

# New York City Atheists Inc.

Serving the Tri-State area

An affiliate of American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International & Center For Atheism

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG COOPER STATION - Box 93, NY, NY 10276-0093

212-330-6794

**JULY 2007**

Vol. IV Issue No. 7

## ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

### UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

#### JULY

July 4*	Wednesday	11:30 A.M.	NYCA JULY 4 <sup>TH</sup> BARBEQUE / FIREWORKS
July 8**	Sunday	11:45 A.M.	NYCA Picnic
July 17***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
July 26****	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

#### AUGUST

Aug. 12*****	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Aug. 21***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Aug. 23*****	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Aug. 25-30	Sat.-Thurs.	4:00 P.M.	NYCA Cruise

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- \* Grand Central Station (Main Waiting Room – Round Kiosk)
  - \*\* Governor's Island Terminal, east of the Staten Island Ferry Terminal – 10 South Street.
  - \*\*\* Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27<sup>th</sup> St. (3<sup>rd</sup>/Lex)  
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>
  - \*\*\*\* SLC Conference Center – 352 Seventh Ave. (30<sup>th</sup> St.) – 19<sup>th</sup> Floor
  - \*\*\*\*\* To Be Announced

#### WEDNESDAYS

***THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM*** CABLE SHOW  
6:30 PM-CH 57 (MANHATTAN CABLE)  
LIVE STREAMING: [WWW.MNN.ORG](http://WWW.MNN.ORG)

#### THURSDAYS

***NYC ATHEISTS*** CABLE SHOW  
7:00 PM-CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)  
LIVE STREAMING: [WWW.MNN.ORG](http://WWW.MNN.ORG)

***ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB*** CABLE SHOW  
7:30 PM-CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)  
LIVE STREAMING: [WWW.MNN.ORG](http://WWW.MNN.ORG)

**PROUD TO BE AN ATHEIST!**

2007

**NEW YORK CITY ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

NYC Atheists Inc. is a 501-C3, non-profit, non-partisan educational association.

Our meetings and membership are open and all are welcome (both non-believers and believers) atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, secularists, separation-of-church/state advocates and individuals who are questioning and searching beliefs.



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

## Say Goodbye To Your Religious Programming

Atheists have a saying: "All babies are born atheist." What that means is, a child is born a blank slate. He or she becomes a Christian, Jew or Muslim because they are *taught* to be Christians, Jews or Muslims by their parents and their community. Put another way: There is no such thing as a Christian, Jewish or Muslim child; they are, rather, the child of a Christian, Jewish or Muslim *parent*.

Most children are, in effect, indoctrinated, instructed, programmed or brainwashed from birth into whatever religion their parents are, over a period of many crucial learning years. The programming may be subtle (prayers and Sunday School) or adamant (daily Hebrew School) or brutal (see the documentary film, *Jesus Camp*) but it is there: years of pressure into a belief system. The child has no say in process, often no way out and no one to offer opposing views. Moreover, the child often is psychologically pressured by the need to belong, to be accepted in the community and to please his parents.

The Jesuits say, "Give us a child until he is seven, and he is ours forever." In Pavlovian terms, that may be all too true. If you recall, the scientist Ivan Pavlov taught dogs to salivate (an autonomic response that the dog is not in control of) at the sound of a bell rather than at the smell and sight of food. But what few people know is that when Pavlov tried to reverse the process, he was not all that successful. Only a few of the dogs were able to regain their natural, autonomic salivation to food itself. The salivation to a bell was forever engraved in the brains of most of the experimental dogs.

### Many Reject It

Thus it is astonishing to me that despite all the conditioning to a religious system that most children experience—from the infant Baptism to the teenage Bar Mitzvah or Confirmation that we are forced to undergo—quite a few of us ultimately reject it. Some of us have apparently acquired the courage, the knowledge and the chutzpah to go against our early religious programming and declare ourselves emancipated.

But is there any way to announce this to the world? Though there are many rites and rituals to induct us *into* religion, I've discovered that there aren't any to get us *out* of it.

Therefore, I'm suggesting that what parents do to indoctrinate a child into their religion should not be considered permanent and irreversible. I would like to propose what I call a reversal or dismissal ceremony—I'm searching for the right word—a renunciation, a voiding, a pardoning of the parents, when the child reaches his or her majority. My legal argument is that because the child is a minor, anything that was done to him that "brands" the child should not be considered valid or permanent. For example, you have a right to change your name legally if you don't like it. So you should have the right, and the responsibility, in the question of faith, to dismiss, reject, change or not change what was done to you as a child.

I am proposing an Un-Confirmation or Un-BarMitzvah ceremony, available to anyone who has undergone a religious affirmation ceremony, often under duress from their parents. The person declaring his or her freedom from the religion they were indoctrinated into should hopefully have achieved some independence from their parents, and therefore may be as old as 25, 30 or even older.

So far, no secular organization has come up with a ceremony disavowing one's former religion but I believe it is a very important and positive action, revealing one's true self to the community before supportive friends and colleagues. A life-affirming decision such as avowing one's dedication to truth, science, reality and secularism is surely as important a feat as standing in front of an altar as a child and declaring oneself submissive to Jesus or Buddha or Yahweh. Thus, I feel it is incumbent on us, as secular leaders, to develop such a ritual and introduce it to the world. □

I would appreciate your comments. Ken Bronstein at [NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM](mailto:NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM) or 212-535-7425

**UPCOMING JULY EVENTS**

**July 4                      Wednesday                      11:30 A.M.  
NYCA BARBEQUE / FIREWORKS**

**Meeting Location: Grand Central Station  
Main Waiting room – Round Info Kiosk  
Cost: Train fare plus \$10 donation**

**We meet in Grand Central Station to take the Metro North train to Chappaqua. Round Trip Fare: \$ 14.50 / Seniors \$ 9.50.**

**Eric and Elaine Stone (76 Devoe Rd., Chappaqua – 914-238-4803) will be our hosts. Individuals driving, please call Ken Bronstein (212-535-7425) for directions.**

**Around 4:15 P.M., we return to NYC. We find a restaurant for dinner before we attend the Macy’s fireworks display on the East River at dusk. At 8:15 P.M., we will meet at the northeast corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. / 34<sup>th</sup> Street. Then we walk to the section where we traditionally view the fireworks display along the East River.**

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**July 8                      Sunday                      11:45 A.M.  
NYCA Picnic**

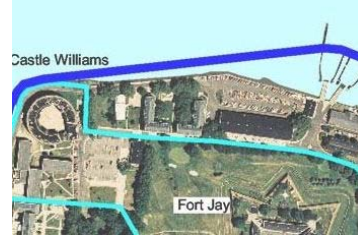
**Location: Governors Island  
Reservations: Not required**

**Governors Island has been recently reopened to the public, a silent sentinel in New York Harbor for more than two centuries. From 1776-1996, the military communities on Governors Island were woven into the intricate social, political and economic tapestry of New York City.**



**Meet at the Governors Island Ferry Terminal – Slip 7 - (left of the Staten Island Ferry Terminal) taking the noon (10 minute) ferry to Governor’s Island. We will be picnicing near Castle Williams.**

**Castle Williams                      Ferry Slip**



**Exit the ferry – Go west along walkway (200 yards) to Castle Williams. Fabulous view of New York Harbor.**

**Bring your own lunch, blanket, drinks, etc. For dessert, bring something to share: Cookies, chips, cake, whatever.**

**Free Guided Island Tour available: approximately 45 minutes.**

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**July 18                      Tuesday                      7:00 P.M.**

**NYCA Meet-Up  
Location: Stone Creek Bar and Lounge  
140 East 27<sup>th</sup> St. (3<sup>rd</sup>/Lex)  
Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.  
Cost: Free (cash food and bar)  
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>**

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**July 26                      Thursday                      6:30 P.M.  
NYCA Monthly Meeting  
Location: SLC Conference Center  
352 Seventh Ave. (30<sup>th</sup> St.) – 19<sup>th</sup> Floor**

**Reservations: Not required  
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation  
Speaker: Randall Balmer  
Subject: *Religion and the Presidency***



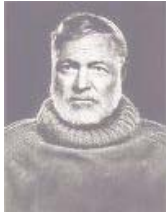
**Randall Balmer is the Ann Whitney Olin Professor of American Religion at Barnard College, Columbia University.**

Dr. Balmer has published widely both in academic and scholarly journals and in the popular press. He is editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*; his commentaries on religion in America, distributed by the New York Times Syndicate, have appeared in newspapers across the country. Dr. Balmer has co-written a history of American Presbyterians and a book on mainline Protestantism. His most recent books are *The Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, published by Baylor University Press, and *Religion in Twentieth Century America*, part of the Religion in American Life series, published by Oxford University Press. Dr. Balmer is currently at work on a history of religion in North America, for Oxford University Press. A spiritual memoir, *Growing Pains: Learning to Love My Father's Faith*, was published by Brazos Press in the fall of 2001 and named "book of the year" (spirituality) by *ChristianityToday* the following year.

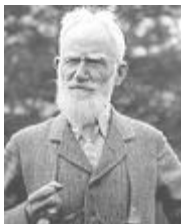
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#### ATHEISTS

#### BORN IN THE MONTH OF JULY



**ERNEST HEMINGWAY**  
JULY 21, 1899 – JULY 2, 1961



**GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**  
JULY 26, 1856 – NOVEMBER 2, 1950



**LUDWIG ANDREAS FEUERBACH**  
JULY 28, 1804 – SEPTEMBER 13, 1872

## Atheist Wedding Vows

*One of the goals of our Atheist community is to create rites and rituals that are Atheist in spirit and form, to mark life's passages. This is not as easy a task as one might think: Religious ceremonies have, for generations, monopolized the births, funerals, weddings and other commemorative events of people's lives. This June, NYCA was fortunate to have Rich and Tiya [Madden] Cotter of New Paltz, NY share with us their secular wedding vows in all their beauty, poetry and originality. The excerpts below will help you appreciate the depth and sincerity of an actual marriage ceremony that did not rely on god or churches.*

*--Editor*

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#### Secular Celebrant:

“Welcome to the ceremony that will unite and Tiya in marriage. We are gathered here today to celebrate their union and to honor their commitment to not just gazing at one another, but to looking outward together in the same direction. Today Tiya and Rich proclaim their love to the world and we rejoice with them...

“...This wedding in the Humanist [or Atheist if you choose] spirit celebrates the joy and the beauty of life. It is a Humanist belief that there should be equality among people in every relevant way and that it is especially important for this principle to be recognized in the marriage relationship. Marriage must be a cooperative venture in every sense. It is a relationship based on love, respect and a determination on the part of both partners to adjust to each other in health or sickness, joy or sadness, ease or hardship.

“Rich and Tiya, we are here to rejoice with you and to recount that it is love that guides us on our path, and to celebrate as you begin this journey together...”

*As Rich and Tiya exchange rings, they each recite these vows separately:*

“I promise to be your lover, companion and friend,  
 Your ally in conflict,  
 Your greatest fan and your toughest adversary,  
 Your comrade in adventure,  
 Your student and your teacher,  
 Your consolation in disappointment,  
 Your accomplice in mischief,  
 Your strength in your need and  
 Vulnerable to you in my own,  
 And most of all, your associate in the search for enlightenment.  
 In token of my love and devotion, I place this ring on your finger.”

**Celebrant:**

“As Tiya and Rich have consented in this ceremony to live in wedlock, and have taken their vows in the presence of this company by the giving and receiving of rings, I now pronounce, by the authority vested in me and in accordance with the laws of the State of New York, that they are married.

“For Rich and Tiya, we read these lines from an ancient Native American ceremony:

“Now you will feel no rain, for each of you will be shelter for the other. Now you will feel no cold, for each of you will be warmth for the other.

“Now you are two persons, but there is only one life inside you. Go now to your dwelling to enter the days of your life together. May your days be good and long upon the earth.” □

**Man invented god  
 god did not invent man**

**Stem Cell Research  
 Is  
 Pro-Life**

**This newsletter is published by  
 New York City Atheists Inc.  
 Publisher – Kenneth Bronstein  
 Editor- Jane Everhart**

## Editor’s Q and A

Dear Editor,

Why are there so many more men than women in the Atheist movement? I’ve noticed this at the Atheist meetings, tabling, social events and even the Meetups. Is Atheism more attractive to men than to women?

Puzzled in Queens

Dear Puzzled,

I, too, have noticed the preponderance of men in the Atheist community. As far as singles events go, I think it’s the best-kept secret in New York City.

I can only speculate why we have this disproportion. One of the possible reasons occurred to me about a year ago when I happened to go by an old Catholic Church on New York’s Lower East Side and decided, for old times sake, to go inside. Sitting there in the pews were about a dozen worshipers—*all elderly women*. I stood at the back of the church and drank in what I, brought up a Catholic, had long ago left behind: The organ rumbling morosely overhead in the choir loft, the flickering candles, the priest at the altar going through the obscure motions of a Catholic service, the musky ancient fragrance of incense—and it all seemed so medieval, so otherworldly, as though the Catholic church had been left behind in a time warp. But what made me saddest of all were the elderly women, kneeling or sitting in housedresses and shabby coats, genuflecting and mumbling soft responses to the mass. I gazed at them and thought: These are the leftover women of a previous generation. Taught to raise children, keep house, clean, sew and be obedient, now widowed or abandoned with no one to protect and succor them in their old age but the church and a nebulous fairy-tale god, they practice their obeisance now in church, to a priest instead of a husband. These are the women that time has forgotten.

Remember, it is only in the past two generations that women have gained the right to be educated. Even today, many religions—including

Christian, Muslim and Jewish sects—relegate women to the childbearing or nun role. Betty Friedan’s generation was the first to insist on women’s right to be educated. Before that, even in wealthy families, women—if educated at all—were sent to “finishing schools” where they learned to set the dinner table properly and pour tea.

If your education is neglected, you might be more apt to believe that there is an ectoplasm floating overhead that cares whether or not you commit sins. If your worldly experiences are limited to kitchen, nursery and drawing room, you are without the knowledge and skills to apply the scientific method and rational thinking to things that impact your life. If you do not work in the larger world—and, two generations ago, middle-class women prided themselves on not having to do gainful work; volunteer work and charity were considered the only suitable work for proper upper-and middle-class ladies—then you were not exposed to the ideas, the policies or the decisions that shake up our world.

Am I implying that a lack of education, particularly in science and rational-thinking skills, leads one to more readily accept religion? That is undoubtedly true, though there are some highly educated people who manage to retain their religion. More telling is that among high-level working scientists, especially on the Nobel level, a religious person is hard to find.

I like to think of those elderly women in the Lower East Side Catholic church as the last remnants of an old order: the economically and emotionally dependent women who, because of their abandonment by society, look to heaven for their reward. I find it pathetic that the Catholic church has come to depend mainly upon these elderly women for its devoted membership.

In the Atheist community, the news is better: NYCA’s president, Ken Bronstein, informs me that these days, 45 percent of our members are women. It’s not quite as many as we’d like, but we’re getting there. And interestingly, a disproportionate number of our women members hold advanced degrees—Master’s and PhDs. What does that tell you about the effects of education on religious beliefs! □

## **No Tax Dollars to Churches, AA’s Ellen Johnson Tells Civil Rights Commission**

Wash. DC —If you don’t know what the Blaine Amendments are, you are not alone. But now it appears that these obscure amendments in the constitutions of about 36 states, which ban the use of tax money for church activities, are being revived in some states to stop the leakage of tax money for religious uses—in particular, these days, for vouchers to Catholic schools.

American Atheists’ president, Ellen Johnson, in her defense of the Blaine Amendments, reminded the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in June that these state amendments grew out of a failed proposal, introduced in 1875 by U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives James G. Blaine, that would have banned use of any federal funds to aid or benefit religious schools and other faith-based institutions.

The Blaine proposal passed the House 180 to 7 in 1875 but failed to achieve the required two-thirds majority in the Senate. State legislatures and districts petitioning for admission into the federal union in 1875 began incorporating versions of the amendment into their constitutions.

### **Private Schools Benefit**

Today, the Blaine amendments are used in many states to prevent the use of school vouchers to reimburse parents for the cost of sending their children to private schools, mostly Roman Catholic.

Johnson told the Civil Rights Commission the point of view of Atheists, who back the Blaine amendments and oppose the use of vouchers for schools. Her testimony included the following moving closing remarks:

“I represent a segment of Atheists in the U.S. who are part of a broader community generally described as “unchurched” or “nonreligious” Americans. We go by many names—Atheist, Rationalist, Humanist, Freethinker—and we

reject, either totally or to a significant degree, religious creeds. We do not believe in a god or revealed religious truths or we have serious doubts about these questions. We are a minority, but a growing minority. Surveys put our numbers between 9% and maybe as high as 13% of the American population. That figure could be as high as 40 million people, larger than most denominations and sects. No issue has galvanized and enraged my constituency more than the question of public funding of religion...

**Churches Get Tax Money**

“I don’t think I should have to pay for the education of divinity students or programs which subsidize religion-based schools whether they are Protestant or Catholic or Islamic or operated by any other religion, I don’t think I should have my tax money used to refurbish a church, a mosque or a temple. I do not believe that any American should be compelled to finance, directly or indirectly, religious schools, charities and outreaches. Doing so is bad public policy and invites further erosion of the separation between government and religion...”

Johnson then quoted a statement from history:

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute—where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference.”

“Those are the words of our 35<sup>th</sup> president, John F. Kennedy. Thank you,” Johnson concluded. □

**Proud to be an atheist!**

**STOP  
FAITH-BASED SUBSIDIES  
THAT WILL BECOME  
FAITH-BASED  
ENTITLEMENTS**

**TOTAL  
SEPARATION  
OF  
CHURCH / STATE**

**Don't Miss the Boat!  
29 Participants - As of July 1**

**NYC Atheists End-of-Summer Cruise**

**5-Day Canada Cruise  
Aboard The Carnival *Victory*  
August 25-30, 2007**



Join Massimo Pigliucci, evolutionary biologist, on our 5-day Cruise—a time for wisdom, friendship and sharing adventure with people of like minds.

Escape the everyday world for a while; ply the waters of the northern Atlantic, drinking in the vistas that our Viking ancestors first saw.

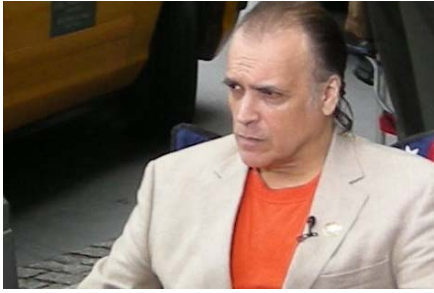
Enjoy the smell of salt air, the vivid sunsets over the ocean, the gourmet buffets, the fresh air in your lungs, the romantic moonlight dances, the deck and chair tête-à-têtes, making new friends and docking at charming little fishing villages peopled by hospitable locals.

**Itinerary**

- Sat.: Depart NYC: 5:00 PM
- Sun.: "Fun Day at Sea"
- Mon.: St. John/Bay of Fundy
- Tue.: Halifax, Nova Scotia
- Wed.: "Fun Day at Sea"
- Thur.: Arrive NYC: 8:00 AM

Contact: Gloria Kingsley  
[Gloria@SolarTravelinc.com](mailto:Gloria@SolarTravelinc.com)  
212-601-2775

**DEMOCRACY  
NOT  
THEOCRACY**



Dennis Horvitz, (NYCA Cable Show Host) being interviewed by NBC News at our May 19<sup>th</sup> Street Tabling



Dr. Michael Pratt, May monthly meeting, guest speaker on Mark Twain.

**RENEW / JOIN NYC ATHEISTS**

Through our programs and activities, we work to bring awareness of our principles, our vision and, above all, of our existence as atheists to the community. We do it through our website, our meetings and events, our cable shows, our library and book club, our street tabling and our newsletters --all of which are funded by your membership.

With the continued growth of our membership, we gather strength in numbers and will more effectively counteract the threat of a looming theocracy.



**NYC ATHEISTS — 2007 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt No.: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit (501-C3), non-partisan, educational association with these purposes and goals:

1. To promote the total and absolute separation of church and state
2. To educate and inform the public about Atheism
3. To provide a forum for discussion about Atheism
4. To develop and engage in educational, cultural, charitable and social activities that are beneficial to the members of NYC Atheists Inc., the Atheist community and the community at large.

**YOUR 2007 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE**

Basic \_\_ \$ 25    Friend \_\_ \$ 100    Sustainer \_\_ \$ 250    Patron \_\_ \$ 500    Benefactor \_\_ \$ 1000

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK PAYABLE TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. - SEND APPLICATION  
TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. MEMBERSHIP - COOPER STATION P.O. Box 93 NY, NY 10276-0093**