



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

DEAR PRESIDENT OBAMA:

STOP RELIGIOUS POLLUTION OF GOVERNMENT!

Mr. President, we know you say you are a man of faith, and we atheists cut you a little slack on that one. But we also know you are a man of great courage and fairness. We think you know, deep in your heart, that religion and government shouldn't be bedfellows in this nation. You know that our First Amendment abominates any collusion between religion and our government. But most of all you know that any "special interests"—as Sarah Palin called those people and corporations who use the government for their own profit—have no right to manipulate our government for their own aggrandizement and glory. And those special interests, Mr. President, include the most pervasive and most blatant "special interest" of all: religion.

You must realize, Mr. President, that there are huge numbers of voters in this country who do not believe, for example, that churches know the best way to funnel help—financial and otherwise—to our impoverished, our unemployed, our sick and desperate citizens. Help shouldn't depend on contact with a religious institution, as it does with George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives.

Conservative Overload

You must also know that vast hordes of American citizens think that packing the entire court system with ultraconservative judges, from the state level to the Supreme court, gives unfair advantage to the forces of reaction and is something that needs to end.

You must understand, too, that we hold that the signs and symbols of religion that decorate our government buildings and properties, our schools, our money, our pledge of allegiance and our patriotic songs, are offensive to the eyes and ears of those of us who believe that we are governed by representatives, not gods.

In short, Mr. President, we want the churches' hands off our medical research, our sex education, our schools, our educational curriculums, our courts, our tax money, our symbols, our holidays. With all due respect, here are the priorities I would suggest for your governmental reforms:

1) First and foremost, Mr. President, the national court system needs to be released from the clutches of the ultraconservative judiciary put in place by your predecessor, George W. Bush. There are 94 district courts and more importantly, 12 regional courts, and some one-third of these judges have been appointed by Bush during his eight-year tenure. No new forward-looking legislation can inch its way to the Supreme Court if our preliminary judiciary system is in bondage to reactionary judges who can halt its passage cold. Besides, the Supreme Court simply doesn't handle that many cases. We need progressive judges at all levels of the federal court system because in many cases, it's our last court of appeal.

2) The second most important task you have, Mr. President, is to liberate our government from its complicity with Faith-Based Initiatives. This is the use of our government's money—our money, actually—funneled through various government agencies into religious institutions to be used for charitable and educational purposes like child care or welfare.

Why some addled-brained bureaucrats in the Bush administration thought that churches and religious people would be better equipped to administer welfare than qualified social workers, I don't know. If you've read any of George Bernard Shaw's plays, or even Frank McCourt's vivid memoir about receiving Catholic church-given charity, "Angela's Ashes," you realize that when a religious institution doles out charity, it is tinged

with an indebtedness to the Great Provider above, and we don't mean George W. Bush. It may be unspoken, but there it is, surrounding the receiver of the largess by the very ambience where the charity is administered. Will the recipient secretly feel that he won't get his new winter coat if he doesn't genuflect to the Virgin Mary? Mr. Obama, stop these coercive, belittling, Faith-Based Initiatives from forcing our poor to be grateful to the heavens for what has really come from us taxpayers.

3) Third, Mr. President, deliver us from the constant barrage of "God Bless America," "One Nation Under god" and other such advertising slogans and jingles that pollute the eyes and ears of our citizens. These slogans and jingles are the advertising hype of religion that penetrates our children's minds and subtly conditions them to connect god and country. We say, enough! We atheists do not believe that god blesses America or any other country, nor do we believe that we are one nation under anything but the sky. It is incumbent upon you, Mr. Obama, to remove these subtle, unwanted encroachments into our children's minds.

4) Fourth, you must rewrite, edit and update the Presidential Regulations, Mr. Obama. And since there are 30,000 pages of them, or about 10 moderately-sized books, covering everything from Federal Drug Regulations to rules for sex education that are based on abstinence, it's going to be a monumental task for your administration. We ask that your administration look carefully at all regulations to make sure that they are not negative for us nonbelievers.

5) Last but not least, we feel you have a responsibility, Mr. President, to keep religion out of our schools. We want to make sure that our public schools teach real science in science classes, not some religious tomfoolery that labels the world 6,000 years old and claims that god created the world in seven days. Nor do we want our children's history books to say that the U.S. was founded as a Christian nation (it wasn't) or that god has guided us through our glorious history. Those are out-and-out lies.

None of these reforms will be easy, Mr. President. And the forces of reaction will fight you tooth and nail all the way. But you are in the presidential seat, Mr. Obama, and it is incumbent on you to consider all your constituents—particularly those of us that have been overlooked or pushed aside under previous administrations: the poor, the unschooled, the vulnerable, the reformers, and of course, *us*, your vast constituency of nonbelievers.

Your proud constituent,
Kenneth Bronstein.

ATHEISM:

A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION

DECEMBER 21, 2008 (SUNDAY) 12:00 PM NYCA SOLSTICE PARTY

SPEAKER: MARGOT ADLER



SUBJECT: WICCA / NEOPAGANISM

Adler is the author of *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. The book is considered a watershed in American Neopagan circles, as it provides the first comprehensive look at modern nature-based religions in the US. Her second book, *Heretic's Heart: A Journey Through Spirit and Revolution*, was published in 1997. Adler is a Wiccan priestess of the Gardnerian Wiccan tradition. Ms. Adler is also a reporter for NPR Radio located in New York City and she is a regular voice on NPR's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*.

LOCATION: LES SANS CULOTTES

1085 SECOND AVE. / 57TH

COST: \$35 incl. brunch, tax, tip. (Appetizer: Sausages, Basket of Vegetables, Chef Pate'),
(Entrée Choose: Fish, Seafood, Meat. Chicken, Salad, Dessert, House Wine or Soda).

Editor's Q & A

So, How Should Atheists Conduct Themselves In a Still Very Religious Society?



By Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

It seems to me that we atheists need some courtesy rules and protocols on how to handle ourselves with grace in a society in which we are a minority. True, our numbers have gone up to about 15 percent of the population, making us a larger minority than Jews, Blacks, or Hispanics, but we still have to face, mingle with and work among a population that is 85 percent religious and by whom we are often thought of as immoral, unscrupulous, mysterious and lawless. I think we need an atheist Emily Post or Amy Vanderbilt to write a courtesy manual on how to cope in a world that doesn't like us or agree with us. In short, how do we conduct ourselves in the very religious society we live in?

--Arlene from Astoria

Dear Arlene,

I would say offhand that we must conduct ourselves among religious people the way porcupines make love: Very carefully. Seriously, I don't think it is possible at this point for anyone to be the Emily Post or Amy Vanderbilt of atheist manners because it is still a work in progress. Along with most of my Atheist friends, I am still learning how to talk with, respond to or work with religious people. We often make mistakes in dealing with them, but we learn from our mistakes. All I can do at this point is pinpoint some of the things we've learned so far:

I. DON'T TRY TO REASON RELIGIONISTS OUT OF THEIR FAITH. Faith is not based on reason or logic, so no amount of reasoning will have any impact on faithheads. Some of us discovered this in our early Street Tabling days, when we still thought we could argue logically with religionists. Our

fearless leader, Ken Bronstein, would sometimes ask a faithhead at tabling, "How old is the world?" and if they answered "6,000 years," as they often did since it is the church's estimate, Bronstein would take pains to present scientific evidence that placed the earth's age as some 4.5 billion years. But it fell on deaf ears because, of course, faithheads are not interested in scientific evidence. The word "faith" itself, if you look it up in Webster's, means "unquestioning belief."

We have grown past that phase of our interaction with religionists. Bronstein now tells NYCA members who do Street Tabling, "We are beyond that. We no longer argue with religionists about their beliefs. That dialogue is over, that battle is won. Or purpose now is to meet atheists or would-be atheists and bring them into the fold, to popularize the atheist lifestyle and to prevent faithheads from ramming religion down our throats." Or to quote an adage I tell my friends and colleagues: Don't try to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and annoys the pig.

2. DON'T MIX UP CAUSES. We are, pure and simple, an atheist group that wants to advance the atheist cause. We are not a political group, a do-good-works group or a group to stop global warming. That is a hard concept for some people to understand because there is sometimes some overlap and there are some gray areas. I can tell you of one incident in which I think I failed to follow this precept. It was at an Atheist Meetup about a year ago. One of the male leaders "shushed" me when I tried to speak up. I was furious, I felt patronized and diminished. It seemed to me that it was not the first time this had happened and it was always to a woman. I strode out of the room in protest and went took a seat in the adjoining bar.

After a while, one of the atheists came out and persuaded me to come back. Back in the Meetup, I tried to explain to the group that I felt this was a feminist issue and that no guy would accept this kind of childish treatment. My explanation fell on deaf ears. Some glances were exchanged, some eyes rolled. It was the wrong issue, in the wrong place.

I totally forgot about the incident. After all, I had in the past engaged in feminist protests much more forceful than walking out of a meetup: I had once even picketed the New York Times with old-time feminists Flo Kennedy and Kate Millett. Walking out of a meetup was pretty small potatoes for me, as far as protests go. But recently, a man who had been present at my inconsequential walkout protest reminded me about it. He'd been there too, and he said he thought I had been petulant and spoiled. I don't think he was right. But it was clear to me that I hadn't gotten my message across, probably because it was totally the wrong issue for that group.

Moral: Do not mix causes. When you're picketing the Pope, you don't want to suddenly hoist a placard opposing drunk drivers; it confuses observers and dilutes your efforts for the atheist cause.

3. DON'T HIDE THE FACT THAT YOU ARE AN ATHEIST. This is hard because sometimes it does not appear to be in your immediate best interests to admit that you are a nonbeliever. But I've learned from activist gay people that once you come "out," no one can out you, no one can "blackmail" you and people will eventually accept you. The gay community has been active for years in its efforts to put homosexuality on a normal footing—and the operative word here is "community." Until atheists become a strong community dedicated to defending our rights through legal action, organization, public protests and public relations, each atheist, as each gay person once did, has to fight his or her lonely battle for acceptance.

In numbers there is strength. Every person who comes out and says it's okay to be an atheist is another nail in that platform. Most of all, we must influence people who work in elected leadership positions in government to come out as the atheists we know they are. When Congressman Barney Frank admitted that he is gay, everybody expected his career to collapse. It didn't. He's still there, as are Rosie O'Donnell and Ellen Degeneris. People have more to worry about than your spiritual beliefs or lack thereof. So be brave and when the right occasion occurs, let drop that you are a nonbeliever. You'll be glad you did. And so will we. ☐

**PROUD TO BE
AN ATHEIST**

**NO GOD?
NO PROBLEM!**

NYC Atheists Blog
<http://nyc-atheists.org/blog/>

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

**ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF**

NYCA Prez Speaks Out about Public ‘Prayer Booth’ ...And It Is Hauled Away



NYCA’s president Kenneth Bronstein was walking in his neighborhood on Manhattan’s Upper East Side one day before Thanksgiving when he spied it: a contraption that looked like a telephone booth but was identified as a “public prayer booth.” People in the media had noticed it too, including National Public Radio’s reporter Margot Adler. Bronstein took this opportunity to inform the media and the public that this “prayer booth,” placed on Second Avenue near 60th Street by the conceptual artist Dylan Mortimer, was an egregious example of religion encroaching on public property, thus violating the First Amendment precepts of separation of church and state. Fox News didn’t see it that way in their article on the incident, from which we excerpt below:

 FOXNEWS.COM: Tuesday, November 25, 2008 -- New York City officials this fall launched an art project called "Public Prayer Booth," which features a modified phone booth rigged up with a flip-down kneeler. Passers-by, if they're in the mood, can bend to their (padded) knee and say a prayer — a private moment in a very public atmosphere.

To cover the story, Nation Public Radio (NPR) sent reporter Margot Adler, a Wiccan priestess and author of two books on paganism [to cover the event]. Lo and behold, she happened upon the president of the New York City Atheists Ken Bronstein, an outspoken opponent of public religious displays.

"I just happened to be walking by [when I noticed it...]" Bronstein told Adler. Then he denounced the display of what he called a "supernatural situation" on city property. Bronstein said that it was inappropriate for the public sphere and had to go. "You know, if they want to put it on private property, that's where it should go — but not in public space," said Bronstein.

Critics are calling the NPR radio report a biased assault on religion — one that's being supported in part with

public funds. "There are serious efforts under way right now to erase religious expression from the public square," said Father Jonathan Morris, a Catholic priest and FOX News contributor. "I don't understand why these groups would be so fascinated with taking this [religious expression] away..."

Adler said traffic was sparse by the booth and she had trouble finding someone who took it seriously enough to pray there, but she interviewed a woman named Francesca Richardson who lives on disability payments and stopped to say a prayer. Adler compared her to Avery Williams, 7, who said grace for her ailing pets. "Well, my gerbil died so we prayed for him, and my dog had a very bad leg so we prayed for that too," said Williams.

The public flare-up is just what Dylan Mortimer — the 29-year-old artist who created the installation — was hoping to stir up with his work. Religion is "just one of those topics you don't bring up at the dinner table," he said. "My hope and my dream would be that there will be a respectful way to engage in dialogue..."

There was a bit more to the Fox News article but we'll spare you their defense of religion's right to tie up our public sidewalks with places to worship. "Fox News just doesn't 'get it,' says Bronstein. "They don't understand separation of church-and-state concepts. They think we want to restrict religion's right to free speech. They don't seem to understand that setting up a prayer booth on public property is tantamount to taxpayers supporting religion because our tax money pays for the upkeep and repair of that public sidewalk. They don't seem to fathom that Jewish, Muslim and Secular taxpayers do not wish to have their tax money pay for a place of worship for Christians." As we go to press, the prayer booth has been removed from the Upper East Side sidewalk. Once more, NYCA was on the spot with a quick, effective protest to protect the interests of nonbelievers. □

God Doesn't Say 'You're Welcome'



By Ron Widelec

We have all heard it a million times. It's become so common, we almost don't even recognize it for what it is: "Thank god!" I hear someone say this several times a day. The uses of this expression fall into two categories. One type is when something happens by chance; a good roll of the dice, the lucky card you needed in a poker hand, or a falling tree that just missed your house. The other type is when something happens because of human action: The school bell rings just as the teacher tries to ask you a question to which you don't know the answer, or the seemingly miraculous inch of space left as your screeching tires bring your car to a halt the instant before causing an accident. The heart races, the adrenalin pumps, the mind shuts down, and we exclaim "Thank god!"

In the first category the human urge to say thank god is quite understandable. You got lucky. Thanks are in order, but towards whom/what shall we direct our gratitude? Fate? Karma? Destiny? Zeus? The Abrahamic god seems as likely a target as any. Obviously, it is pure mathematical probability that you got lucky. Someone had to. That lucky card had to hit someone at some time. Today, it landed on you. "Thank Probability" doesn't have the same ring. Saying thank god in this situation, while pointless, is at least understandable.

Thank Mankind

In the second category, thanking god is nothing short of insulting. The bell rang when it did because it is programmed to do so, no different from your alarm clock. But when that goes off, I find myself more often cursing rather than thanking. When your car stopped just in time to prevent an accident, why not thank the inventor of the anti-lock braking system? Why not thank your own senses for noticing the potential problem and your reflexes for reacting quickly enough to avoid the danger. For some reason, many people have serious difficulty giving credit to man for the amazing things we do and create, instead seeking the miraculous and aiming our appreciation into the ether.

At its most extreme and inane is thanking god for something explicitly invented by human beings. You celebrate getting that piece of corn out of your teeth, only to hear someone say "that's why god invented floss." Granted, very few know that floss was invented

by a dentist named Levi Parmly (I just looked it up). Clearly, no one actually thinks god created the first floss, no matter how fervently they believe in him. Even the most fanatical would agree (I hope) that if there is a god, he is a bit too busy to divinely inspire dental floss (and if he did, why wait until 1815 to save us from those annoying food particles?).

No Help from Supernatural

This topic may seem like an absurd waste of time, but it is actually very relevant. People thank god for the same reason humans invented god in the first place. Some of us, apparently, have great difficulty accepting that we, as a species, are highly intelligent, creative, inventive, and adaptive. Some of us simply cannot accept the fact that all that we have accomplished was actually accomplished by us without the help of the supernatural. These people cannot fathom the complexity and exceptional capacity of the human species any more than they can understand the simplicity and unexceptional nature of our ancestral descent from the lowliest bacteria billions of years ago. *A Raisin in the Sun's* Beneatha said it well:

"It's just that I get tired of [god] getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort...there is only man and it is he who makes miracles!"

This same weakness has also led to the absurd hypothesizing of those who claim aliens came here and taught humans how to farm or that the mysterious civilization of Atlantis must have taught us lowly minded humans how to build the pyramids, explaining the use of pyramids in several different societies around the world before the Columbian Exchange.

Man Alone Makes 'Miracles'

Stories like this have been presented on TV on shows on the History Channel, Discovery, and other 'educational' programming. They have also become quite popular in Hollywood in recent years. Blockbuster movies like *Stargate*, *Aliens v. Predators*, *Transformers*, and most recently the newest Indiana Jones movie, all credit some major part of human achievement to either alien visitors, super-powerful robots, or inter-dimensional travelers. Obviously, these are just movies for entertainment

purposes, but they point to the same innate weakness in human thinking: the desire to give credit to the supernatural rather than the natural and the super-human rather than the human.

It is about time we grow up from this intellectual infancy and finally get through the mental puberty stage that began during the Enlightenment. As Robert Ingersoll once said, the blessings of our modern age “were not found in cathedrals or behind altars—neither were they searched for with holy candles. They were not

discovered by the closed eyes of prayer, nor did they come in answer to superstitious supplications. They are the children of freedom, the gifts of reason, observation and experience—and for them all, man is indebted to man.” Amen. Though if he were alive today, Ingersoll would have to add to his list of entities we should not thank: extra terrestrial cultural diffusion, inter-dimensional visitations and Atlantian inspiration. Anyway, none of them ever say “You’re welcome.” □

Ron Widelec is a teacher who lives on Long Island.

UPCOMING DECEMBER EVENTS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

DECEMBER 14, 2008 (Sunday) 12:00 PM
NYCA Brunch, Speaker, Book Club

WHERE: Kennedy’s Restaurant
 327 W57 St. (8/9th) – Backroom

COST: \$20 (includes Brunch, one drink, tax, tip)

SPEAKER: Brian McCartin
 Director of the Thomas Paine Museum in New Rochelle, New York.

SUBJECT: Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine, January 29, 1737 – June 8, 1809, was an English pamphleteer, revolutionary, radical, inventor, and intellectual. He lived and worked in Britain until age 37, when he emigrated to the British American colonies, just in time to participate in the American Revolution. His principal contribution was the powerful, widely-read pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), advocating colonial America's independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain, and *The American Crisis* (1776–1783), a pro-revolutionary pamphlet series.

Later, he greatly influenced the French Revolution. He wrote *The Rights of Man* (1791), a guide to Enlightenment ideas. Despite not speaking French, he was elected to the French National Convention in 1792.

He became notorious because of *The Age of Reason* (1793–94), which he wrote as an assault on

organized "revealed" religion combining a compilation of inconsistencies he found in the Bible with his own advocacy of Deism.

In France, he also wrote the pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1795), discussing the origins of property, and introduced the concept of a guaranteed minimum income.

He remained in France during the early Napoleonic era, but condemned Napoleon's dictatorship, calling him "the completest charlatan that ever existed". In 1802, at President Thomas Jefferson's invitation, he returned to America.

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 12: "A Coda: How Religions End."

Need not have read the assignment to participate.

DEC. 23, 2008 (Tuesday) 7:00 PM
NYCA Meetup / Solstice Celebration

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

Celebrate the Solstice – First Drink is free!

Cost: Free (cash food and bar)

Register: <http://atheists.meetup.com>

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

DECEMBER 2008

Dec. 1*	Mon.	7:00 PM	NYCA Atheists Lifestyle Discussion Group
Dec. 14**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
Dec. 21*****	Sun.	1:00 PM	NYCA Solstice Party
Dec. 23****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up / Solstice Celebration

JANUARY 2009

Jan. 11***	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
Jan. 20****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
Jan. 29*****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Annual Meeting

* **Location: Call Ken Bronstein 212-535-7425**

** **Kennedy's Restaurant / 327 West 57th St. (8/9th)**

*** **Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (29/30th St.) – 2nd Floor**

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

***** **SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)**

***** **Les Sans Culottes – 1085 Second Ave. / 57th 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

NYCA
 Cooper Station
 P.O. Box 93
 NY, NY 10276-0093

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