

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

AUGUST 2007

Vol. IV Issue No. 8

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

AUGUST

Aug. 21* Tuesday 7:00 P.M. NYCA Meet-Up
Aug. 25-30 Sat.-Thurs. 4:00 P.M. NYCA Cruise

SEPTEMBER

Sept. 9** Sunday 12:00 P.M. NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Sept. 18* Tuesday 7:00 P.M. NYCA Meet-Up
Sept. 27*** Thursday 6:30 P.M. NYCA Monthly Meeting

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- * Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>
** To Be Announced
*** SLC Conference Center – 352 Seventh Ave. (30th St.) – 16th Floor

WEDNESDAYS

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

THURSDAYS

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

ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB CABLE SHOW
7:30 PM-CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: 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

**PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"
The Trauma of Childhood Religious Brainwashing**

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Last month I proposed the "Un" ceremony— an *Un-Confirmation* or *Un-BarMitzvah* rite that would represent Atheists' renunciation of the religion that they were indoctrinated into as a child. If the overwhelming email response we got is any indication, the idea seems to have caught on with many of our members (see Page 5). But a few people have asked me: *Why would we want to do that? What is the purpose, besides an excuse to have a party?* I have given that question a great deal of thought.

I think there is a very profound purpose in having such a rite-of-passage. What makes me come to this conclusion are the things I've witnessed not only in documentary films such as *Jesus Camp* and well-documented accounts of the ill-fated followers of Reverend Jim Jones who committed mass suicide, but also what I saw in my teaching days down South: young people who had been indoctrinated too soon, too ruthlessly, too irrationally, into fundamentalist religions and seemed confused, unapproachable and guarded. They were wary and suspicious that any new learning that might come their way might dislodge what had been ingrained into their psyche at great cost to them in free will. Their lethargy and lack of enthusiasm reminded me of a relatively new psychological diagnosis called Post-Trauma Anxiety Syndrome (PTAS), which, since 9/11, and since our boys came back from the Gulf War, has stirred up concern in the medical community.

Symptoms of Post-Trauma Anxiety Syndrome are depression, emotional numbness, disorientation, inadequate coping abilities, low self-esteem, sleeplessness and sometimes, uncontrollable crying. Anyone who has seen the film *Jesus Camp* must remember, as I do, one little boy, perhaps five or six years old, who lay on the floor sobbing, howling and trembling after the overbearing camp director had worked the children into a frenzy of fear of the devil and hell. Would that qualify as child abuse, I wondered. Is there such a thing as child abuse through religious indoctrination?

Religious Trauma

I believe there is such a thing. I'll call it—for the purpose of differentiating it from PTAS—Childhood Religious Indoctrination Trauma, or CRIT, and it is caused by vigorous, irrational, unrelenting indoctrination of a child into a religion. Parents who engage in this kind of ongoing, persistent, unremitting brainwashing do it in the name of the Lord, in the name of their church and their faith, and even claim that it is for the "child's own good." Their objective is to immerse the child into these teachings until acceptance of the religion and assimilation into the congregation is achieved. In the process, the child's will is beaten down, and these children often end up being afraid to question or critically examine the religious doctrines they have been taught.

What these religions teach the child may seem astonishing to us Atheists, but I assure you it is taken as, well, gospel, by these religious parents. The children are taught that god is the 24/7 eye-in-the-sky monitoring every one of their thoughts and actions, and that if the children don't follow the rules they are taught (which the parents claim came from god) then god will be mad and take punitive action during their lifetimes or after death.

The children are taught that heaven and hell are very real places ("Never mind how we know this, we just know," the parents will tell the child) and that god will blackball their entrance into heaven if they are not one of his compliant disciples.

Editor's Q and A

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Tammy Faye Skips Purgatory, Goes Right to Heaven

Dear Editor,

I was appalled that CNN's Larry King show let the late televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker do a commercial for religion virtually on her deathbed. Millions of viewers saw Tammy Faye broadcast her exultation at the prospect of going "right to heaven" after death, which, she said, she hoped would include a giant shopping center "where there's no limit on your charge card." Don't you think her delusions might be taken seriously by untold numbers of children and vulnerable, ignorant, viewers nationwide? Shouldn't we Atheists demand equal time to counteract her ridiculous statements with truth and reason?

Angry in the Bronx

Dear Angry,

Well, I like to think of Tammy Faye's final statements, which bordered on the hallucinatory, as sort-of giving the finger to religion. The idea of heaven being a giant Walmart might best be countered by the likes of comedian George Carlin, who in one of his skits puzzles over the fact that while god is apparently a guy who knows everything, sees everything and is in complete control of everything, he still needs money.

It's ironic that Tammy Faye, whose career consisted of lying, bilking poor Christians of their hard-earned money, making a clown of herself on her television ministry show, frivolous spending of donors' money on personal luxuries, a tranquilizer addiction, mocking the Christian standard of marriage and not exactly standing by her husband when he alone went to jail for these same indiscretions—it is ironic that she, of all people, felt she was going to go straight to heaven.

I assume that what Tammy Faye meant is that she would not be required, after her death, to spend any time in purgatory, which, it is said, is

a kind of Christian way station or halfway house where you spend a few eons being remorseful for all the sins you committed in your lifetime on earth. The more sins you committed, the more time you spend in purgatory (Hey, I don't make this stuff up).

So let's see. Lying? That's worth a couple years in purgatory, easy. Bad makeup? Add a decade. Crocodile tears on camera for her PTL (Praise The Lord) television ministry? Surely that gets an eon in purgatory. Being fashion-challenged? That merits forty lashes from Coco Chanel and Versace, both residents down there for their own indiscretions. But wait, if Gabriel is not a Versace fan, Tammy could possibly shave a few days off purgatory with this one. I mean, though the Devil wears Prada, I've never seen Jesus or Zeus pictured wearing anything but robes and a kind-of plastic neon halo over their heads. Fashion mavens, they're not.

If you are silly enough to buy into the idea of heaven and hell that is perpetrated by Christian theology, you can have a lot of fun with it. You can make it be whatever you want it to be. Tammy Faye could very well have believed that she has purchased a condo in heaven on Cloud Nine Boulevard at the bottom of the Immortality cul-de-sac within that pearly-gated community. We will never know what happens to Tammy Faye in her imaginary heaven. But we do know what will happen to her here on earth. Her deceased body will disintegrate slowly and in the end return to the earth the molecules of which human bodies are made up. All that will be left will be her bones, and even they too will disintegrate in time. Ashes to ashes. That is a kind of immortality, some would say: Your ashes become one with the soil in which we grow our food. Ironically, you may very well be imbibing grandma, or someone's grandma, along with your asparagus. It is the most ancient, most effective, form of recycling that I know of.

I don't think it is necessary for us to aspire to go on CNN to refute Tammy Faye's vision of heaven any more than it is necessary (or feasible) for us to try to refute the existence of god every time someone mentions him on TV. I feel the ball

Readers React To Rite of Passage That Says Goodbye to Religion

In his July “Sermon,” New York City Atheists’ president, Kenneth Bronstein, proposed the idea of establishing a ceremony of bidding farewell to the religious programming we were subjected to as children and announcing to friends and the community that we are Atheists.

As NYCA’s Director of Communications, I emailed our membership asking their opinions about this idea. Within a day or two, to my surprise, dozens of members deluged my email site with their reactions, which were overwhelmingly positive (only two people opposed Bronstein’s idea), although a few members had some interesting caveats. Below, some excerpts from a few samples of the responses.

—Jane Everhart

“..I think it’s a terrific idea, and it does have the potential to attract local and perhaps national media coverage if well publicized. Ideally, this should [take place] in a public space in Manhattan, like a park, possibly with a fountain (though one would have to check with the City for permits). It could be done on a demand basis, with people signing up for it, and then a ceremony announced ahead of time when we have enough people. Obviously, we want many participants for the very first event.

“This really should look like a ceremony, an official event. However, it shouldn’t be too long, and it should not—in my opinion—be an occasion for long speeches and rants against religion. The point is clear by itself, and we want to come across as nice and reasonable. As for the tone—do we want it to be light and humorous or solemn and serious? I’d say a combination of both. We need to show a sense of humor, but at the same time convey the message that we do take this seriously. Way to go, Ken!”

--Massimo Pigliucci
Dept. of Ecology & Evolution
SUNY—Stony Brook, NY

is in religion’s court to prove to us that there is a god or a heaven. Besides, the televangelists have historically had a lock hold on television. There’s one on camera every single weekday night on Channel 31 in my area, and I have heard that in the Bible Belt, preachers are on television practically all day long. Yet, I have never, ever, heard of a teleatheist, have you? We have been outnumbered and out-preached, out-shouted and out-proselytized. But NYCA is working hard to catch up--we have three weekly Cable TV shows so far--and hopefully, someday, with the help of science, reason and facts, we will surpass the televangelists.

Tammy Faye’s ravaged, skeletal appearance on the Larry King show a day before she died made it clear that she had been in cancer purgatory right here on earth. I feel that we as Atheists have three main responsibilities in our lifetimes: to make life on earth good for ourselves, to make life on earth good for others, and to make life on earth good for our children, grandchildren, and future generations. It is our Atheist responsibility, our goal, our hope, through science and research, to find a cure for cancer as soon as possible so that Tammy Faye, and all others in her situation, need not suffer the very real purgatories of pain and suffering here on earth.

--Jane Everhart

ATHEISTS BORN IN THE MONTH OF AUGUST



Percy Bysshe Shelley / August 4, 1792 – July 8, 1822



Gene Roddenberry / August 19, 1921 – October 24, 1991

“I agree with Ken’s sermon completely. However, I question whether many would want to publicly announce their rejection of religion. Most of us are slow to come out of the closet for many reasons. On the other hand, to start a program like this would get an important point across even if only a few people had the courage to participate. I vote a resounding Right On!”

--John Henderson. M.D.
Author of *Judging god*, due in Sept.

“I think this is a great idea...I’m thinking the NYCA could have one day a month set aside for this ‘ceremony’ when both existing members and new members could renounce their religious upbringing. Obviously only a limited number of people can do this at a time, so members would have to sign up for a date in advance. Each participant should prepare a short speech about when and why they became an atheist, and the tone (be it light and humorous or serious and thoughtful) should be left up to the individual. At the end of the ceremony, pins with the Atheist symbol could be given out to the participants.

“Instead of calling it an un-confirmation or un-bar mitzvah, which sounds negative, it could simply be called a graduation—a graduation from child-like fantasies of a Santa Claus god into a rational way of thinking and an adult-like sense of responsibility—because it’s more than just a reversal, it’s a kind of maturing, in my opinion.”

--Jina

“I think it’s a wonderful idea....I would very much like to be involved in its further development.”

--Howard Blakeslee

“A very interesting idea, kind of like a divorce party. I think it should be generally light-hearted though serious at some point. Really, it’s kind of a social gathering to renounce one’s ‘faith.’ Actually, if we could formulate some sort of witty ‘catechism’ (Dennis could do this perhaps?) to undo what has been done, I think that would be great. A party, however small or inexpensive or casual, could follow if desired, as they do with other ceremonies....”

--Elaine Stone
Chappaqua

“I think the term Ken is searching for is ‘emancipation.’ It has a good connotation from the slavery battles, but more importantly, there is a legal precedent where a child can have him/her self declared an emancipated minor, no longer under the legal control of the parents—a very good fit for your plan...Check it out with some lawyers.”

--Betta E.

“Yeah, like an ‘Awakening’ ceremony...Maybe people who have awakened, like I did, could have a special section of the newsletter...but, like Ken said, there’s got to be something official...hmmmmmm...”

--Rick Brass
New Jersey

“Please put me on your email contact list. I would like to support such an enticing idea.”

--S. Derrick

“Disavowal Convocation? How about:

I _____, as an adult citizen of _____, hereby renounce those ceremonies and rituals imposed on me when I was a child and unable to make my own choices, I so Declare!

The above should be recited in unison by all present wanting to make such declaration, and should be made without influence of others....”

--Mary Dunn

“I like the idea of a ceremony declaring one’s freedom from religion, but it should be used sparingly for just those people who, like me, have truly adopted a secular way of life. All too often I hear people say that they have no religious beliefs but their homes tell a different story around the holidays when they decorate them in the name of ‘tradition,’ which to them is not the same as religion or faith. People who believe in this phony distinction are welcomed as members of some atheist groups as long as they believe in the separation of church and state, but I don’t consider them atheists.

“If someone wants to reverse their religious indoctrination, he or she should take a vow to forsake all forms of worship—and that includes painting Easter eggs or taking children to the mall to see Santa. All of that may seem innocent,

but it perpetuates organized religion—which society must eventually abandon. So I support the creation of a unique ceremony with the above conditions attached. I’ll even bring the chips and soda.”

--Buzz Adelman

“It is a good idea to let people know that it is okay to question and even reject what has been programmed into them but ‘revealing one’s true self to the community before supportive friends and colleagues’ would be the most difficult task. Can you really use the words ‘supportive’ and ‘friends/colleagues’ in the same sentence when the subject is religion?... I have lost many ‘friends and colleagues’ after revealing my Atheism. I believe it will be important to provide support for those who choose to reject their religions. Whether young or old, Atheism (and any similar philosophy) can lead to a lonely life. This is why many people choose not to reveal their Atheism and further choose to hide behind labels such as ‘humanist’ or ‘bright’ or ‘freethinker.’... I know many people who are scared to admit publicly that they are Atheists. This is why I believe there are more Atheists in this world than we think.

“Now is the time for Atheists to stop being scared, to stop lying about their Atheism and to unite and support each other. Having a ceremony to allow people to ‘come out of the closet’ is the first step, as long as those of us who are already out are willing to embrace and support them.”

--Mardi Jones

And my own contribution, which originally went out in an email response to Massimo:

“My idea is that the ceremony should be conducted for the first time in connection with an Atheist convention, such as the one we are having in September in Washington DC. The reason: The Press is already there for the convention, and we would have hundreds of fellow atheists on the premises to back us and participate in this demonstration. That is, we would already have a ready-made podium.

“Since it would really be a demonstration, at least the first time, I don’t think we need that many people to take part in the actual ceremony.

We would need only a couple of representative Atheists declaring their emancipation from religion. I would love to get a celebrity, such as Robin Williams or Julia Sweeney, to do it. O, the fun that would be!...

“I envision a semi-humorous declaration: 'In the name of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and George Bernard Shaw, I hereby declare myself free of the bondage of church, religion, heaven and hell...I dedicate myself to truth, science, logic, rational thinking and the furtherance of the power of humankind over nature...I dedicate myself to grappling with the truth, no matter how unpleasant it may be, and to seek no comfort in unsubstantiated tales about any unseen, unproven, otherworldly deity, be it Jesus, god, Buddha, Yahweh, fairies, goblins, angels, Zeus or the spirits of the dead. Long live truth and reason!’”

--Jane Everhart

**DEMOCRACY
NOT
THEOCRACY**

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

**Stem Cell Research
Is
Pro-life**

**Total
Separation
Of
Church / State**

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



**NYC Atheists July Monthly Meeting
July 26, 2007
L-R: Dr. Randall Balmer, Professor of Religion
(Barnard College) and an Episcopal priest,
accepts a plaque commemorating his talk to
New York City Atheists from Dennis Horvitz
(NYC Atheists Cable Show Host).**

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**