working in and around Grand Central Station and later becoming an automobile driving instructor. I found him at several national conferences of atheist, freethought, and humanist organizations. When I founded the Secular Humanist Society of New York City, he helped and was present at many of our meetings. He was a member of FANNY, for Freethinking Activist Non-Theist New Yorkers that I also founded. He also was an activist member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation in Wisconsin and the Tom Paine Foundation in Pennsylvania.

Once, he appeared in a televised American Atheist Forum with Madalyn Murray O'Hair and Jon G. Murray that was shown in 121 cities.

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out freethought literature from card tables in Central Park and around New York City.

"It's amazing how many non-believers are present in our society," he once wrote me. "Most of them are bound to family, career, neighbors, tenure, and discretion. By presenting myself as a living, day-by-day, godless person, I pin-prick the protective bubble these people hide. As an atheist in Alcoholics Anonymous, with a record of over three decades of continuous sobriety, I talk about atheism in a light atmosphere and, with jokes and laughter, perhaps I encourage a few to emerge."

That quotation with Yablon's listing is found in my *Who's Who in Hell* (Barricade Books, 2000), a reference book highly prized by Irving. "Hey, look, I'm in there with 10,000 other non-believers," he told friends. "Smith says no one dies so long as someone remembers, so now I'll be remembered at least in libraries."

### EQUAL TIME FOR FREETHOUGHT

The *Equal Time for Freethought* radio program airs on Sundays at 6:30 P.M. on member-supported WBAI, 99.5 FM. Every three or four shows features call-ins; you can call at (212) 209-2900.

To listen online to the show via WBAI's live Webcast, see the show's Web site, <http://foody.org/freethoughtradio.html>, which also has audio of most past programs and text notes on all past programs.



## Separation of Religion and State, in the U.S. and the World

By Lenni Brenner

On February 28, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals let stand a version of a 2 to 1 lower court ruling that "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance violates the First Amendment's "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

It was to be banned in nine western states on March 10. But the Court stayed its order pending an appeal of atheist Michael Newdow's victory to the Supremes. The *New York Times* said "The decision now stops short of declaring the law passed by Congress in 1954 . . . unconstitutional. The panel focuses instead on public school decisions that allow voluntary recitations of the words."

The 1954 addition was part of a demagogic ideological makeover by American capitalism, for the first time facing ideological and military challenge by an atheist power, Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. President Dwight Eisenhower hated his mother's Christian pacifist fanaticism, but was prevailed upon to become the first President baptized in office. There is no doubt that the words were intended to "establish" the "Judeo-Christian way of life" that politicians then constantly defended against "Godless, atheistic Communism."

The demagogic motivation behind modern American pious politics is continuing before our eyes. In June 2002, the Senate instantly voted 99 to 0 to condemn the lower court's 2-to-1 vote. Only three representatives voted no. Now, on March 4, 2003, the Senate voted 94-to-0 to condemn the 9th

Circuit Court's ruling.

Both major parties pander nonstop to religious voters. "Under God" in schools sells well with Protestant fundamentalists. Republicans nationally, Democrats locally, are antiabortion to hustle elderly uneducated Catholics. Guns to Israel pleases Brooklyn's Zionist Orthodox Jews. In 2000, Bush campaigned with Sami Al-Arian, just arrested as an Islamic Jihad terrorist, gushing forth sympathy for Muslim voters' concerns about secret evidence in terrorist deportation hearings.

No matter when and how the Supremes decide Newdow's case, resolute defense of Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation between Church and State" will remain central to the progressive critique of America's domestic and foreign politics. Fully exposing Bush's unconstitutional "faith-based" assault on the schools, etc., will provide scaffolding for the needed grasp of Washington's past and present international manipulation of religion, most notably the arming of Afghan Islamic fundamentalism in the 80s, also against atheist Stalinism, and its dreadful consequences on September 11, when the monster turned on its patron.

*"An Unhallowed Perversion of the Means of Salvation."*

Serious discussion of religious separation vs. establishment and the First Amendment begins with an examination of the writings of James Madison. He presented the Bill of Rights to the first House of Representatives in 1789. If we take him to the public, millions will see that the United States has swerved far off the high road of Madison's emphatic separationism.

Recent historians have correctly focused on the faults of the founding fathers. Many were slave holders, not one called for votes for women, etc. However, if history was made by rich white men in their time, they most assuredly believed in their own freedom, starting with religious freedom. Indeed, as the American revolution directly generated the modern wave of world revolution, and their government evolved into the world's prime military/economic power,

their views on separation are classics, required reading for all time and every nation on the globe, regardless of their glaring failures on slavery and other profound issues of their day.

Clinically speaking, most Americans are like unto the six score thousand of Jonah's Nineveh, whom God pitied because they couldn't "discern between their right hand and their left hand" when it came to trusting politicians. But millions at least know that they are the heirs to, and should know more about, their country's revolutionary message. Present Madison to the educated, now increasingly alarmed at the disasters that flow from politicizing religion, and many will look upon today's bipartisan politicians with wary eyes.

In his day (1751-1836), Madison was already hailed as "the Father of the Constitution" for managing the 1787 convention. But, unlike Washington and Jefferson, he is virtually unknown to most modern educated Americans.

Born into the Episcopal Church, he never left it. However, he was the furthest thing from a religious zealot. He came to believe that humans couldn't really know God. His first major writing on separation was the 1785 "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments" against a Virginia bill providing support of teachers of the Christian religion:

"We, the subscribers . . . conceiving that the same, if finally armed with the sanctions of a law, will be a dangerous abuse of power, are bound as faithful members of a free state, to remonstrate against it. . . . Because if religion be exempt from the authority of the society at large, still less can it be subject to that of the legislative body. . . . The rulers who are guilty of such an encroachment, exceed the commission from which they derive their authority, and are tyrants. The people who submit to it are governed by laws made neither by themselves, nor by an authority derived from them, and are slaves.

"Because, it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of citizens, and one of the noblest characteristics of the late revolution. The freemen of America did not wait till usurped power had

strengthened itself by exercise, and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much, soon to forget it. Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects? . . . Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess and to observe the religion which we believe to be of divine origin, we cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yielded to the evidence which convinced us."

He opposed the measure,

"Because the bill implies either that the civil magistrate is a competent judge of religious truth; or that he may employ religion as an engine of civil policy. The first is an arrogant pretension falsified by the contradictory opinions of rulers in all ages, and throughout the world: The second an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation.

Because the establishment proposed by the bill is not requisite for the support of the Christian religion. To say that it is, is a contradiction to the Christian religion itself; for every page of it disavows a dependence on the powers of this world. . . . It is moreover to weaken in those who profess this religion a pious confidence in its innate excellence, and the patronage of its Author; and to foster in those who still reject it, a suspicion that its friends are too conscious of its fallacies, to trust it to its own merits."

([http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/madison\\_mr.html](http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/madison_mr.html))

His original 1789 wording of the First Amendment was emphatically secular and amply spells out the full meaning of the Amendment as finally passed:

"The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext, infringed."

In retirement, ca. 1827, he set down his mature thoughts on church-state relations in his "Detached [sic] Memoranda." The author of the First Amendment took it to its logical

conclusions:

"The danger of silent accumulations and encroachments by ecclesiastical bodies have not sufficiently engaged attention in the United States. They have the noble merit of first unshackling the conscience from persecuting laws, and of establishing among religious sects a legal equality. . . . and there is one state at least, Virginia, where religious liberty is placed on its true foundation, and is defined in its full latitude. . . . Here the separation between the authority of human laws, and the natural rights of man excepted from the grant on which all political authority is founded, is traced as distinctly as words can admit, and the limits to this authority established with as much solemnity as the forms of legislation can express. . . . This act is a true standard of religious liberty: its principle the great barrier against usurpations on the rights of conscience. As long as it is respected and no longer, these will be safe. Every provision for them short of this principle, will be found to leave crevices at least through which bigotry may introduce persecution; a monster that feeding and thriving on its own venom, gradually swells to a size and strength overwhelming all laws divine and human.

"Ye States of America, which retain in your constitutions or codes, any aberration from the sacred principle of religious liberty, by giving to Caesar what belongs to God, or joining together what God has put asunder, hasten to revise and purify your systems, and make the example of your country as pure and complete, in what relates to the freedom of the mind and its allegiance to its maker, as in what belongs to the legitimate objects of political and civil institutions."

*"The Pure Principle of Religious Freedom"*

The First Amendment's author asked questions rarely raised in the present Congress, not even by Democrats, who claim Jefferson and Madison as their party's cofounders:

"Is the appointment of Chaplains to the two houses of Congress consistent with the Constitution, and with the pure principle of religious freedom?"

"In strictness the answer on

both points must be in the negative. The Constitution of the United States forbids everything like an establishment of a national religion. The law appointing chaplains establishes a religious worship for the national representatives, to be performed by ministers of religion, elected by a majority of them; and these are to be paid out of the national taxes. Does not this involve the principle of a national establishment, applicable to a provision for a religious worship for the constituent as well as of the representative body, approved by the majority, and conducted by ministers of religion paid by the entire nation. . . .

"If religion consists in voluntary acts of individuals, singly, or voluntarily associated, and it be proper that public functionaries, as well as their constituents should discharge their religious duties, let them like their constituents, do so at their own expense. How small a contribution from each member of Congress would suffice for the purpose? How just would it be in its principle? How noble in its exemplary sacrifice to the genius of the Constitution; and the divine right of conscience? Why should the expense of a religious worship be allowed for the legislature, be paid by the public, more than that for the executive or judiciary branch of the government?"

"Were the establishment to be tried by its fruits, are not the daily devotions conducted by these legal ecclesiastics, already degenerating into a scanty attendance, and a tiresome formality?"

"Rather than let this step beyond the landmarks of power have the effect of a legitimate precedent, it will be better to apply to it the legal aphorism *de minimis non curat lex* [the law has no concern for the very small]; or to class it *cum maculis quas aut incuria fudit, aut humana parum cavit natura* [with faults which human nature either has scattered around through negligence or has guarded against too little].

Better also to disarm in the same way, the precedent of chaplainships for the army and navy, than erect them into a political authority in matters of religion. The object of this establishment is seducing; the motive to it is laudable. But is it not safer to adhere to a right principle, and trust to its consequences, than confide in the reasoning however specious in favor of

a wrong one. Look through the armies and navies of the world, and say whether in the appointment of their ministers of religion, the spiritual interest of the flocks or the temporal interest of the shepherds, be most in view: whether here, as elsewhere the political care of religion, is not nominal more than a real aid. If the spirit of armies be devout, the spirit out of the armies will never be less so; and a failure of religious instruction and exhortation from a voluntary source within or without, will rarely happen; and if such be not the spirit of armies, the official services of their teacher are not likely to produce it. It is more likely to flow from the labors of a spontaneous zeal. The armies of the Puritans had their appointed chaplains, but without these there would have been no lack of public devotion to that devout age. . . .

Religious proclamations by the executive recommending thanksgivings and fasts are shoots from the same root with the legislative acts reviewed. Although recommendations only, they imply a religious agency, making no part of the trust delegated to political rulers.

The objections to them are:

1. That governments ought not to interpose in relation to those subject to their authority but in cases where they can do it with effect. An advisory government is a contradiction in terms.

2. The members of a government, as such, can in no sense, be regarded as possessing an advisory trust from their constituents in their religious capacities. They cannot form an ecclesiastical assembly, convocation, council, or synod, and as such issue decrees of injunctions addressed to the faith or the consciences of the people. In their individual capacities, as distinct from their official station, they might unite in recommendations of any sort whatever, in the same manner as any other individuals might do. But then their recommendations ought to express the true character from which they emanate.

3. They seem to imply and certainly nourish the erroneous idea of a national religion. The idea just as it related to the Jewish nation under a theocracy having been improperly adopted by so many nations which have embraced Christianity, is too apt to lurk in the bosoms even of Americans, who in general are aware of the distinction

between religious and political societies. The idea also of a union of all to form one nation under one government in acts of devotion to the God of all is an imposing idea. But reason and the principles of the Christian religion require that [if] all the individuals composing a nation were of the same precise creed and wished to unite in a universal act of religion at the same time, the union ought to be effected through their religious not of their political representatives. In a nation composed of various sects, some alienated widely from others, and where no agreement could take place through the former, the interposition of the latter is doubly wrong.

4. The tendency of the practice, to narrow the recommendation to the standard of the predominant sect. The first (see if this was the first) proclamation of General Washington dated January 1, 1795, recommending a day of thanksgiving, embraced all who believed in a Supreme Ruler of the Universe. That of Mr. Adams called for a Christian worship. Many private letters reproached the proclamations issued by James Madison for using general terms, used in that of President Washington; and some of them for not inserting particulars according with the faith of certain Christian sects. The practice if not strictly guarded naturally terminates in a conformity to the creed of the majority and a single sect, if amounting to a majority.

5. The last and not the least objection is the liability of the practice to subserviency to political views; to the scandal of religion, as well as the increase of party animosities. Candid or incautious politicians will not always disown such views. In truth it is difficult to frame such a religious proclamation generally suggested by a political state of things, without referring to them in terms having some bearing on party questions. The proclamation of President Washington which was issued just after the suppression of the insurrection in Pennsylvania and at a time when the public mind was divided on several topics, was so construed by many. Of this the Secretary of State himself, Edmund Randolph seems to have had an anticipation. . . .

During the administration of Mr. Jefferson no religious proclamation was issued. It being understood that his successor was disinclined to such

interpositions of the Executive, and by some supposed moreover that they might originate with more propriety with the legislative body, a resolution was passed requesting him to issue a proclamation. See the resolution in the Journals of Congress. . . .

It was thought not proper to refuse a compliance altogether; but a form and language were employed, which were meant to deaden as much as possible any claim of political right to enjoin religious observances by resting these expressly on the voluntary compliance of individuals, and even by limiting the recommendation to such as wished simultaneous as well as voluntary performance of a religious act on the occasion."

(<http://www.sunnetworks.net/~ggarman/estaorel.html>)

I agree with scholars who feel Madison regretted his concession to political pressure. We automatically think of revolutionaries as fighters. But Madison and Jefferson were shy, bookish, diffident in ways unimaginable in modern society. Indeed it is interesting to contrast the Proclamation of the President in 1813, during the war against Britain, with his mature thoughts on it:

"WHEREAS the Congress of the United States, by a joint resolution of the two Houses, have signified a request that a day may be recommended, to be observed by the people of the United States with religious solemnity, as a day of Public Humiliation and Prayer and whereas in times of public calamity, such as that of the war, brought on the U. States by the injustice of a foreign government, it is especially becoming, that the hearts of all should be touched with the same, and the eyes of all be turned to that Almighty Power, in whose hand are the welfare and the destiny of nations: I do, therefore, issue this my Proclamation, recommending to all who shall be piously disposed to unite their teams and voices in addressing, at one and the same time their vows and adorations to the great Parent and Sovereign of the Universe, that they assemble on the second Thursday of September next, in their respective religious congregations, to render him thanks for the many blessings he has bestowed on the people of the United States; that he has blessed them with a land capable of yielding all the necessaries and requisites of human

life, with ample means for convenient exchanges with foreign countries; that he has blessed the labors employed in its cultivation and improvement; that he is now blessing the exertions to extend and establish the arts and manufactures; which will secure within ourselves supplies too important to remain dependent on the precarious policy, or the peaceable dispositions of other nations, and particularly that he has blessed the United States with a political constitution founded on the will and authority of the whole people, and guaranteeing to each individual security, not only of his person and his property, but of those sacred rights of conscience, so essential to his present happiness, and so dear to his future hopes: - that with those expressions of devout thankfulness be joined supplications to the same Almighty Power, that he would look down with compassion on our infirmities, that he would pardon our manifold transgressions, and awaken and strengthen in all the wholesome purposes of repentance and amendment; that in this season of trial and calamity, he would preside, in a particular manner over our public councils, and inspire all citizens with a love of their country, and with those fraternal affections and that mutual confidence, which have so happy a tendency to make us safe at home and respected abroad; and that, as he was graciously pleased, heretofore, to smile on our struggles against the attempts of the government of the empire of which these states then made a part, to wrest from them the rights and privileges to which they were entitled in common with every other part, and to raise them to the station of an independent and sovereign people; so he would now be pleased, in like manner, to bestow his blessing on our arms in resisting the hostile and persevering efforts of the same power to degrade us on the ocean, the common inheritance of all, from rights and immunities, belonging and essential to the American people, as a coequal member of the great community of independent nations; and that, inspiring our enemies with moderation, with justice and with that spirit of reasonable accommodation, which our country has continued to manifest, we may be enabled to beat our swords into plough-shares, and to enjoy in peace, every man; the fruits of his honest industry, and the rewards of his lawful enterprise.

"If the public homage of a people can ever be worthy the favorable regard of the Holy and Omniscient Being to whom it is addressed, it must be that, in which those who join in it are guided only by their free choice, by the impulse of their hearts and the dictates of their consciences; and such a spectacle must be interesting to all Christian nations; as proving that religion, that gift of Heaven for the good of man, freed from all coercive edicts, from that unhallowed connexion with the powers of this world, which corrupts religion into an instrument or a usurper policy of the state, and making no appeal but to reason, to the heart and to the conscience, can spread its benign influence every where, and can attract to the Divine Altar those free will offerings of humble supplication, thanksgiving and praise, which alone can be acceptable to Him whom no hypocrisy can deceive, and no forced sacrifices propitiate.

Upon these principles, and with these views, the people of the United States are invited, in conformity with the resolution aforesaid, to dedicate the day above named to the religious solemnities therein recommended.

Given at Washington, this twenty-third day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirteen."

(<http://www.jmu.edu/madison/churchandstate/imagemadisonprayer.htm>)

Perhaps we would not have noted his emphasis on its voluntary nature if we hadn't first read his retro cleanup for failing to maintain Jefferson's policy. Nevertheless, in his mind, the emphasis on voluntarism meant that he hadn't earlier established a national religion.

Presumably, he issued the proclamation rather than offend the pious during a war which saw him flee the White House before superior British troops. But by the late 1820s, he saw the "fruits" of established religion re Congress:

"Are not the daily devotions conducted by these legal ecclesiastics, already degenerating into a scanty attendance, and a tiresome formality?"

Madison believed in a God and separation of religion and state. But clearly his separatism grew stronger with time. So much so that, if Congress were miraculously to become intelligent

and abolish its chaplains, as per his reflections, we would be talking about a cultural sea change as dramatic as the American revolution itself.

From beginning to end, his 1785 argument for separation re religion and state remained his central maxim:

"Because the bill implies either that the civil magistrate is a competent judge of religious truth; or that he may employ religion as an engine of civil policy. The first is an arrogant pretension falsified by the contradictory opinions of rulers in all ages, and throughout the world: The second an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation."

Let's scroll him up to modern times. What would Jim have said in 1954, re putting "under God" in the pledge, to beat the atheist Soviets? Wouldn't it have been something like the above? Perhaps "The United States, which I created, isn't competent to make any religious declaration. Using religion to fight Communism is exactly what I meant by an unhallowed perversion. Where will you end up, if you start holy wars for political and economic reasons?"

We know the answer to that, don't we?

In 1950, John Foster Dulles, soon to be Eisenhower's Secretary of State, declared that:

"The religions of the East are deeply rooted and have many precious values. Their spiritual beliefs cannot be reconciled with Communist atheism and materialism. That creates a common bond between us."

By 1979, the US began successfully arming Islamic fundamentalists against the Soviets in Afghanistan. That "unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation" generated a triumphalist psychology in Bin Laden, one of Washington's prime allies in that US subsidized holy war. He, in turn, exactly like the Democrats and Republicans before him, then used religion against America. Truly, what goes around, comes around.

*Madison Is for Today*

Historians bring forward lost documents. But sometimes they lose them. *The Proceedings in the House of Representatives* for 1789 were lost in the Library of Congress, well before the civil war, and not recovered for over a

century. In 1856, Congress voted to print Madison's works and sent the Memoranda to the editor of the volumes. But the 1946 *William and Mary Quarterly* scooped the world, 90 years late as it were, when it first published the Memoranda, rediscovered, buried away in William Rives' own papers.

It is interesting to speculate what might have been the effect of the monumental writings if Lincoln, with his reverence for his forefathers' Constitution, and later Americans, had been able to read them. In any event, rediscovery of the *Proceedings* dramatically effected America when Bennett Patterson republished them in 1955 in his celebrated *The Forgotten Ninth Amendment*. The Supremes used them to protect privacy rights under the 9th Amendment's "The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."

Publication of Madison's Memoranda at the beginning of the anti-Red witch hunt had no such impact. It is virtually unknown beyond a few professional historians and secularist circles. But now City University of New York's American Religious Identification Survey 2001 declared that:

"Since the mid-1960s . . . American religion has been widely perceived as leaning toward the more literal, fundamental, and spiritual . . . In sharp contrast . . . the present survey has detected a wide and possibly growing swath of secularism among Americans. The magnitude and role of this large secular segment of the American population is frequently ignored by scholars and politicians alike."

In 1990, 90% of adults identified with a religious group. In 2001, such identification dropped to 81%.

"The greatest increase in absolute as well as in percentage terms has been among those adults who do not subscribe to any religious identification; their number has more than doubled from 14.3 million in 1990 to 29.4 million in 2001; their proportion has grown from just eight percent of the total in 1990 to over fourteen percent in 2001."

Fourteen percent of 18-to-34 year olds define themselves as "secular," another 9% are "somewhat secular,"

43% are "somewhat religious," 27% "religious," compared to 7%, 3%, 34% and 47% for over 65s. Better youthful scientific education is involved.

Even within most denominations, the tendency among the young and educated is toward theological and cultural liberalization. The 3/5 NY Times reported that "A survey of thousands of Catholic students who were freshmen in 1997 and seniors in 2001 found that many adopted more liberal views in their college years." In 1997, 37.9% thought abortion should be legal. In 2001 51.7% of these same students were for legality. Only 27% had thought premarital sex was OK in 1997. By 2001, 48% of these youths approved.

More than thirty-three million American adults, about 16% of the total U.S. adult population, report that they changed their religious identification.

Plainly, it is possible to put together an alliance to maintain and strengthen religion/state separation, based on the ever-growing minority of youthful skeptics, those who have changed religions, and the greater numbers of believers who have moved to a more liberal theology within their original sectarian framework.

The implications of that struggle are enormous. A resolute movement for total separation of religion and state, rooted in America's history, fortified by modern science, will be among the leading forces that will ultimately defeat the hypocritical politicians, Democratic and Republican alike.

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## Should We Tell Everyone We Are Atheists?

By Harvey Tippit  
Reprinted from *Atheists United*, February 2003

We are atheists and should not, I think, be ashamed to tell anyone we are. There is no other word that says so cogently, "I do not believe in a god," or "I am not a theist." It comes to the same thing.

(Non-believers? anti-religionists? again they would define us by what we are not.)

We should not define ourselves by what we are not -- if there were a single, comprehensive word to express what we stand for. Realists? humanists? critical minds? individualists? freethinkers? None of these catches the essence of "atheists, atheism," and they suggest a cop-out -- an evasion, a reluctance to assert our rejection of god-belief.

We do stand for positive virtues -- not just non-acceptance of religion. Only look at the calendar of activities of Atheists United in the past year or review the concerns of the writers in the newsletter to be aware of that. But finding an umbrella for all these concerns -- not easy.

There are some of our friends who object to the word "atheists" -- individuals and organizations; but I will not name names here.

To my mind religion, god-believe, Mary-worship are curious degradations of the human intellect but irrelevant and insignificant to our own beliefs backed by evidence and critical thinking. But I would prefer not to arouse enmity by declaring for no purpose, "*I am not what you are!*"

On that point I would like to recall a recent instance when someone unknown to me called me on the phone and mentioned an organization with "Christian" in its name.

"I am not a Christian. I am an atheist," I quickly replied.

After a perhaps shocked pause, "I am sorry --"

"I'm sorry you are a Christian," I interjected.

Then some phrase about heaven or hell, I didn't pay much attention. Knowing he was not to be reached by reason, I said, "That's a myth," and I told him I did not need to talk to him any further.

But now I think it would have been better to stop with, "I'm not a Christian," for the reasons I've given above.

Any differing opinions?

We need not wear an antagonistic and off-putting frown (metaphorically speaking). It does no good -- it's a self-accusation of non-conformism, but aren't we worth more than that?