

# New York City Atheists Inc.

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

September 2003

(212) 330-6794 PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013  
<http://nyc-atheists.org> [info@nyc-atheists.org](mailto:info@nyc-atheists.org)

## Events

### September Atheist Meetup

Casual dining or drinks with your fellow freethinkers.

Tuesday, September 16, 7-9 P.M.

*Manhattan:* V Bar, 225 Sullivan St.,

*Long Island:* Bagel Boss,

432 S Oyster Bay Rd, Hicksville

*Westchester:* Barnes & Noble,

111 South Central Ave, Hartsdale

Call (212) 330-6794 to confirm.

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.

### September Meeting

Thursday, September 25, 7 P.M. (note: weekday night, not weekend afternoon)

*Guest:* Richard Cotter, Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, on how "There Are Atheists in Foxholes."

*Book discussion group* follows at 9 P.M.: *An Atheist Epic*, Madalyn O'Hair's personal account of how the Bible and prayers were removed from public schools of the United States. Books are available for a \$15 (tax deductible) donation to NYC Atheists Inc. — mail [info@nyc-atheists.org](mailto:info@nyc-atheists.org) or call (212) 330-6794 for details.

352 7th Ave., 16th flr.

(Between W. 29th-30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)

Donation requested

### Street Fair Tabling

Saturday, October 4, 10 A.M.-6 P.M.

52d St. (between Madison and 7th Aves.)

Twice as big as before! Visit our table, or e-mail [info@nyc-atheists.org](mailto:info@nyc-atheists.org) or call (212) 330-6794 to help volunteer.

### More Street Fair Tabling

Sunday, October 19, 10 A.M.-6 P.M.

Broadway (between 86th St. and 96th Sts.)

Once again! Visit our table, or e-mail [info@nyc-atheists.org](mailto:info@nyc-atheists.org) or call (212) 330-6794 to help volunteer.



### October Atheist Meetup

Casual dining or drinks with your fellow freethinkers.

Tuesday, October 21, 7-9 P.M.

Locations chosen by registering and voting at <http://atheists.meetup.com>.

Call (212) 330-6794 to confirm.

### October Meeting

Sunday, October 26, 1-4 P.M.

(last Sunday of the month)

*Guest:* Joe Fox, New Jersey Humanist Network, on the HumanLight holiday (<http://www.humanlight.org>)

352 7th Ave., 16th flr.

(Between W. 29th-30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)

Donation requested

### November Meeting

Thursday, November 20, 6:30 P.M.

*Guest:* Bill Baird, reproductive rights activist

352 7th Ave., 16th flr.

(Between W. 29th-30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)

Donation requested

### Religion Is No Private Matter, Says Dacey at August Meeting

Philosopher Dr. Austin Dacey, director of educational programs of the Center for Inquiry

(<http://www.centerforinquiry.net>) and chair of its New York City branch, and executive editor of the journal *Philo* (<http://www.philoonline.org>), spoke to New York City Atheists at its August meeting on "How Religion Is No Private Matter (And Why Secularists Should Be Glad)."

Contemporary American secularism, said Dacey, maintains that the key to understanding the problems caused by religion and politics is to keep the former in the private realm and the latter in the public realm, forever separated. Dacey said that secularists should abandon thinking of religion as private, and that the distinction between public and private is an inadequate conceptual tool for understanding the problems of religion and politics.

Attacking the "privacy argument" that religion has a right to private practice but should be excluded from politics, Dacey, citing points and counterpoints, described how religious discourse could be just as political, social, ethical, and empirically testable as secular discourse, making it deserving of no special privacy.



Conversely, secular discourse, especially on public policy issues, can be so divisive and subjective that it deserves no special favor, said Dacey, adding that a “screen” that would filter out religious issues would be so fine that it would filter out secular issues as well.

Why should secularists be glad that religion isn’t private, asked Dacey, since secularism has been depending on the argument that religion is private? “Civil secularists,” such as those in Americans United for Church (<http://www.au.org/>) and State and Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty (<http://www.bjcpa.org/>) who might be religious but are for broad freedom of consciences and separation of religion and government, would support the reduction of privacy for religion said Dacey, because some of the most influential and successful arguments for secularism, even those advocated by James Madison and John Locke, have relied on religious assumptions that protect religion.

More “full-blooded, comprehensive” secularists, such as members of NYC Atheists, who want not just separation of church and state but would also want a general decline in the influence — socially, culturally, intellectually — of religion, should be even more pleased to think of religion as not deserving of special privacy, said Dacey, since it allows religion to be criticized in public. Allow religion to be presented in public, Dacey said, since that allows us to hold it to the same evaluative standards as any political discourse. To deny this freedom would be to trivialize religious devotion.

After discussion about privacy and religion, the growth of freethought, the role of activism, “intelligent design,” George W. Bush, the value of education, whether to speak of the injustices of religion, Dacey described the Center for Inquiry, an international nonprofit organization that encourages evidence-based inquiry into science, pseudoscience, medicine and health, religion, ethics, secular, and society, and which published several journals and represents freethought communities. A member suggested that New York City Atheists merge with the Center for Inquiry. Another member suggested that New York City Atheists is growing well on its own, and that in the future, the Center for Inquiry might merge with it.

### **Life Without God: People Who Don’t Believe in a Higher Being Want Their Voices to be Heard**

By Kim Mulford  
*Courier-Post* [South Jersey], 7/26/03

Whenever Janice Rael wears her favorite white T-shirt, the one with “Atheist” stamped across the front, she hears it.

You’re going to burn in hell, someone usually shouts.

She expects comments like that. But what really irks the 34-year-old mother of two is when the government and its elected officials invoke the name of God, whether it’s in the Pledge of Allegiance or in prayers before council meetings.

“I’m tired of feeling marginalized and I’m tired of feeling like I’m the only one out here living without religion,” said Rael, a Clayton resident

who volunteers as the South Jersey regional director for American Atheists. “It does bother me.”

She’s not the only one, of course. Estimates on the number of nonbelievers range from about 10 to 14 percent of Americans — that means as many as 30 million Americans don’t have a religion.

Nonbelievers can be atheists: people who don’t believe in the existence of a god. They can be agnostics: people who aren’t sure if there is a god. They may call themselves secular humanists, freethinkers, nontheists or even “Brights.” Some don’t call themselves anything.

Bill Brown of Haddon Township was raised in the Baptist church. But after his baptism at age 12, he had what he calls a “revelation” that the church wasn’t teaching the truth.

Today, the 72-year-old retired engineer isn’t sure what label to attach to his beliefs and tentatively calls himself agnostic.

He believes much evil has been done in the name of religion.

“I’m more anti-religion, than I am anti-deity,” said Brown.

The term “Brights” was recently coined to combat the negative connotations of atheism. And there is plenty of that, nonbelievers say.

Mike Judge, a 51-year-old airline pilot, grew up in a Baptist family of six. When he was a teen, he began to question his beliefs and decided Christianity didn’t make sense.

He has spent much of his adult life reading about religion, which he finds a fascinating subject. But after much research and debate, he believes he has the answer. . . .

"It's not easy being a minority," said Judge. "We don't do it because we like being looked down on. We're honest with ourselves and our beliefs."

If anyone can show him he's wrong about the existence of God, he said, he's willing to listen.

"I think there's a lot of people out there who want to believe so badly in a supernatural being, they don't want to look at the details too much," said Judge, who lives in Washington Township. "That's why many Christians don't read the Bible."

Bernie Katz does. His Palmyra apartment is crammed with reference books, magazines, papers and his own essays about religion. Among the books is a hard-bound Bible, a dictionary of Christian terms and a well-thumbed favorite, the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*.

"I was born an atheist," said Katz, a retired Philadelphia schoolteacher and a former stockbroker. "I merely continued that way."

Religion defies reason and logic, said Katz, 79. It amazes him that faith in the supernatural runs so deep in the American culture.

"People take the Bible literally," Katz said. "They want to transform that into legislation and they want to impose that legislation on me."

When religion crosses into government, American nonbelievers ignite into action.

"There should be a clear line," said Judge, who is a member of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia. The group lobbies against such things as the posting of the 10 Commandments on courthouses.

There shouldn't be prayer before Congress or city council meetings, he said. There shouldn't be prayer in schools. The country's motto shouldn't be "one nation under God."

Religion can survive without government's endorsement, Judge said.

"Do freethinkers want this country to be a godless nation?" Judge asked. "No. They want it to be a free country."

Last Christmas, Judge got into an argument with his largely Christian

family about the "under God" phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in February that the phrase, which was added in 1954, was unconstitutional.

"It should have never been put in there in the first place," said Judge. "Something as basic as the Pledge of Allegiance should be general enough to include everyone and not exclude nonbelievers."

As he was taking the country to war, President Bush mentioned God frequently in his speeches, an act that infuriated nonbelievers.

"He's not espousing a Muslim god or a Hindu god," said Judge. "He's espousing a Christian god. Everybody knows that."

Rael lives in Clayton, where one of the four symbols on the borough's seal is a church with a Christian cross. The town's motto is: Clayton, a good place to live and play, work and pray.

"It feels like an official government endorsement of only one religion," said Rael. "There are Muslims who live in Clayton. There are Jews who live in Clayton. And there are atheists who live in Clayton. We pay taxes here, too."

For now, though, the stay-at-home mom protests against religious intrusions on the federal level. She writes to politicians regularly and hosts Internet chat rooms. She is trying to unite South Jersey atheists.

"The work that we atheists do now to ensure our own constitutional rights," said Rael, "will help guarantee religious liberties for all Americans."

### **Autumn Meetings: Atheists in Foxholes, A New Holiday, and Abortion**

At our September meeting, the first to be held on a weeknight — Thursday, September 25, 7-9 P.M. — guest speaker Richard Cotter, of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (<http://www.maaf.info>) will speak on how "There Are Atheists in Foxholes." We'll meet at our usual location, 352 Seventh Avenue, 16th floor, between 29th and 30th Streets, just south of Penn Station. A donation is requested.

Immediately after the meeting, our first book discussion group will meet to explore *An Atheist Epic*, Madalyn O'Hair's personal account of how the Bible and prayers were removed from public schools of the United States. Books are available for a \$15 (tax

deductible) donation to NYC Atheists Inc. Contact Ken Bronstein ([firebell1@aol.com](mailto:firebell1@aol.com)) for more details.

October's meeting — to be held on the last Sunday of the month, October 26, 1-4 P.M. — features guest speaker Joe Fox, of the New Jersey Humanist Network, who will discuss HumanLight (<http://www.humanlight.org>), "a new holiday celebrating humanist values. . . . Humanists are not comfortable with holidays based on supernatural concepts, but nonetheless wish to express their good wishes to others in a spirit of hope, love, and understanding."

In November the guest speaker will be Bill Baird, the nationally known reproductive rights activist. Baird has long been a friend to atheist and other freethought groups. Come hear him on Thursday, November 20, 6:30 P.M.

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### **Our First *New York Times* Ad**

New York City Atheists' first paid meeting advertisement appeared in the Saturday, August 9, 2003 issue of the *New York Times*, page B5, in the column advertising local religious services. The *Times* required "Other religious services" to precede our ad. New ads will appear in the future issues of the *Times* and in other local newspapers.

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### **OTHER RELIGIOUS SERVICES**

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### **NEW YORK CITY ATHEISTS**

Sun.8/24 1-4pm 352 7 Av/29-30 St, 16 Fl  
For details, see: NYC-ATHEISTS ORG

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## Write Letters to the Editor

Ron Barrier and Dennis Middlebrooks had the following letters to the editor published in the *New York Daily News* on August 22 and August 30, respectively. Congratulations to both!

*As a man married 27 years, I am appalled by state Sen. Serphin Maltese's irrational and primitive dismissal of gay marriage (Aug. 19 Opinion). Since when is it the business of small-minded bureaucrats to stick their religion-swollen noses in the relationship choices of consenting American adults?*

Ron Barrier  
Staten Island

*Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore and his followers are quite wrong to claim that the U.S. government is founded on Judeo-Christian principles. Democracy originated in Athens and Rome, pagan societies that pre-dated Christianity. There were no democracies in Europe at the time of the American Revolution despite the fact that Europe had been Christian for more than 1,000 years. Our Founding Fathers were men of the Enlightenment, opposed to religious orthodoxy. This is why the Constitution makes no reference to God. Moore should put his Ten Commandments monument in his living room, where it belongs.*

Dennis Middlebrooks  
Brooklyn

Use this list of major local print media (plus *USA Today*) to send letters. Letters should respond to a journal's specific article or general coverage, and opinion/"op-ed" commentaries should reflect a journal's general style. Include your name, address, and daytime and evening phone numbers. The shorter the letter or commentary, the better the chance it will be used. All journals reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity. Contact information is also given, where available, for opinion/"op-ed" commentaries. Always check journals first for the most current submission information and expected style. If you'd like to write letters in the name of NYC Atheists, which might improve chances of publication, e-mail [info@nyc-atheists.org](mailto:info@nyc-atheists.org) or call (212) 330-6794.

### Daily News

Letters to the Editor  
The New York Daily News  
450 W. 33rd St.  
New York, N.Y. 10001  
E-mail: [voicers@edit.nydailynews.com](mailto:voicers@edit.nydailynews.com)

### The Jersey Journal (Jersey City)

In Your Opinion  
The Jersey Journal  
30 Journal Square  
Jersey City, NJ 07306

### The Journal News (Westchester)

1 Gannett Drive  
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[www.nyjnews.com/contact/letters.php3?address=letters](http://www.nyjnews.com/contact/letters.php3?address=letters)

### New York Magazine

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444 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10022  
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<http://forums.metronewyork.com/n/main.asp?webtag=ab-newyorkmetro&nav=messages&lgnF=y&msg=start&nav=start>

### New York Post

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1211 Avenue of the Americas  
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### New York Press

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NY, NY 10001  
E-mail: [mugger@nypress.com](mailto:mugger@nypress.com)

### The New York Times

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The New York Times (or) The New York Times Magazine  
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E-mail (magazine): [magazine@nytimes.com](mailto:magazine@nytimes.com)  
Web forum:  
<http://forums.nytimes.com/comment/>  
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Op-Ed submissions:  
[oped@nytimes.com](mailto:oped@nytimes.com)

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Newsday  
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Melville, NY 11747-4250  
Web:  
<http://cf.newsday.com/newsdayemail/email.cfm>  
Viewpoints commentary submission:  
[oped@newsday.com](mailto:oped@newsday.com)

### The Star-Ledger (Trenton)

Letters to the Editor  
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1 Star-Ledger Plaza  
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Opinion: Richard Aregood, Editorial Department, [raregood@starledger.com](mailto:raregood@starledger.com)

### The Times (Trenton)

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The Times  
P.O. Box 847  
Trenton, N.J. 08605  
E-mail: [letters@njtimes.com](mailto:letters@njtimes.com)

### USA Today

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USA Today  
1000 Wilson Blvd., 22nd  
Arlington, VA 22229  
E-mail: [editor@usatoday.com](mailto:editor@usatoday.com)  
Length: 250 or fewer words

### The Village Voice

Letters to the Editor  
The Village Voice  
36 Cooper Square  
New York, NY 10003  
E-mail: [editor@villagevoice.com](mailto:editor@villagevoice.com)  
Web:  
<http://www.villagevoice.com/aboutus/contact.shtml>

### The Wall Street Journal

Letters to the Editor  
4300 Route 1 North  
South Brunswick, NJ 08852  
E-mail: [editors@interactive.wsj.com](mailto:editors@interactive.wsj.com)

## Street Tabling Grows; Next on October 4

Despite rain, New York City Atheists' latest street-fair tabling — at the Annual Greenwich Ave. Festival on Saturday, August 30, Labor Day weekend — proved so popular, with up to fifteen members pitching in, that future tablings will rent twice as much space as before. Everyone loved the giveaway pens printed with New York City Atheists' Web site and phone number. We plan other promotional giveaways.

Our next two tablings will be on Saturday, October 4, on 53rd Street between Madison and 7th Aves., and on Sunday, October 19, on Broadway between 86th St. and 96th Sts. E-mail [info@nyc-atheists.org](mailto:info@nyc-atheists.org) if you'd like to help volunteer in the morning or afternoon shifts. See several photos of our earlier tablings at <http://nyc-atheists.org/tabling.html>.

## Treasury Report

Due to an editing error, August's newsletter reprinted July's treasury report, so this month includes both August and September. Apologies for the omission.

Mid-July's treasury balance was \$1,506.54. We spent \$39.11 to print and \$33.67 to mail the July newsletter, \$195.53 to print and \$35.89 to mail the August newsletter, \$296 for postage for press releases promoting the September, October, and November meetings, and \$19.09 on film and videotape. Members donated \$127 at the July meeting and \$243 at the August meeting. We received \$55 in donations via mail, and \$145 at the August street-fair tabling. We spent \$70 upgrade the room for the August meeting. As of mid-September, the treasury balance is \$1387.25, excluding the cost of this newsletter.

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

## Getting Stoned

by Dan Gislao

[A video showing stonings in Iran, available on the Web site <http://iran-e-azad.org/stoning/video.html>, was recently discussed in *nyc-atheists*, the Yahoo Groups discussion forum for NYC Atheists members.]

I'd like to know: From where do they get all of those stones? Do people bring them from home, or is it someone's job to collect them for the stoning? Do they reuse the stones or get a fresh supply for each stoning?

Are some types of stones more desirable than others? Does one try to get larger stones, or ones with jagged shapes? I think I would go for a flat, jagged stone that I could throw like a Frisbee. But then I don't know if they have Frisbees in Iran.

Where most American kids grow up wanting to throw a perfect spiral football just as Air McNair, do Iranian kids practice to throw the perfect killing stone?

And how do they know exactly when to stop? Does an Iranian Dave Hebner come out, raise the victim's arm three times, and if it falls all three times the stoning is over? I mean, if they're paying people to gather all of those stones I am sure they don't want to use them unnecessarily. Although there is no reason to believe a radical Islamic government is any less wasteful than ours with taxpayer money.

This all confuses me. But I am sure I'm glad I am an atheist.



## Where Are the Women?

By Cheri Nolan  
*Atheists United*, July 2003

Why are there so few women in the freethought, movement?

I have witnessed this for twenty years in freethought groups throughout California. The most astounding absence of women was in Berkeley. If women aren't 14 coming out" in brave counterculture Berkeley, then is there any hope for us in the atheist community? In a typical Berkeley monthly meeting of thirty people, four would be women. What on earth could be the reasons for this?

I've discussed this with several other atheist women, and we've been able to pinpoint several probable causes for this phenomenon:

### Conditioning Factor

Sociologists and psychologists have conducted some revealing studies in the early conditioning of girls and boys. There are big differences in the treatment and expectations. Boys are encouraged to be more bold, brave, and independent. This creates fundamental differences in the thinking process as well.

### The Fear Factor

We all know that atheism is viewed by most people with suspicion at best, to being despised and condemned at worst. To publicly declare ones atheism has been and can still be a threat to ones social standing and job security, and in some places the threat can extend to physical safety and property. One certainly needs to be bold, brave and independent; and I must say, we few sisters in the freethought community ARE!

### The Special Sphere Factor

It has been documented that females seem to require and utilize their social network much more than males. This requires the ability to fit in with the majority which happens to be religious. To compound things, statistics show that most people join religious groups for social reasons rather than theological ones.

### Protective Mother Factor

This factor was suggested by my mother. She reminds us that mothers are fiercely protective about their children. My mother raised two daughters as atheists, but for our protection, she instructed us to say that we were Unitarian when asked about our religion. Luckily, we complied, and all went smoothly. But other children may not be as careful. It is a big worry, and one that many parents might opt to avoid.

### Ethics Factor

It seems that women have always dominated the role of "ethics cop" in family and community affairs. And since the religions have usurped the arena of ethics, we have the inevitable outcome.

## All Things Bright Not Beautiful

(Originally titled "Techsploitation: The Damned")  
By Annalee Newitz  
Alternet, 7/22/03

Last week's meme of the moment was the noun "bright." A couple of zealots in Sacramento started a Web site at <http://www.the-brights.net> for an ancient special-interest group whose image apparently needs a face-lift: atheists. The founders of this movement in the making, Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell, think that atheist just doesn't sound happy and fun enough. Maybe, they wager, more people will like atheists if we don't go around describing ourselves as godless. Instead,

we should call ourselves something that makes people think of pretty stars and emergency vehicles.

According to the Bright Web site — whose capacious logic and stumbling syntax read alarmingly like Scientology's — you don't even have to be an atheist to join the club. If you want to "sign up as a Bright" and offer a personal testimonial you merely have to profess a "naturalist worldview." Naturalism means, Geisert and Futrell write, "conceiving of reality as the natural world as it is known and experienced scientifically (no supernatural)." Ah, if only things could be as simple as a high school class in philosophy. Then there would be no disagreements among scientists about what they'd "experienced," no quibbles over what exactly "the natural world" is, no disputes over what it means to "know" something, and no three-millennia-old debates about what constitutes the "supernatural." Truly in



such a world, anyone could call her- or himself “bright.”

The amazing scheme behind all of this naturalism crap is to spread the Bright meme via what Geisert and Futrell call their “Internet constituency.” And they’ve even got Mr. Meme himself, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, busking the Bright tune in the London Guardian. In an op-ed (“The Future Looks Bright,” 6/21/03) for the British newspaper, Dawkins compares the Bright movement to feminism and gay rights (he isn’t quite hip to queer rights yet). Apparently, feminists taught Dawkins that changing language can lead to changing people’s minds. He describes how he has learned that writing “he or she” and “chairperson” are two ways we can challenge sexism with language, even though he “tries to avoid” these phrases “on aesthetic grounds.” Wow, what an endorsement. Too bad those feminists didn’t give Dawkins a brain transplant, too.

But the climactic moment in Dawkins’s argument is that bright will be a term that atheists — erm, I mean naturalists — can use to raise consciousness, to teach people that godlessness is next to cleanliness. He compares this linguistic feat to what he calls “the homosexual hijacking of the word ‘gay.’” Gay, he says, is an “up” word, just like bright. Just as homos stole the word gay away from the aesthetically minded Dawkins, now the infidels can steal bright away from George W. Bush.

First of all, let’s get something straight here, Mr. Dawkins. Homosexuals did not “hijack” the word gay. They were called gay as an insult by other people — the same people who called them pansy and nelly, which also happen to be very “up” words. Gay activists didn’t sit down together, design a poorly written Web site, and say, “Let’s pick a nice word to call ourselves so that people won’t hate us!” Nope, they fought tooth and fucking nail to be respected, and they got beaten up by cops and fired from their jobs and sent to jail and raped. Finally they were so miserable and pissed off that they just started calling themselves gay to take the insulting sting out of the word. That’s why people in my generation call themselves queers. That’s why blacks call themselves niggers, and why people who grew up in trailer parks call themselves trash. This ain’t no fucking marketing campaign for “Internet constituencies.” It’s survivor’s pride.

Daniel Dennett’s op-ed (“The Bright Stuff,” 7/12/03) on being a Bright in the New York Times is not

quite as clueless as Dawkins’ piece . Dennett decries the prejudice against atheists and identifies himself as a persecuted “silent majority.” He’s right, in some ways. Although there are 27 million atheists in the United States, many in the highly productive science and technology fields, we are routinely derided by our Judeo-Christian leaders. No politician has yet dared to out him or herself as a nonbeliever. Public policy is often based on the idea that we have souls in need of saving.

But if we’re going to stand up and fight for our right to be atheists, let’s not try to jump-start some dumb little advertising campaign that makes us sound like cultists or kids who went to hippie day school. Let’s start where it hurts, the way our brothers and sisters did: with words like godless, unholy, damned, infidel, unbeliever, sinner. I am a sinner and proud! Civil liberties for the infidel! We represent the godless future! Now get used to it.

### **Military Atheists Protest Prayer At Naval Academy Group Charges Violation of Trainees’ Rights**

*American Atheists press release, 9/1/03*

Officials at the Naval Academy have decided chaplain-led prayers before lunch will continue, despite federal court rulings that have struck down similar practices at other military academies. Attendance by all 4,000 midshipmen at the weekday lunches and prayer rituals is mandatory and the Naval Academy is now the only U.S. service academy that coerces prayers before meals.

Military Atheists were vocal in their condemnation of this practice. Kathleen Johnson, American Atheists’ Director of Military Affairs and Founder of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, stated “its shameful that future sailors in training to defend our country and the Constitution apparently have no civil rights themselves.

“This practice violates Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 1350.2 in that it gives preferential treatment to midshipmen with monotheistic religious beliefs,” said Johnson. “DODD 1350.2 strictly requires the chain of command to intervene immediately.”

Bart Meltzer, the Director of State and Regional Operations for American Atheists, and a retired US Navy veteran stated: “It’s sad that theocrats in the Navy have not been kept in check by the command.” Meltzer added: “Violating the rights of Atheists to be

free from theistic beliefs is common place in the Navy. The practice of forcing theistic beliefs on everyone clearly displays disregard for Navy core values, a lack of leadership, and lack of accountability by the chain of command.”

Meltzer also stated: “This practice violates Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction (OPNAVINST) 5354.1E. OPNAVINST 5354.1E, Paragraph 6.d states that any violation of this instruction is punishable by the Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).” Johnson and Meltzer are calling for an investigation as to why this divisive practice has not been stopped.

American Atheists called on the Naval Academy to reestablish all midshipmen’s civil rights by following the lead of the other U.S. service academies and immediately stop this divisive practice that negatively impacts troop morale and fleet readiness.

## Book Discussion Group

Join New York City Atheists' book discussion group on Thursday, September 25, 9 P.M., at 352 7th Ave., 16th flr. (Between W. 29th-30th Sts., just south of Penn Station), where we'll explore *An Atheist Epic*, Madalyn O'Hair's personal account of how the Bible and prayers were removed from public schools of the United States.

Books are available for a \$15 (tax deductible) donation to NYC Atheists Inc. — mail [info@nyc-atheists.org](mailto:info@nyc-atheists.org) or call (212) 330-6794 for details.

The discussion group follows New York City Atheists' regular monthly meeting, which begins at 7 P.M. with guest speaker Richard Cotter, Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, on how "There Are Atheists in Foxholes." A donation is requested for the regular monthly meeting.

### **An Atheist Epic**

By Madalyn Murray O'Hair

Here is the story about the Supreme Court case brought by an Atheist which helped to end mandatory prayer and bible recitation in the United States. The 1950's was a time when government insisted that goodness was godliness. Religious symbols were sprouting on city and state property around the nation. Prayer breakfasts were fast becoming a part of the political and public life. If there was ever a time for an Atheist to be in the closet, this was it.

Yet one Atheist — Madalyn Murray — stepped forward to challenge the growing institutionalization of religion in American public life. As a result of challenging prayer in schools, she lost her job; friends melted away in the heat of controversy. Her home was vandalized. She was bombarded with hate mail and harassing phone calls. Merchants refused to sell to her. Her children were beaten, over and over again.

Now, over three decades after the Murray case, religionists are still fighting to put prayer back in the schools; it's time for Atheists and civil libertarians to read once again the personal story of what happened to the family who stood up for First Amendment rights! "An Atheist Epic" is the full account of the battle.

