

## ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

### PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

### Atheism, Phase II: Building a Secular Society

A new member of New York City Atheists asked me, "I have become an Atheist, *now what?* Who marries me? Who buries me? What replaces the rites and rituals of life? What is the foundation of my ethics? What is the purpose of life?" I told him that as far as we Atheists are concerned, the debate about the supernatural is over; we are declaring victory. We will no longer engage in the *Is There or Isn't There a god* debate. We must move on to Phase II of Atheism: building a new, positive, secular society that will replace the old religion-based society.

In a way, like Martin Luther King Jr., I have a dream. But I veer from our late hero in that my dream is secular and consists of a society that would not depend on heaven or hell or any edicts on how to live life handed down by a spirit who doesn't exist and therefore can't tell me how to live life. If you'll allow me my penchant for acronyms, I would like to call this new secular society S.P.E.C.I.A.L, which stands for Secular, Plural, Ethical, Compassionate, Intellectual, Attitude and Livelihood.

We must start to build a new, positive contemporary society that reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and technology. Organized religion has had more than 5,000 years to develop its model, which was, and still is, based on Bronze Age concepts, but they have yet to solve the problems of poverty, hunger, war, illness, universal education, and friendship among nations. Surely we Atheists can do better than that. Here's how I see our S.P.E.C.I.A.L society emerging:

#### No Illusions of Afterlife

The first step is *Secularization*. We need to develop a secular society that is not based on the supernatural. This will mean: (1) dealing with our earthly problems without depending on the illusion of an afterlife. If you are looking for paradise in heaven, you aren't apt to build paradise here on earth. (2) the secularization of ceremonies and rites. There is something about us *homo sapiens* that craves the marking of passages in our lives. Religion recognizes this and provides pageantry for almost every marker along the road of our lives from puberty (the Bar Mitzvah or Confirmation ) to death (sitting Shiva or the Wake). We secularists can provide these markers of life passages without the aid of churches, the supernatural or its earthly representatives such as priests or rabbis.

Nor must Atheists overlook the need for human contact, love and cooperation. Thus, we must (3) establish groups, institutions and organizations that meet the shared needs of people in a non-religious way. Do we need the name of god carved into the concrete and brick of our halls of justice, our schools, our government seats, our auditoriums, our sports arenas? Would not these group activities be just as effective without the imprimatur of the supernatural on their walls? And (4) we will require brick and

mortar institutions. For Atheists to be a tangible part of society, we need the long-lasting structures that will represent us, and outlast individuals, to insure that our secularism will continue to enrich society for other generations.

#### No More 'Chosen' People

We will also need to acknowledge and accommodate *Pluralism*—that is, cultural, gender, national and racial diversity. The rights of any and all minorities must be respected. No more “chosen people,” no more religious hierarchies, no more favoring of one nation over another or one race over another. As for *Ethics*, we must base our morals and ethics upon rational and scientific evidence rather than myths, legends and tales imposed on us by an ancient book that was barely relevant a thousand years ago. For myself, I favor the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as a guide to secular ethics and justice.

Nor must we ever forget that the feeling of *Compassion* does not belong solely to saints and martyrs. Religions do not have a corner on compassion. We Atheists feel identification with, and sympathy for, our brothers and sisters as deeply as religious people. Perhaps more so, for we do not relegate our concern for our fellow man to his afterlife; we want to help our suffering brothers and sisters *here and now*.

#### No Elitism

Nor do we Atheists wish to relegate *Intellectualism* to the elite members of our society or religion’s monks, priests and rabbis. We believe that all people are born equal and must be given equal opportunity to develop their intellect. That means free schooling, not just up to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but beyond. Our ghettos and barrios are filled with children who, denied the opportunity to learn, will never be able contribute to the world as much as they might have.

Lastly, there is our *Attitude*, which must always remain optimistic, strong and forward-looking, coupled with *Livelihood*—which has two meanings for me: the means of support or subsistence and the quality of being lively. Our ideal secular society must provide each human with a means of earning their livelihood in a way that suits their talents and abilities, contributes to their happiness and makes them glad to be alive. We must not countenance a whole population of citizens who are doomed to servitude to more-affluent citizens.

I believe this secular society is achievable—and necessary. Someday the lies of religion will be universally recognized for what they are and religion will wither away. In its place will be our secular world, “special” no more, but quite ordinary and accepted as the norm. □

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

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Mark Twain [Samuel Langhorne Clemens] (1835-1910) Source: Is Shakespeare Dead ?  
From *My Autobiography* By Mark Twain

"I am aware that when even the brightest mind in our world has been trained up from childhood in a superstition of any kind, it will never be possible for that mind, in its maturity, to examine sincerely, dispassionately, and conscientiously any evidence or any circumstance which shall seem to cast a doubt upon the validity of that superstition."

## NYCA President Vs. Pope on CBS-TV

Dear Editor,

I saw the president of NYCA, Ken Bronstein, on CBS's Five O'Clock TV News program in which he was asked to comment on the Pope's new Encyclical that blasts Atheists as being the root of all evil. It seems to me that Bronstein didn't have much time to respond; he was gone in a blink of an eye, while the Pope's Encyclical is 78 pages long. Do you think that's fair to us Atheists?

Indignant in Tribeca

Dear Indignant,

Of course it's not fair, but who says the media is fair? We Atheists have to fight for every inch of news space we get. I, as NYCA's press officer, was present when the CBS reporter and cameraman interviewed Ken Bronstein, and I can tell you that our president spoke with the reporter on camera for a good 15 or 20 minutes; however, what the viewer saw on the actual TV program lasted only one and a quarter minutes.

Bronstein's longer response was, in my opinion, incisive, humorous and on target. For example, his opening statement to CBS was that "this is a proud day for Atheists because the Pope has had to respond to the growing secularism in the world. The Pope has finally had to acknowledge that Atheism is a rising force in the world."

Bronstein went on to say that the Pope doesn't really understand Atheism and, thus, is defensive in his attempts to protect a 2,000-3,000-year-old cause that harks back to the Bronze age. At one point our NYCA president said, "The world has progressed historically from polytheism to monotheism to atheism. Atheism brings it up to contemporary times. A lot of the reasons that people needed a religion are gone. Science and knowledge have taken the place of many of the unknowns that religions were built on. The Pope, however, is apparently still living in the world of 2,000 years ago. He uses airplanes and

Popemobiles and cell phones and faxes, but his philosophy has not kept up with the advances in technology."

### Pope Contradicts Himself

When asked by the reporter what Bronstein thought of the Pope calling Atheism "evil," Bronstein retorted, "The feeling is mutual!" Bronstein went on to explain that Atheist philosophers and historians feel, in turn, that religion has caused, or encouraged, or done nothing about the worst evils known to man. As for prayer, Bronstein noted that we Atheists feel that prayer accomplishes nothing; that no one is listening to it and therefore, prayer is "just a mantra" that you can direct at anything. "You can pray to anyone or anything ...you can pray to the hubcap of a 1957 Edsel!"

In looking at the Pope's new Encyclical myself (an "Encyclical" is defined as a sort-of update in the interpretation of Roman Catholic rules and principles), this editor was amazed at the crude contradictions contained in it. For example, in his Encyclical the Pope says that Atheism has led to some of "the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice" ever known to mankind. Almost in the same breath, the Pope says that "...to banish it [suffering and evil] from the world is not in our power. Only god is able to do this." Well, wait a minute. If god is the only one with the power to banish suffering, then why doesn't he just smite all these Atheists that are supposedly causing all the trouble and be done with it?

Could it be that god secretly *likes* Atheists? Could it be—say it isn't so—that god is an Atheist himself? Now there's a troubling thought for the Pope to ruminate on during his next Popemobile ride. I smell another Encyclical coming on.

--- Jane Everhart, Editor

## Editor's Q & A

### Why Lower-Case the Word “god?”

Dear Editor,

The NYCA newsletter always uses the lower-case “g” in the word “god.” I find this disconcerting, especially when the word “god” begins a sentence or is in a book title.

--Rigid in Manhattan

Dear Rigid,

Most grammar textbooks will tell you that the word “god” is “*always* capitalized.” Those of us who grew up with that precept carved into our brains can get jarred whenever we see the word “god” uncapitalized. I, too, find it unsettling, especially when “god” begins a sentence or is in the title of a book or play.

But the style of every publication is set by its publisher, and the publisher of the NYCA newsletter is our president, Kenneth Bronstein. The underlying conviction that leads him to insist that we lower-case the word “god” is that capitalizing the word turns it into a name, that naming an entity gives it form and reality, and god has no form or reality.

Our president does not wish to give credence or reverence to the viability of something called “god” by treating the word like a proper name. For example, the name Zeus is generally capitalized and it can lead one to believe that there is a distinct, definable, recognizable deity called Zeus, different from other deities.

So Bronstein has established the rule for our publication that the word “god” is never—with

no exceptions—ever capitalized. Not even, you may ask, at the beginning of a sentence or in the name of a book? At that question, Bronstein will whip out a copy of the Christopher Hitchens book, “*god is not Great—How Religion Poisons Everything*,” and point out to you that the word “god” is not capitalized on the cover of this book even though it begins a sentence and, moreover, is also the title of the book.

I have come to terms with our president’s insistence on a lower-case g in “god.” But I also hold that grammar and punctuation are just another man-made tool for the writer. After all, the rules of grammar have not been handed down to us from the Mount by the god of grammar (who is undoubtedly William Safire, language columnist of *the New York Times*). The rules of grammar have evolved because certain arbiters in publishing circles have arbitrarily decided, and compiled, ways to help us better understand the written word. Grammar is actually fungible, arbitrary, constantly evolving and subject to only one criterion: Does it clarify, does it aid in the understanding of the idea that the writer is trying to communicate? Poets know this, and that’s why you will find poems with no periods at the end of sentences, or no punctuation at all or one long sentence divided into lines. The concept that we at NYCA want to communicate by lower-casing “god” is that this is not a name that belongs to someone, it is just another word.

So I’m afraid you will continue to see the word “god” uncapitalized at all times in this publication. Deal with it. --- Jane Everhart, Editor

# The Scarlet Letter: A for Atheist

By Nathaniel Adams

*Nathaniel (Natty) Adams, 25, is one of our new members.*

On the night of the Christopher Hitchens/Dinesh D'Souza debate in New York City, I went into a drugstore to get a bottle of water before the event. I was proudly wearing my Richard Dawkins "Out Campaign" scarlet letter "A-for-Atheism" lapel pin. I reached the front of the checkout line and was paying for my drink when the young man behind the counter pointed at the pin.

"You like the Atlanta Braves?" he asked.

"Er... no. That's not what it stands for."

"Then what is it?"

"Well, I'm an Atheist."

He looked puzzled.

"What is *that*?" he asked.

"It means I don't believe in god."

His jaw dropped to the level of his nametag.

Clearly, this was not a viewpoint he was familiar with. The line behind me seemed to grow more irritable as they waited to pay. He searched his brain for the next question. "But you believe in the Bible, right?"

Now almost as dumbfounded as he was, I responded: "Well, no. That seems to be putting the cart before the horse."

At this point, the girl at the next register came over, damning her checkout line to commercial limbo as the irritated sighs from my fellow shoppers increased. She demanded to know what the big deal was, and after he told her, her eyes were as wide as plasma TVs. Desperately grasping for some form of reassurance that this was just a fluke or aberration, he asked the most incredible question imaginable:

"Is it *just you*?"

I reeled at the suggestion that I alone had come to this conclusion, and had perhaps smelted a scarlet letter "A" lapel pin in my basement in order to further my lonely agenda.

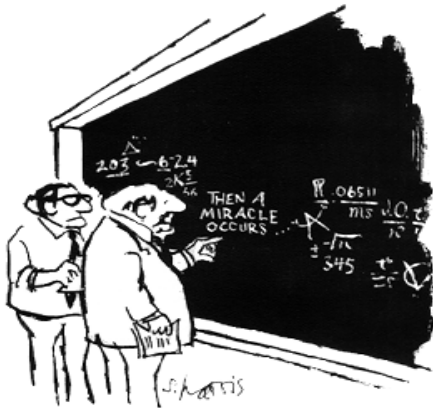
"Actually, there are quite a few of us," I responded.

His lower jaw returned to its rightful position beneath its upper colleague, and he shook his head slightly with resignation.

"Well," he offered, "good luck."

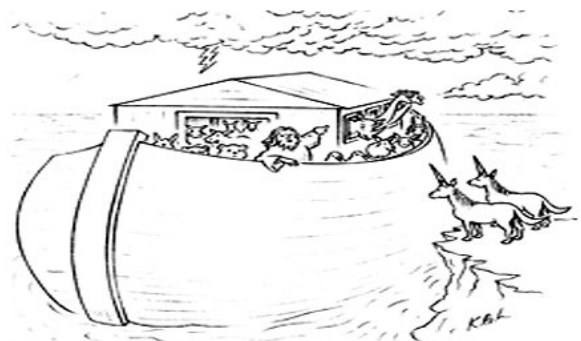
I took my change.

"At least you didn't say 'god bless,'" I said, and left the shop, content in the knowledge that I may have raised someone's consciousness to the mere possibility of Atheism. □



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Man invented god  
god did not create man



"There's another one coming right behind this one."

PROUD TO BE AN  
ATHEIST

## Letters to the Editor

### Taxation and Churches

To the Editor:

Ken, fascinating article you wrote about taxation and the churches. It made me think that someday we Atheists might be able to get a tax deduction based on our forced contribution to religion. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could deduct \$3,333 from our federal taxes based on the fact that we are Atheists and are forced to contribute to religion?

Eric Stone  
Chappaqua, N.Y.

*Ken Bronstein responds: "A great idea. I think we'd find that, suddenly, we'd have Atheists coming out of the woodwork."*

To the Editor:

Hello, all you great New York City Atheists. The town where I live, Shasta Lake, California, and the next largest town, Redding, both charge the churches for garbage pickup and water. Get New York to follow suit if you can!

Ed W. Coleman  
Shasta Lake, CA.

### Ken vs. Pope

To the Editor:

Ken, I watched you on CBS News! Though it was only a short conversation, it was exciting to see you replying back to the POPE. You are on the dot...Yes, we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Everyone has to go forward, learning from experience and modifying, including the Pope.

Sara Ismail-Muqaddam  
New Jersey

### Beltway 'New Atheists' Come Out

To the Editor:

Last weekend some members of our Beltway Atheists group attended a seminar at a very conservative Episcopal church titled *Addressing Challenges To Our Faith—Answering Today's Atheists, A Response to the Views of Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins*, by Dr. Art Lindsley. It was a good opportunity for the theists attending the seminar to see us there, in their midst, as Atheists. When we introduced ourselves to the speaker, Dr. Lindsley, as "your friendly neighborhood atheists," he responded,

"But you aren't those 'new atheists.'" We said, almost in unison, "Yes, we are the 'new atheists!'" I think he had a misconception that we would be angry, fist-shaking types out to destroy Christianity violently...

Throughout this seminar, Dr. Lindsley continually expressed his befuddlement that Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett et al didn't take time to address (and refute) all of the philosophical arguments for the existence of god. I think he would have felt much more comfortable if the recent atheist writers stuck with that "normal," ivory-tower, intellectual approach of endless, futile (thus "safe") debates about philosophical pros and cons regarding the existence of god. Instead, the New Atheists' approach cuts to the chase and essentially ridicules the whole idea of mythical sky-gods. Dr. Lindsley had a really hard time dealing with *the idea that faith would be ridiculed*, which lets us know that ridicule is a very effective approach for Atheists to take in countering irrational "faith."

Lynne Williamson  
Washington, D.C.

### Support Groups

To the Editor:

I am ready, willing and able to support anyone who wishes to deny their religious upbringing. Last year I joined a [nonatheist] group for support but found it hypocritical, without a purpose and unsupportive, and I have since stopped attending meetings. What NYCA is trying to do here with this new endeavor is similar to Dawkins' OUT campaign. This is a very good idea...

Mardi Jones - Manhattan

### Science, Not god, Saves

*Note: It is our custom to give \$100 to any NYCA member who has a Letter-to-the-Editor about Atheism published in a local newspaper. If it doesn't get published, we often reward the writer by publishing it herein. This letter was sent to the Daily News, responding to an article about a man who said that his survival after a car accident "proves that god exists."*

To the *Daily News* Editor:

In response to the story you ran in which an injured tow-truck driver said that his recovery from a devastating accident is “proof that god exists,” I would like to point out, with all due respect to a brave man who survived a horrible accident, that the thanks should go to the doctors and scientists who devote their lives to saving

people, and to our ancestors, who survived to evolve into the physically strong species that humans have become. For secularists like myself, the idea that this man’s god exposed him to horror and pain to prove to him that god exists is an erroneous and naive inference.

Eileen Regan  
Riverdale

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**UPCOMING DECEMBER EVENTS**

December 9            Sunday            12:00 P.M.  
NYCA Brunch and Book Club

Location: Kennedy’s Restaurant  
327 West 57<sup>th</sup> St. (8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Ave.) – Rear Room  
Brunch Cost: \$20 includes tax and tip

Brunch Meeting Program  
Brunch Speaker: Mel Lipman, President:  
American Humanist Association  
[www.americanhumanists.org](http://www.americanhumanists.org)

Subject: Appignani Humanist Legal Center

Despite the Humanist movement's long history of utilizing the courts to stand-up for our rights, no group has ever had more than a handful of lawyers assisting with the process. To address this, and to ensure that our constitutional rights are represented in court, the American Humanist Association (AHA) launched the Appignani Humanist Legal Center (AHLIC) in mid-May 2006 in Washington, D.C. Through amicus activity and litigation, its team of pro-bono lawyers, including Humanist luminaries such as Jim McCollum, Wendy Kaminer and Michael Newdow, provide legal assistance to defend the constitutional rights of religious and secular minorities by directly challenging clear violations of the law where it relates to First Amendment/Establishment Clause concerns.

This newsletter is published by  
New York City Atheists Inc.

Publisher – Kenneth Bronstein  
Editor – Jane Everhart

**Book Club**

After the brunch meeting, we go to the NYCA Library located on East 79<sup>th</sup> Street.

Book: Christopher Hitchens’ “*god is not Great.*”  
(First three chapters – 42 pages).

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December 18            Tuesday            7:00 P.M.

NYCA Social Gathering (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 [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)

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December 21            Friday            7:00 P.M.

NYCA Solstice Dinner / Party

Location: TBA

Cost: TBA

**NYCA SUPPORT GROUP**

Date: Jan. 7, 2008

Location: TBA

We are organizing a support group for Atheists with the purpose of providing solace, courage, friendship and comfort to Atheists who are undergoing life change. We will not depend on religion or the supernatural but instead use reason, logic and fellowship to help solve problems.

If you are interested in taking part in the support group, either as a participant or leader, call Ken Bronstein at 212-535-7425.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

DECEMBER 2007

Dec. 9*	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch and Book Club
Dec. 18**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Social Gathering (Meet-Up)
Dec. 21***	Friday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Solstice Dinner / Party
Dec. 31*****	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA New Years Party

### JANUARY 2008

Jan. 7*****	Monday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Support Group
Jan. 13*	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch and Book Club
Jan. 15**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Social Gathering (Meet-Up)
Jan. 31****	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Annual Meeting

- \* Kennedy's Restaurant – 327 West 57<sup>th</sup> St. (8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>) – Rear Room / Cost: \$20  
\*\* Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27<sup>th</sup> St. (3<sup>rd</sup>/Lex)  
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>  
\*\*\* Todai Restaurant – 6 East 32<sup>nd</sup> St. (5<sup>th</sup> Ave.) – Cost: \$37  
\*\*\*\* SLC Conference Center – 352 Seventh Ave. / 16<sup>th</sup> Floor - (29/30<sup>th</sup> St.)  
\*\*\*\*\* Call 212-330-6794 for details.

#### WEDNESDAYS

##### *THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM*

6:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 57)  
Live Streaming: [WWW.MNN.ORG](http://WWW.MNN.ORG)

#### THURSDAYS

##### *NYC ATHEISTS CABLE SHOW*

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

#### THURSDAYS

##### *ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB*

7:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 67)  
Live Streaming: [WWW.MNN.ORG](http://WWW.MNN.ORG)

NYCA

Cooper Station

P.O. Box 93

NY, NY 10276-0093

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Application





**RENEW YOUR NYCA MEMBERSHIP**

Through our programs and activities, we work to bring awareness of our principles, our vision and, above all, of our existence as atheists to all New York citizens. 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 — 2008 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 2008 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**