

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

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

The Battle to Secularize Our Society: The Next 10 Years

You've got to give the religious community credit for one thing: They never give up. They may lose some ground in advancing one of their causes in our society, but they invariably take another tack, approach the task from a different angle and hang in there for another 30-40 years.

Their fight against abortion has taken at least that long, and though the religionists may have lost that battle on some counts, they have managed to roll back the decision in small increments, such as winning on late-term abortions.

Or how about Creationism? Another example of the tenacity of religionists is their forceful attempt to impose the teaching of creationism in public schools in competition with evolution. They may have lost some ground with the celebrated precedent-setting Dover case, in which a conservative Republican judge ruled against the teaching of creationism in public schools, but the religionists quickly diverted to another strategy: inserting their religious point of view into history classes and revising history textbooks to emphasize the so-called positive impacts of religion on history.

Inflicting Religion on Us

The patience of religionists in pursuing their cause—which is inserting religion into every important facet of American life—is legendary, and their use of the legal system and politics for their purposes is skillful. In fighting abortion, they have used zoning laws to remove abortion clinics from some communities; they have imposed health statutes on abortion clinics that are virtually impossible to comply with, such as requiring 10 nurses for every doctor. When worse comes to worse, they are out there in front of the clinic, carrying signs that accuse the abortion seeker of fetus murder.

We cannot ever rest in the knowledge that we have won a case here and there. The believers are out there, looking for a way to inflict religion on us in one way or another. They remind me a little of gophers on a golf course: you fill up one gopher hole, only to find that they have popped up in another one. Our eight-year struggle under the dim-witted dynasty of George W. Bush and his cabal, who launched Faith-Based Initiatives and are pushing school vouchers, will not end so easily, especially since we have some 20 years ahead of us of conservative decisions by a Bush-packed Supreme Court.

Ahead: A Decade of Struggle

Faith-based initiatives will be especially hard to roll back because this religionist administration has, in effect, set up a political machine. Put simply, when the current government gives money to churches in the form of faith-based initiatives, they get church members to vote for them. Not quite like Tammany Hall, but perhaps it's even more effective; Tammany could never say, as Bush does, that god is on its side.

**ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF**

But we can't give up. We can't let ignorance, false ideas and wrongful beliefs creep into our society just because we weren't paying attention. I see ahead of us at least 10 years of battling the inroads that Bush's E-Z pass to religionists have bequeathed to us. We have our work cut out for us, and the strategies I suggest below are just a beginning:

- (1) **Lobbying.** We need to be as skillful as the religionists are at using our laws to achieve our goals. That means lobbying our representatives on the local, state and federal levels. We need to let our lawmakers know that we are watching them and holding them accountable for any infringement of the Bill of Rights in matters of religion.
- (2) **Become a voting bloc.** Never mind the adage that it's "like herding cats" to get atheists to act in concert. We've got to get politically hip and let candidates know that we are a powerful voting population.
- (3) **Become candidates and support our candidates.** Atheists are disproportionately well educated, scientific, practical-minded and articulate. Perfect for a candidate for political office! Come out from behind the water cooler, Atheists, and get into the political fray.
- (4) **Agitate for equal media coverage.** The religionists kvetched for 30 years, complaining that they didn't get equal media attention, using their buying power to put an arm lock on advertisers. The result: Now they carry more media weight than we could dream of. We Atheists have yet to make the media aware that we exist.
- (5) **Establish facilities and rites.** Let's face it, churches provide life-passage markers that often have little to do with religion. Weddings, funerals, baptisms—someone's got to do them. Something in us humans craves notice at points in our lives. We need to provide a place and pageantry worthy of these functions. A dedication of our offspring to science, say, instead of to a god or a religion.

I think it's going to take us a good 10 years to accomplish what we need to in order to stave off the religionists and establish both credibility and acceptability for Atheists. Join us: It may be the most meaningful battle of your life!

Letters-to-Editor

The Pope Picket

Dear Editor,

Great Pope article, Jane. [*"The Strange, Exhilarating Experience of Picketing the Pope,"* May 2008] As for the girl with god inside her, here are a few comebacks: How do you know it's god? What does he do in there all day? How do you know which god it is? Are Jesus and the Holy Ghost in there too? If the god inside you told you to run in front of a car, would you do it?

--Linda LaScola – Washington D.C.

Dear Editor,

You did right in picketing the Pope. He of all people, needs to know that there are sane and thoughtful atheists who do not buy into his or anyone else's mythology.

As for the hate spewed by those who would like to see us "burn in hell," my response would have to be: you'll have to get there first. But their "hell" is also a myth; it can frighten only those who believe in it.

--Joyce Harrington - Manhattan

Below, a copy of an email letter sent to Bill O'Reilly at Fox News by our master letter writer, Dennis Middlebrooks:

Hey Bill,
You attack Bill Maher and secularists for criticizing the Pope, but you have nothing to say when the Pope claims that secularists like myself are either mentally ill or morally bankrupt and are responsible for most of the evil in the world. I guess you find slander against the non-religious to be an example of compassion and tolerance. You practice a shameful double standard.

--Dennis Middlebrooks - Brooklyn

<p style="text-align: center;">man invented god</p> <p style="text-align: center;">god did not create man</p>

Letters-to-Editor

The Minneapolis Convention

Dear Editor,

During the American Atheists (AA) convention in Minneapolis on March 21-23, Dennis Prager, California radio talk show host, debated AA's Board Member Frank Zindler (now temporary AA president) on the topic, "Resolved: The Jewish god Exists," which you described in your article, "The Message from Minneapolis: Atheism is Sweeping the Country" [April 2008 issue].

Frank Zindler did a superlative job of undermining the flimsy rationale for the existence of the Jewish god. I would like to offer a few more nails in its coffin.

Prager defined his god as nonphysical—beyond this world. If completely nonphysical, how then did this god create, interact with and dominate the physical universe?

Prager said that although religion cannot explain evil, atheism cannot explain the rest of the world. But it can. It's called science and it explains great portions of the extant universe.

Prager said, so what if his god cannot be defined or measured, neither can happiness, love or pornography. Happiness and love, however, can be, and are, being measured and quantified just like any other aspect of conscious emotion, by self report correlated with behavior, autonomic and hormonal variables. The last time I looked, the dictionary defined pornography as anything that is created explicitly to cause sexual excitement or arousal.

Prager says happiness, according to science, is simply the amount of serotonin in the brain. This reveals a profound naiveté about neuroscience. The brain circuits that underlie emotion utilize serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine plus many more neurotransmitters, are distributed throughout diverse nuclei in the brain, are highly complex and have been evolving for hundreds of millions of years.

--Eric Stone
Chappaqua

Editor's note: NYCA member Dr. Eric Stone is a research scientist at New York University School of Medicine.

Atheist Blood Donation On National 'Day of Prayer'

I just need to say that while I did help lead a National Day of Prayer event today, I am enormously encouraged and prodded by your group's alternative/protest event idea. [*'What Are You Doing on the' National Day of Prayer?' We Have a Better Idea: Donate Blood!*—NYCA Press Release, April 27, 2008]

While we obviously have different base world-views, I have to say that the blood-donation thing is a wonderful idea and I will pledge that in the next week I will also donate blood. You have helped remind me that action is a vital part of being a caring human (of faith or not). Thanks.

--Jason Whelpley
Campus Crusade for Christ
Washington DC Metro Team
Mid-Atlantic Technology & Information Specialist

ATHEISM IS THE RIGHT STUFF

ATHEISM: A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION

STEM CELL RESEARCH IS PRO-LIFE

Editor's Q and A



Jane Everhart

What's The Difference Between a Meetup and a Meeting?

Dear Editor,

I'm sensing that there are differences between an Atheist Meetup and an Atheist meeting, but I'm not sure what. How do I distinguish between the two? Or should I?

--Althea from Astoria

Dear Althea,

There are indeed differences between a Meetup and a meeting, though the two are often confused. If you are like me, you have, until recently, associated the word "meetup" with two people getting together; you "meet up" with someone. Whereas a "meeting" could involve any number of people getting together for a purpose. But all that has changed in the past few years with the advent of a new kind of "Meetup" on the Internet.

About five years ago, a company call Meetup Inc. hit the Internet. Its concept was so simple, you wonder why no one had ever thought of it before: It is basically a nationwide database or network of self-organized clubs and groups. Anyone can start an interest group on the Meetup site, pay a small fee to Meetup Inc., and have their meeting posted on the Meetup site. The Meetup organization will publicize it and make it easy for like-minded people to find you.

What a wonderful idea. A central data bank listing thousands of interest groups, help in finding your interest group, and email reminders of meetings--all for a small monthly fee paid by the Meetup organizer. Though that's a marvelously global idea, somehow the Meetups soon became associated with Singles, meeting persons of the opposite sex and matchmaking. Meetup Inc. avows that this is not quite accurate, but let's face it, that's what the Meetup concept was initially known for.

The Meetup company claims that if you access the Meetup.com site, you will find Meetups for chess players, pug owners and Italian food lovers among hordes of other interest groups. Sure, but there is also that vague, unspoken implication hanging in the air and never really denied, that you will meet *single* chess players, pug owners and Italian food lovers of the opposite sex. And why not, some say: It's faster, cheaper, less time consuming and probably gives a truer representation of a person than an online dating service.

Not Just for Singles

"Some people have the general misunderstanding that Meetup.com is a place for singles to meet up," says Greg Benson, a New York City Atheists member who has led a couple of NYCA Meetups. "It has nothing to do with atheism, but it is a misunderstanding I have come across at a variety of Meetups."

Benson points out that the Meetup.com company claims it helps people do many diversified things such as:

- Find others in their area who share their interests
- Learn, teach and share things
- Make friends and have fun
- Rise up, stand up, unite and make a difference
- Be a part of something bigger—both locally and globally.

When NYCA decided to start our own monthly Meetup several years ago, we took these Meetup.Com goals to heart. We wanted to introduce newcomers to what the atheist movement is about, what NYCA is about, our goals and our actions, and hopefully lead them to understand the possible ongoing role of Atheism in their lives.

Unfortunately, it didn't work out that way. Our early main Meetup leader was convinced that "socialization" was the most important goal of the Meetup. NYCA has no objection to socialization, but we do not feel that this is our main goal. In fact, we

Proud To Be An Atheist

have found it did not really work for us: Newcomers, mostly young, would come once, check out who else was there, and never come back again. They may as well have been “socializing” with pug owners or Italian food lovers.

Introduction to Atheism

NYCA’s president Ken Bronstein discussed with our Meetup leader the possibility of changing the emphasis in the Meetups from socialization to discussion. Bronstein emphasized that while we are not opposed to those who wish to focus on drinking and partying with atheists, that is not our goal nor our preferred method of introducing people to Atheist activities.

Our philosophy about Meetups, and the format that our current Meetup leaders have agreed to: make attendees feel comfortable and welcomed, give an introduction to what we do and bring all into an incisive, in-depth and animated discussion about an Atheist event or an issue that is important to Atheists.

NYC Atheists Blog

<http://nyc-atheists.org/blog/>

We allow for plenty of time for socializing, both before after the discussion.

The Better Way

Ironically, Ken Bronstein’s goal of a deeper, more serious Meetup is probably also a better way for singles to meet and get to know one another. Drinking on a stool in a darkened bar beside someone does not really allow you to get to know somebody. But in an animated, in-depth discussion, a person’s ideas, personality and character are revealed. So you can focus, during the social period, on getting to know those who interested you the most.

Come visit us on the third Tuesday of each month at our Meetup. You don’t have to be a newcomer—you just have to like to get involved, discuss what’s going on, meet new and old friends and find out what’s going on in the exciting, volatile world of Atheism. Then join us at other times of the month for our regular meetings that include speakers, debates and actions such as the Pope Picket. □

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

Another Standing Room Only Monthly Meeting
May 29, 2008

Prof. Peter Brancazio (Featured speaker)
Dennis Horvitz (Host)- May 29, 2008 Monthly Meeting

Henny Youngman (Comic)

I once wanted to become an Atheist but I gave up . . they have no holidays.

UPCOMING JUNE EVENTS

June 7, 14, 21, 28, 2008 (Saturday) 10AM-6PM
NYC Atheists Street Tabling

WHERE: Columbus Circle
Front of Time Warner Building-Broadway (59/60)

Shift one: 10:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

Shift two: 1:00 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.

Great time to meet the public - Wonderful experience

June 8, 2008 (Sunday) 12:00 PM
NYCA Brunch, Speaker, Book Club, Library

WHERE: Kennedy's Restaurant
327 West 57th St. (8th/9th Ave.)
COST: \$20 (includes brunch, one drink, tax, tip)

Speaker: John A. Aretakis, JD
Litigation Attorney: Primary field of specialty,
Clergy sexual abuse.

Subject: "Sex Abuse Lawyer Who Sued Catholic Church Tells All"

Renowned Attorney John Aretakis has taken on the Catholic Church in more than 300 clergy sexual abuse cases. In California, he recently won a \$500 million settlement for victims of sexual abuse by catholic priests. He will describe, and discuss, the tactics used by the Catholic Church to hide pedophiles, bully parents, intimidate litigants -- and why this has turned him into an Atheist.

Book Club / Library

After brunch, we move to the NYCA Library located on East 79th Street.

We continue discussing Christopher Hitchens' *god is not Great*. Chapter 7: Revelation: The Nightmare of the "Old" Testament, and Chapter 8: The "New Testament Exceeds the Evil of the Old One."

Need have not read the assignment to participate.

June 17, 2008 (Tuesday) 7:00 PM
NYC Atheists Meetup

Location: Stone Creek Bar and Lounge
140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

If you are into lively discussions, interesting people, provocative ideas, challenging conversation; if you like people who make you think and let you talk, if you'd like to get to know your fellow atheists better,

what they're really like with no pretensions, no censorship, no affectations, this is the place for you. See page 4 for article about the Meetup concept.

Cost: Free (cash food and bar)
Register: <http://atheists.meetup.com>

June 26, 2008 (Thursday) 6:30 PM
NYCA MONTHLY MEETING

WHERE: SLC Conference Center
352 Seventh Ave. (29th & 30th St.) 16th Floor
COST: We would appreciate a \$5 contribution toward room rental cost.

Speaker: Jason Trophy – President (MAAF)
Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers
Subject: "There ARE Atheists in Foxholes!"

Throughout the world and throughout history, atheist and freethinker military service members have defended their country with distinction. Drawing on rational, humanistic values, they face the dangers of combat without fear of punishment or hope of reward after death. They fight for their values, their families, and their fellows in order to serve their country. MAAF is dedicated to providing a supportive community for these Atheists. As they move from base to base, from port to port, and from ship to ship, MAAF is there to provide like-minded friends and moral support. Secular service members need never feel they are alone in doubting religious doctrines.

Discrimination Against Atheists

Throughout society, there is a perception that it's OK to discriminate against those who do not hold religious beliefs. Such discrimination is common because of the prevalence of religion and because the expression of religious doubt is suppressed in popular culture.

MAAF provides visibility for nontheistic service members. It provides them with a public face and voice which clearly says "we exist; we serve; and, yes, we are in foxholes."

MAAF partners with existing secular organizations to develop a nontheist community. Rather than set up individual chapters, MAAF identifies organizations that welcome atheist and freethinker military members.

The “MAAF Network” ensures that as service members move, they can always participate in the local secular community. MAAF coordinates with secular organizations to ensure a strong national presence.

MAAF has represented nontheist service members in national media such as Newsweek and the Colbert Report. MAAF educates military leaders about the nontheistic worldview, ensuring that MAAF members have the support of their chain of command without fear of discrimination because of their lack of religious belief. ☐

**DEMAND
A
NO SMOKING
NO BIBLE
HOTEL ROOM**

**July 4 Friday 10:15 A.M.
NYCA BARBEQUE/FIREWORKS**

**Meeting Location: Grand Central Station
Main Waiting room – Round Info Kiosk
Take the Metro North train to Chappaqua.
Round Trip Fare: \$ 15.00 / Seniors \$ 10.00.**

**Eric and Elaine Stone will be our hosts in their charming country home.
Individuals driving, please call Ken Bronstein
(212-535-7425) for directions.
Cost: \$10 donation**

**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.
8:15 P.M., we will meet at the northeast corner of 3rd Ave. / 34th Street. Then we walk to the special section where we traditionally view the fireworks display along the East River. ☐**



**Prof. Daniel Dennett, one of the famous Four Horsemen,
visits the NYC Atheists Street Tabling – May 31, 2008**

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

JUNE 2008

June 2*	Mon.	7:00 PM	NYCA Lifestyle Discussion Group
June 7**	Sat.	10AM-6PM	NYCA Street Tabling
June 8***	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
June 14**	Sat.	10AM-6PM	NYCA Street Tabling
June 17****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meetup and Discussion
June 21 **	Sat.	10AM-6PM	NYCA Street Tabling
June 26*****	Thu.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting
June 28 **	Sat.	10AM-6PM	NYCA Street Tabling

JULY 2008

July 4*	Fri.	10:15 AM	NYCA Barbeque/Fireworks
July 7*	Mon.	7:00 PM	NYCA Lifestyle Discussion Group
July 12**	Sat. .	10AM-6PM	NYCA Street Tabling
July 13***	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
July 15****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
July 19**	Sat. .	10AM-6PM	NYCA Street Tabling
July 26**	Sat. .	10AM-6PM	NYCA Street Tabling
July 31*****	Thu.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

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* **Location: Call Ken Bronstein 212-535-7425**
 ** **Columbus Circle – Front of Time Warner Building – Broadway (59/60)**
 *** **Kennedy’s Restaurant – 327 West 57th St. (8th/9th) – Rear Room**
 **** **Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)**
 ***** **SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)**

WEDNESDAYS

THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM
 6:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 57)
 Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

THURSDAYS

NYC ATHEISTS CABLE SHOW
 7:00 PM (Manhattan Cable # 67)
 Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

THURSDAYS

ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB
 7:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 67)
 Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

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