



**KENNETH BRONSTEIN**

## PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

### Four Reasons Why Religion Is Self-Destructing

People ask me all the time, why is Atheism so 'hot' now? I say, there are many reasons, but one of the uppermost is that the church is simply destroying itself.

Of course, the religious community would like you to think that they are not failing, and that the only thing wrong with religion today is the proliferation of atheists, those bad apples who are spoiling things for everybody. But take a look at four factors that are contributing to the incipient demise of religions and their domiciles, the churches:

**1) RELIGION IS FAILING TO MEET THE CONTEMPORARY NEEDS OF SOCIETY.** Religion, based on 2,000-year old concepts developed when there were a mere 230 million people on the earth, is hopelessly out of date. Today there are seven billion people living on this planet. We have soared into outer space (and, to the best of my knowledge, have not encountered even a hint of the existence of a heaven up there) and science is increasing the life span of humans to an estimated possibility of 120 years. The church cannot keep up with these scientific or technological advances; it is trapped in Bronze Age tradition and ideology.

#### **Ancient Rituals**

Take a look at today's Catholic Mass and you will see the ancient ideology still represented by rituals: The priest walks down the church center aisle to the altar, holding a staff and swinging a canister of incense. The staff represents a shepherd's staff, but when was the last time you saw sheep in New York City? The incense is a medieval attempt to rid churches of the bad smells of disease and unwashed bodies. The priest is wearing a robe and vestments

trimmed with gold (only in Chelsea would that fly in today's New York, and even there, only on Halloween) and a soaring hat that seems more appropriate for Saturday Night Live's Conehead family.

Then the priest conducts an undecipherable ceremony (or Mass) in Latin (do you know anyone who speaks Latin these days?) making beseeching gestures toward a huge hanging cross that bears a lifelike sculpture of a naked dying man. In the background, a church choir sings melancholy hymns, while that Draculian musical instrument, the church organ, booms out a raucous cacophony.

#### **Out of Touch**

At last, after much gesturing and sing-songing to the dying man on the cross, the priest, a man who generally has no knowledge of the problems of everyday life due to his mandatory celibacy and life in a rectory, delivers his sermon, telling his parishioners how to live their lives. Alas, it is often based on ancient morality, when parishioners were advised things like not to covet their neighbor's ass, and when things like abortion, Trojans, AIDS, stem cell research or in vitro fertilization were not even a flicker in Galileo's eye.

I ask you, does any of this Catholic ritual make sense in a modern city in the year 2009? One would like to give a shout-out to the Catholic church advising it to wake up and smell the 21st century. At the very least, the church might advise its parishioners not to covet their neighbor's Toyota rather than their neighbor's ass.

*Cont. next page*

2) **THE CORRUPTION WITHIN THE CHURCH IS DESTROYING IT.** The extent of pedophilia in the catholic church is now legendary. Manhattan Attorney John Aretakis, who represents some 250 victims of sexual abuse by priests, reports that 3,000 pedophile clergy have been removed from the priesthood in the past six years, or about six percent of all the priests in this country. Aretakis estimates that there are many more unreported cases and that the actual percentage of pedophiles within the catholic clergy is more like 10 to 12 percent. But the real importance of the pedophile scandals in the priesthood is the shock and disapproval of parishioners, an unknown percentage of whom have left the church because of it.

#### **Mocking Sex Standards**

There are other scandals that have eaten away at the foundations of the churches. The Vatican's knowledge of, and neglect to do anything about, the Holocaust and other genocides has rankled for decades. The sexual escapades of Ted Haggard (and other fundamentalist ministers) with male prostitutes and others have made a mockery of the sexual standards of the church. The fiscal shenanigans of Tammy Faye Bakker and her husband, Jim Bakker, hurt evangelicals even after Bakker allegedly paid his debt to society by doing time in prison. Folks, you can't make this stuff up. It's a clash between the stringent morality of the church and its inability to enforce that imposed morality even on its representatives.

3) **RELIGION'S LOSS OF RESPECT AND CREDIBILITY DUE TO ITS RIDICULOUS PRONOUNCEMENTS.** One of the stupidest things ever said by a man of the cloth was the statement by both Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson that Hurricane Katrina and the Tsunami last year were due to god's displeasure with homosexuality in the U.S. And while these idiotic statements turned off lots of people, it's tragic to realize that there are many ignorant redneck fundamentalists who believed them.

There were other such pronouncements—too many to mention here—that indicated fundamentalist preachers have a hotline to god and to his reasons for various natural disasters. You got a sinkhole in your backyard? Leave it to the dear departed

Falwell to inform you that it's there because god is displeased by how much you put in the collection plate last year.

4. **ATHEIST AUTHORS AND SPOKESPEOPLE HAVE PUT RELIGION INTO A DEFENSIVE POSTURE.** Only in this century could the Four Horsemen of Atheism have reaped the full benefits and results of their outspoken books. In medieval times, they would have been burned at the stake. Today, authors Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*), Sam Harris (*End of Faith*), Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great*) and Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell*), with their best-selling books, their lectures and teachings, their appearances and foundations, have widened the cracks in the church's autonomy. With this outspoken questioning of its precepts, no longer does the church have immunity to criticism or logic.

#### **President Recognizes Nonbelievers**

Before the Four Horsemen, the prevailing notion among nonbelievers was that we must be kind to religion's spokespeople, no matter how bizarre their pronouncements, because we mustn't hurt their feelings. No longer. Now the church must justify itself and its precepts just like anybody else. Now, the church is not exempt from examination. Now, we questioners have become a force. Now, with some 25 percent of the population identifying themselves as either atheists, agnostics, nonbelievers or "not aligned with any religion," we have been publicly and excitingly acknowledged as part of the legitimate society of this country by no less a personage than the president of the United States in his inauguration speech.

Meanwhile, the Christian community is losing members at the rate of one percent a year, and the religion that in 1990 claimed 86 percent of the nation's population, today is down to 77 percent, according to polls. But we atheists can't take credit for bringing reality and logic to nine percent more of our population since 1990. The fact is, religion is digging itself into a grave with its own backwardness, mistakes, corruption and ideas of untouchability. I believe Atheism will prevail, not only because it rightfully should, but also because of the idiocy, ineffectualness and hubris of religions. □

**ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION  
NOT A BELIEF**

## How Religion Tries to Control the Movies Through Censorship



*By Jeanean Hollen*

Organized religion and cinema have always been intertwined. It could be just a coincidence that both are replete with fantasy, have widespread appeal and garner millions of dollars annually. But what I find interesting is that throughout the history of film, religionists have been trying to dictate the content.

Almost as soon as films were born, so was film censorship. The roots of control can be traced back to early Chicago and the advent of nickelodeons. Social reformers spearheaded a successful movement requiring all films within that city to be prescreened by the police for approval. When the New York film industry learned of this decree from the Windy City, they organized their own Board of Censorship. By 1910, more cities had adopted the practice of restricting films. In response, the industry created its own national regulation body.

By the early 1920s, three major Hollywood scandals drew further attention to the budding film industry: the manslaughter trial of popular actor Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle, the murder of director William Desmond Taylor and revelations of his bisexuality, and the drug-related death of actor Wallace Reid.



“Fatty” Arbuckle

Hollywood was perceived as a hotbed of immoral behavior and public outcry was deafening. Many church organizations, women’s clubs and reform groups demonstrated across the country calling for stricter censorship of Hollywood films.

William Hays, former church elder, lawyer, chairman of the Republican National Committee and Postmaster General under President Warren Harding, was offered the position of president of the Motion Picture Production and Directors Association (MPPDA) which, by the way, paid the generous salary of \$100,000 in 1922. Hays was well-connected politically and known as

a passionate and persuasive speaker with widespread influence. He soon earned the nickname “czar of the rushes” because of his vigilant reign over the industry. He also began a moral blacklist in Hollywood and insisted on inserting morality clauses in actors’ contracts. Some performers who were known as partygoers soon disappeared from movies altogether, women with questionable reputations were dropped from films and certain romantic relationships between stars were publicized as marriages.



William Hays

By the 1930s, film censorship was in full swing. Martin J. Quigley, the publisher of a Chicago-based motion picture trade newspaper, began lobbying for an extensive censorship code that contained a moral system based on Catholic theology. He recruited Father Daniel Lord (seriously, that’s his name), a Jesuit priest, to write the code. These rules governing films eventually became known as the Hays Code because William Hays was tapped to oversee its creation.

### **No Lust Allowed**

The Hays Code detailed subjects that were forbidden in the movies. For example, the words god, Lord, Jesus and Christ were not allowed unless they were used reverently, and words such as hell, S.O.B., damn and Gawd were banned altogether. Lustful embracing, suggestive postures and illegal drug traffic were prohibited. In addition, any negative representation of the U.S. government was banned.

Not surprisingly, the following guidelines were adopted with regard to religious depiction in films:

- No film or episode may throw ridicule on any religious faith.
- Ministers of religion should not be used in comedy, as villains or as unpleasant persons.
- Ceremonies of any definite religion should be carefully and respectfully handled and supervised

by someone thoroughly conversant with that religion.

In 1934, the Legion of Decency was formed by a group of Catholics who believed that the Hays Production Code was too lenient. Determined to reform film making, the Legion pledged to review all movies and give approval to those that were deemed acceptable for viewing by good Catholics.

Hays reacted to this by calling on Joseph Breen, a prominent Catholic, to enforce a rigorous production code called "The Purity Seal." All movies were required to have this stamp of approval before distribution through affiliated theaters. Studios rushed to sanitize some projects and stopped production on others altogether. Mainstream filmmakers quickly found a way around the stringent rules by using subtle techniques for getting their point across. Witness the woman's knowing smile, the double entendre, the bedroom curtains billowing in the breeze as the camera pans off the would-be lovers.

### **Foreign Films Bring Nudity**

The end of stringent Code enforcement came during the early 1960s. Many factors contributed to the change. First, there was the competition of television. Although television shows were under an even more restrictive censorship code, people did not need to leave their houses to watch moving pictures. So movies needed to give people something that they couldn't get at home.

Secondly, there was an influx of foreign films to the United States. These movies were not bound by the Production Code and thus offered the public something new and different. Swedish films were the first to include nude love scenes and, as you can imagine, were extremely popular.

Also, in the 1960s a boycott from the Legion of Decency no longer guaranteed that a film would be a commercial failure and Hollywood producers who ignored the Production Code were still able to make films that were profitable. Finally, the American civil rights movement prompted a reevaluation of themes that had previously been restricted by the Code.

### **Hidden Religious Influence**

Eventually the Production Code was abandoned entirely because enforcement had become impossible and a new system of rating was established. This new system eventually morphed into the current system, which is under the control of the Motion Picture Association of

American (MPAA). This group includes a private 10-member board and an equally private 14-member appeals board. A short lived and hard to find 2006 movie titled "This Film Is Not Yet Rated" publicized the 2005 board members names, which included the Reverend James Wall, a United Methodist Church minister and member of the National Council of Churches, and Harry Forbes, a representative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.



Today, the inner workings of the MPAA continue to be sketchy. Even their official website does not list any board member names and gives only perfunctory answers on the FAQ page. It remains a mystery as to who makes the rating decisions and what part religious pressure plays. What is clear is that for the last 100 years in the United States, there has always been some group with a strong desire to control the media. Will the next 100 be any different? ☐

*Jeanean Hollen, who lives in Thousand Oaks, CA., is an educator and member of Atheists United.*

## **ATHEISM:**

### **TRUE TO ONESELF**

**NYCA Fourth Cable Show  
Atheism in History  
Wednesdays: 5:30PM (MNN # 57)**

**ATHEISTS ARE NOT SIMPLY  
"NON BELIEVERS," WE ARE REALISTS**

**ATHEISM:  
A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION**

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

## Editor's Q & A

### Why the Generations Have Exchanged Roles: A Call to Action



*By Jane Everhart*

Dear Editor,

Last spring, you wrote a ringing appreciation of the activism of senior citizens in the atheist movement and pointed out that we seniors carry the banner because young people today are not being politically active--a statement for which you were rebuked by a young woman blogger. Since then, I've read other articles making the same observation about today's less-rebellious young people. I'm wondering if these writers were also chided for pointing out the couch potato and video-game propensities of today's younger generation.

--Martha in Maspeth

Dear Martha,

You are right, I am not the only adult who has voiced disappointment in our younger generation for their lack of activism and initiative. Take the following statement:

“As the father of an 11-year-old son, I often wonder what's wrong with kids today. With my child as an exception, of course, they do not seem very bright. They appear to be shamelessly narcissistic, apathetic and lacking in social skills...”

That was written by Harry Hurt III in the Business Section of the Sunday *New York Times* on December 21, 2008 in a review of a book on how the Internet has affected our young people.

And guess who depicted baby boomers thus: “Whiny, narcissistic, self-indulgent people with a simple philosophy: Gimme it, it's mine.”

That opinion was put forth by none other than the late, great George Carlin, one of my atheist heroes, and quoted in his obituary in the *New York Times Magazine* section, December 28, 2008.

I don't know if these writers got hammered for their remarks but if they did, I'm sure they didn't care. (If a writer doesn't arouse some dissension, she might as well

hand in her press card.) The young woman blogger who rebuked me for pointing out that today's youngsters are failing to do their bit presented no evidence to the contrary. I would have loved to be proven wrong about our young people. But her comments were of the how-dare-you-say-that caliber and then she fell back into blogger obscurity.

#### Campuses Are Quiet

Of course the baby boomers are not the generation I was evaluating. I was chiding today's youth, those in their teens and twenties, who are demonstrably missing in today's atheist activism—or activism of any kind. The campuses are strangely quiet today. For several years, prominent atheist organizations have tried to organize atheist groups on campuses—even, at one point, hiring paid youth organizers—but to no avail. As far as I know, most of those who were hoping to organize young atheists have failed (except in southern California where, apparently, a couple of campus atheist clubs have been organized.) In most parts of the country, students today are not joining atheist organizations—or any other.

Traditionally, in our society, the younger generation has been the rebellious one. Why is this generation, those now in their teens and 20s, the do-nothing generation? I find it an odd turnabout that these days, our senior citizens are rebellious and youngsters have taken a back seat. I attribute this to a number of things: our child-centered society, uninspiring schoolteachers; the Internet, a general apathy brought on by eight years of George W. Bush and his administration, and even the events of four years ago when our marches and protests against Bush produced no visible results. Let's take these things one at a time:

- 1) This generation is composed of the kids whose parents mortgaged their houses to pay for their education. Raised in a child-centered society, this generation's expectations are that parents will “do” for them. They see themselves as the end result of evolution, of parents' sacrifices. They apparently feel it is not incumbent on them to do anything for society; it is enough for them to just exist.

2) Teachers today don't infuse their students with the sense of injustice, adventure or possibilities. Where are the Howard Zinns, the Noam Chomskys, the Albert Ellises, the Bertrand Russells, the Mario Savios for this generation? Who is there to goad these students to rise up against the injustices of our society? I grew up in the age of Abby Hoffman, the Black Panthers, Norman Mailer, marches on the Pentagon, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" exhortation. I recall picketing for World Peace with my son in his stroller. (He is probably the youngest alleged agitator recorded in FBI files.)

3) Kids, blogging is not activism. (Although our fearless leader, Ken Bronstein, is convinced that someday blogging will become an important tool for human advances, I tend to disagree with him on this one. But then, I have blogged and he has not.) The thing about blogging is that it is so ephemeral. Today's quips are tomorrow's stale phrases. And blogging is time consuming. You can blog for hours, exchanging clever little thoughts with anonymous strangers and at the end

of that time, nothing definitive or permanent has transpired. I have no doubt that blogging is great for shut-ins and lonely people in remote places, but honestly, people, what in the world does it accomplish?

4) George W. Bush is gone, replaced by a man who was a true activist, a community organizer. Obama is an activist's activist. Still, he is 49 years old. We shall need our youthful activists in the future, or who will take Obama's place in eight years?

So, youngsters, get off that blog, turn off that video game and do something to justify your parents' second mortgage. Join us in our movement to quell the ridiculous fantasies and lies of the religious establishment that are poisoning the minds of the next generation: your children. Fight, march, organize, write poetry, compose anthems. Do something, anything, to relieve those brave Senior Citizens who are filling in for you on the barricades. ☐

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## UPCOMING FEBUARY EVENTS

**CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES**

**February 2, 2009 (Monday) 6:30 PM**  
**NYC Atheists' Lifestyle Discussion Group**

**Group Leader:** Dr. Nando Pelusi, Clinical Psychologist



Join Dr. Pelusi, contributing editor to *Psychology Today*, in discussions on how to live a more fulfilling Atheist / Secular life, handling uncomfortable situations, declaring your Atheism.

**NEW LOCATION: Call Ken Bronstein**  
**(212-535-7425)**

**Must be a NYC Atheists Member to participate.**  
**Space is limited, so RSVP as soon as possible.**

**Obama's Inauguration Speech:  
 "We are a nation of Christians and  
 Muslims and Jews and Hindus  
 and Nonbelievers..."**

**February 8, 2009 12:00 PM**  
**NYC Atheists Brunch / Speaker / Book Club**

**SPEAKER:** Sarah Barringer Gordon  
 University of Pennsylvania Law School, Arlin M.  
 Adams Professor of Constitutional Law and Professor  
 of History.



*Sarah Barringer Gordon*

Subject: Blasphemy

Sarah Gordon is a widely recognized scholar and commentator on religion in American public life and the law of church and state. Gordon researches and teaches extensively in American constitutional history, religion and religious experience. She has been a frequent guest on news and talk shows. Her book, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002) won the Mormon History Association's and the Utah Historical Society's Best Book awards in 2003.

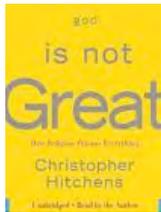
She is currently working on a new book about religion and law in the twentieth century, titled *The Spirit of the Law*, which will be published by Harvard University Press. She is the recipient of numerous prizes and fellowships and is on the advisory boards of the National Constitution Center, the American Society for Legal History, Vassar College, and the Mormon History Association. She holds a secondary appointment in the History Department of UP, where she teaches American religious and constitutional history.

**Location:** Press Box Restaurant & Pub  
932 Second Ave. (49/50<sup>th</sup> St.) – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

**Cost:** Buffet: \$20 – (Includes Brunch, one drink, coffee, tax, tip)

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### 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 13: "*Does Religion Make People Behave Better?*"

**Need not have read the assignment to participate.**

**February 12, 2009 (Thursday) 6:30 PM**  
**NYCA Darwin Birthday Party**



**Subject:** *Darwin's Dangerous Idea (Evolution: A Journey into Where We're From and Where We're going)* – PBS Video

**Location:** Press Box Restaurant & Pub  
932 Second Ave. (49/50<sup>th</sup> St.) – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

**Cost:** Buffet: \$30 – (Includes Buffet, one drink, coffee, tax, tip)

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**February 17, 2009 (Tuesday) 7:00 PM**  
**NYCA Meetup**

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

Group Leader: Natty Adams



Exciting discussions with fellow freethinkers! This popular Atheist Meetup is led by the charismatic young man-about-town, Nathaniel "Natty" Adams

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

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

**Location:** SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16<sup>th</sup> Floor-(29/30<sup>th</sup> St.)

**Subject:** TBA  
**Speaker:** TBA

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## Letters to the Editor

### Inauguration

Dear Editor,  
In my opinion, there was way too much religion in the Inauguration ceremony.

For one thing, schools across the country viewed it. It must be confusing for kids who may know about separation of Church and State and then see no wall of separation.  
- Cathy Clare (Manhattan)

### Religious 'Morality'

*The following letter was sent to the New York Daily News by Dennis Middlebrooks, NYCA's champion Letter Writer Emeritus.*

Dear Voice of the People,

Why do I suspect that Linda Hockaday, the matron who abandoned a disabled man in as freezing bus so she could attend a New Years Eve church service, is one of the majority of Americans who say they would never vote for an atheist on the grounds that belief in God is necessary for morality.

-Dennis Middlebrooks (Brooklyn)

## UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

**CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES**

### FEBRUARY 2009

Feb. 2*	Mon.	7:00 PM	NYCA Atheists Lifestyle Discussion Group
Feb. 8**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
Feb. 12*****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Charles Darwin's 200 <sup>th</sup> Birthday Party
Feb. 17***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
Feb. 26*****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

### MARCH 2009

Mar. 2*	Mon.	7:00 PM	NYCA Atheists Lifestyle Discussion Group
Mar. 8**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
Mar. 17***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
Mar. 26*****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

- \* **Location: Call Jane Everhart 212-879-2687**  
 \*\* **Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50<sup>th</sup> St.) – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**  
 \*\*\* **Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27<sup>th</sup> St. (3<sup>rd</sup>/Lex)**  
 \*\*\*\*\* **SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16<sup>th</sup> Floor-(29/30<sup>th</sup> St.)**

#### NYCA CABLE SHOWS

Wednesdays:	5:30 PM	Atheism in History	(Manhattan Cable # 57)
	6:30 PM	This Week in Atheism	(Manhattan Cable # 57)
Thursdays:	7:00 PM	NYC Atheists	(Manhattan Cable # 67)
	7:30 PM	Atheists Book Club	(Manhattan Cable # 67)

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

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## RENEW / JOIN NYC ATHEISTS

**Through our programs and activities, we have worked to bring awareness of our principles, our vision and, above all, of our existence as atheists. We have done it through our Website, our Meetups, our Cable Shows, our Library and Book Club, our Street Tabling and our Newsletter to enhance our visibility--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.**

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### NYC ATHEISTS — 2009 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

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

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

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

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

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit (501c) 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 the NYC Atheists Inc., the Atheist community and the community at large.

#### YOUR 2009 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**

