



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

The Atheist Buses Are Here!

NYCA Poster Buses to Roll Through New York This Month

You asked for it. You anticipated it. You waited for it! This month, some two dozen buses will roll through Manhattan, debuting our 12-foot long, three foot high message, "You don't have to believe in god," in white letters on a bright blue background.

Look for the signs the first day our buses maneuver through the city in late June. Take a photo of yourself standing beside our bus poster at a bus stop and we'll run it in our newsletter. If you're with friends, wave and cheer when you see the sign go by! Wave and cheer even if you're alone: This is New York City; no one will think you are crazy. And if they do, tell them you are just crazily happy to be an atheist in a free country where the Atheist message can be carried through town on the side of a bus.

How the Bus Ads Came About

So how did this happen? In January, I announced at our annual meeting that NYCA would develop a Poster Program. After a six-week review of worldwide Atheist billboard, bus and subway programs, we were most inspired by the acclaimed London bus ad campaign and made the decision to concentrate on exterior bus posters, at least initially.

Using the successful London experience as a model to convince New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), we began negotiations with them as far back as February. The MTA was initially skeptical: It had never been done before, they said. We pointed out that churches advertise all the time. Who has not seen the words "Jesus Saves" in huge neon letters across the East River? We assured MTA that nearly 25 percent of their riders were

nonbelievers or unaffiliated with any religion, more than any other minority that rides their buses. We hinted that we might be a source of revenue for them in years to come if we could run a successful ad campaign. Perhaps that was the deal maker in the end; the MTA is more interested in revenue than in message.

Two-Month Negotiation

Negotiation with the MTA took some two months. At last we got approval for a limited bus poster campaign that is scheduled to start on or about June 22. It has been funded by an anonymous donor.

The next step was to design the poster and have dozens printed. We decided on a simple, clear message with no background distraction because, we figured, the message itself will be distraction enough to many viewers. We chose a bright blue as the background—I call it "Atheist blue"—to contrast with the bus exterior, and simple white lettering for visibility, dignity and clarity.

Two-Fold Purpose

We opted for a simple, sensible message that I felt was dynamic and positive without being threatening. (Note: We want the complete message to be a surprise for you, so though I've given away the first line in this Sermon, look for our message in its two-line entirety when the poster buses hit the streets.)

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We have two main goals in this upcoming bus campaign. One, of course, is to draw more attention to our cause, to recruit new members, to let the world know that we are here, that we are here to stay, that we are legit and an open, respected, acknowledged part of the teeming masses of New York City that ride buses or stride along its sidewalks. We are the primary “Voice for Atheism” in the New York area, so we feel it is incumbent upon us to let our message roll into all the boroughs, beckoning to New Yorkers, reminding all that we are here, that we are proud and that we’re a good way of life.

Legitimizing Atheism

But our other goal with this bus campaign—I’ll wager you didn’t expect this—is to benefit our members and all nonbelievers. We want to help create an atmosphere in which our members can be publicly proud of being atheists. Yes, we want to draw hidden atheists out of the woodwork, but once they’re out, we want them to feel that it’s OK to be an open atheist—that it’s as legitimate, as ordinary, as common and as acceptable in our society as being an Episcopalian—hopefully more so. No one should be stigmatized because they declare themselves an atheist. Our bus ads will bring the message of Atheist joy and invulnerability to New Yorkers each day as the buses barrel down Manhattan’s avenues from Riverdale to South Ferry.

We feel this is the right moment in history to press our bus ad campaign because the general atmosphere in the country has changed since the election of Obama and the catching on of his “Yes We Can” slogan. There is a new openness and an acceptance of non-traditional ideas, a new willingness to give everybody a chance, regardless of color or belief. The very fact that we Americans elected an African-American president seems to have considerably deflated racism in this country, and in his generosity, Obama has lobbed some of that acceptance our way.

Obama Opened Doors

The President’s nod to “nonbelievers” in his inaugural address opened the door for us, it seems. The country appears to have taken in its stride the fact that a new category has been officially added to its panoply of beliefs: the choice of no belief in religion whatsoever.

Whether the door has been opened a crack for us or not, we Atheists are ready to come out. We have assembled our humble chariots of realism—OK, they’re buses—and we are going to take the high road from the Battery to East Harlem. We’re on the road, my friends. And we’re moving in the right direction. □

Letter to the Editor

Taxing the God Business

To the Editor,

I was very impressed by your May sermon on the outrageous (and I would call it unfair and illegal) subsidies we in our nation are paying to organized religion so they can keep to their "faith." Why do they have the right to not pay their fair share of tax dollars for the faith "business" they are running as a corporation with all the privileges of corporations and much, much more! Where was this decreed, and how can we bring this up to our elected officials and ask to have a law decreeing that religion pay for the privileges they receive from our tax dollars?

Thank you for your outspoken courage and let's keep up the pressure and the fight. Let's ask, where does it say in our constitution that we should subsidize religion?

--Edith Amster, Manhattan

**MAN INVENTED GOD
GOD DID NOT CREATE MAN**

Editor's Q & A

Why Aren't Nonbelievers One Big Happy Family?



By Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

Why are there four or five organizations of nonbelievers in New York City? Why aren't we atheists and freethinkers just one big happy group? Wouldn't it be more efficient to have one consolidated, ecumenical organization? I use the word "ecumenical" in the sense of "promoting or tending toward worldwide unity," in the way that various religious denominations use it. Wouldn't we be more powerful in pressing our atheist agenda if we were one big group?

--Yanni from Yonkers

Dear Yanni,

There are good reasons to have smaller, separate groups of nonbelievers, says Ken Bronstein, president of New York City Atheists. He feels each group has something different and special to contribute to the atheist movement and that each group should maintain its individuality. Each organization may appeal to a different kind of person or focus on a different purpose.

Bronstein points out, for example, that atheist activist groups like NYC Atheists stress the here and now; humanists seem to focus on morality and the ethical world, and skeptics like to question everything. The different perspective of each of these groups may appeal to a different kind of person and answer a different philosophical or political need.

Together on Major Issues

We nonbelievers work on many fronts, Bronstein adds. Each group's role is needed to make progress in eliminating the many injustices we freethinkers suffer, or to debunk the arcane magical beliefs still extant in the world, or to set up alternative lifestyles and ethical concepts for the growing population of nonbelievers. An added bonus: With multiple groups, people within the individual organizations have more opportunity to develop leadership roles.

But Bronstein believes the different groups should get together on major issues (such as picketing the Pope or supporting nonbelievers in the military) and certainly we should get together on a nationwide basis for conventions, conferences and coalitions.

Case in point: The Secular Coalition for America is planning a Million-Atheists March on Washington DC. We hope every Atheist, every Secular Humanist, every Skeptic, every Bright, every Ethical Culturalist, every military freethinker, even every unaffiliated seeker of the truth, will crowd into those buses to Washington on that day and march with banners aloft, singing, holding hands, chanting to support a new future of realism and reason. Let it be a Day of Love for humanity and the world, let it be free of supernatural darkness and hell, let it show that we nonbelievers are mighty and together.

Three P's of Separatism

I agree with Bronstein's reasons for advocating a variety of separate atheist organizations and I would add three other reasons for having separate organizations for nonbelievers. I have dubbed them the Three P's—Purpose, Politics and People.

1) PURPOSE. Bronstein has covered the basic reasons for individual organizations, but I would like to add one more, a rather practical reason: The fact is, one atheist organization can't do everything, it simply doesn't have the time, the manpower or the resources. We are up against powerful, well-funded religions, whose income, hidden and overt, is in the billions, perhaps trillions. Catholicism alone has mesmerized and brainwashed millions of workers in third world countries by promising them a less arduous life in the hereafter. It has tithed them to support its vast diaspora of priests and their cohorts who work full time to perpetuate the church's lies and increase its income. We atheist groups do not have the funds or the manpower to counteract this insidious takeover of the innocents in third world countries. Our movement is just beginning. We don't tithe. We are underfunded.

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A single organization of atheists could be knocked over by religionists: A single target is easier to hit than many small targets. So my addition to the various purposes of separate atheist groups is that we have a better chance of survival and success if we are many smaller groups working on different projects rather than one large, easier-to-hit target.

2) POLITICS. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the various atheist groups can, and do, espouse different political outlooks. True, it seems that there are generally more Liberals in the atheist movement than Conservatives and quite logically so if you stop to think about it: Science is progressive; religion is conservative (they got Bush elected). The many issues atheists espouse (such as civil rights) are also favorites of the Left. The ideals of a good atheist life on earth champion scientific progress, equality of all humans and control over one's personal life (as opposed to following the church's dictums on how one should live one's life to achieve happiness after death.)

But there is also a coterie of Conservative thinkers who have renounced religion and they have, and are entitled to, their own groups. Their perspective may be slightly different, but many of their issues are the same, and there is a general understanding that the atheist Conservatives are with us and will back us on major issues, though their reasons may be different.

3) PEOPLE. I have found that different personalities are drawn to different groups. I recall one young woman who was so damaged by her Catholic upbringing that she could not stand the idea of a leader. The last I heard, she was still looking for an atheist group that is totally leaderless. Then there was the young man who felt that the main purpose for an atheist group should be socializing and imbibing. He split off from our group and formed a drinking group that meets in pool halls, parks and bars. So far, it has not accomplished anything much for atheism but a lot for Coors.

With a variety of atheist organizations, people can move from one group to another as their needs and interests change. We've had members come to us after exploring other groups and found that our activist approach was exhilarating. To limit nonbelievers to one large group assumes that one size fits all.

True, there are nonbelievers who feel, as one clever NYCA member once put it rather sardonically, "Shouldn't we all hold hands and sing *kum ba yah*?" Well, we can't, and shouldn't. We are too diverse. But I believe there is strength in diversity. Having a range of atheist organizations to choose from responds to individual needs, offers more choices and appeals to a variety of nonbelievers. Or, as one historical figure said a gazillion years ago but which still holds up today: "Let a thousand flowers bloom." □

NYCA Street Tabling



Ken Bronstein, (l), and Josh Treiber, (r), Josh, who for the last three years has helped us in setting up our street tabling, is moving to Miami

JULY 4, 2009 (Saturday) 6:30 PM NYCA Barbeque / Fireworks

Meeting Location: Grand Central Station – Grand Hall – Round Information Booth

Time: 10:15 AM / train departs 10:48 AM
Round trip fare: \$15 / Senior \$10

Barbeque location: Chappaqua, NY.
Call 212-535-7425 for exact location.
Donation: \$10

Depart: 3:30 PM for NYC

Will have dinner in Manhattan before fireworks.
This year the fireworks will be on the Hudson River.

Therefore: Fireworks Meeting time and location-TBA

New Nationwide Support Group Formed To Help People Leave Religion



By Darrel Ray, Ed.D.

Over the years, I have talked with many people who agonize over the issues of leaving religion. They often struggle alone, without support from friends, family or community.

When people decide that superstition and religion no longer have a place in their lives, they often face complications with family, friends, and even on the job. How do you deal with family events where you are expected to pray or wear religious symbols? How do you respond when someone asks you to read a religious book to children or grandchildren?

If you are married to a religious person, how do you renegotiate that part of your relationship? You no longer wish to attend religious activities but your spouse enjoys them and wants you present in church or Synagogue. Worse, she wants to raise the children in a religious milieu that you now find objectionable.

How do you deal with the loss or isolation you may experience when friends reject you because you no longer believe in their god? How do you deal with your own mortality? These are some of the issues that crop up when you leave religion.

Finding Community in a Secular World

Religion provides many benefits to believers that are hard to replace in a secular frame of reference. Of course you must believe some crazy things to belong to a religion. If you don't believe in virgin births, resurrections of dead people, parting of seas, magic underwear, crystals or astrological signs, you might be persuaded to attend religious services but you will feel like an outsider or hypocrite.

When you finally decide to leave religion behind forever, you face questions like: How do I get my need for social support met without having to believe all the stuff required by religion? How do I find emotional support in learning new ways of living as a non-religious person in a religious world? What do I answer when someone asks "why aren't you in church anymore?"

"Recovering from Religion" is a new organization created to answer these questions and more. We are just normal people who meet at the local library or a cafe, to share and discuss. We meet in small groups of 6-10 in

cities around the U.S., even the world. We follow simple guidelines that ensure the meetings and events are productive and provide real support for those who attend. Group facilitators are not professionals, just regular people who have faced the same problems we all experienced in leaving religion. No one has all the answers, but we think there are answers to be found in openly sharing and discussing.

Putting Religion Behind You

If you are interested in joining an RR™ group or want to become a facilitator for a group in your area, please contact us. The only requirement for joining is that you are putting religion and superstition behind you for good. We are not another religion, and don't want to start another one. We are getting out of religion, not creating a new one.

Consider this a support group like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), but without all the god stuff. We no longer need the hocus pocus of invisible friends, miracles and god talk but we do want solid, healthy human contact and support.

We already have groups throughout the world. If you are interested in starting one in your community or facilitating an already organized group in your area, all that is required is that you agree to the simple, commonsense guidelines on our website and contact us to register your group. We will help you get started and plug you in to a network of groups and facilitators who are doing the same thing in their community.

See: RecoveringReligionists.com □

Darrel W. Ray, Ed.D is the author of "The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture." He was the dynamic speaker at NYCA's April 30th monthly meeting. He has recently announced that two new Recovering from Religion groups have been formed: one in Cincinnati and one in Atlanta. Their links are: www.meetup.com/Cincinnati-Recovering-from-Religion-Meetup-Group/calendar/10453499/ and www.meetup.com/The-Atlanta-Recovering-Religionists/calendar/1035859

Should Atheist Hero Dawkins Debate a Celebrity Preacher?



By Ron Widelec

Richard Dawkins, the famed evolutionary biologist, was recently challenged to a debate by Ray Comfort, a well-known evangelical preacher. Dawkins is a recently retired Oxford professor and the author of several major science and atheism books, such as *The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, and most recently, his worldwide best seller, *The God Delusion*. Comfort runs several religious organizations such as “Living Water” and “The Way of the Master.” He has written several books about religion, god, evolution and atheism. He is perhaps most famous because of his alliance with Kirk Cameron (yes, that Kirk Cameron, the actor).

Comfort offered \$10,000 if Dawkins would engage in a debate with him, to which Dawkins countered with a request for \$100,000. Currently, Comfort has upped his offer to twenty grand. Many have argued over the wisdom of debating creationists. Some have said that this only gives credibility to the idea that there is a “scientific debate” over the evolution/creation issue when there is none to be found among scientists. Also, there is very little chance of convincing true believers of anything; all the evidence and logical reasoning has no impact on them. Most of these debates end with each observer thinking that the side they agreed with clearly won, regardless of the discussion.

Despite all this, I feel that Richard Dawkins should accept this debate challenge, but only under certain conditions. One, that the debate be held at an academic site, such as a major university. Two, that a TV network agrees to televise the debate. Three, that each of the debaters will get to ask the questions of one another, rather than a moderator, who should only be there to introduce and keep the time. Four, that both sides sign a contract agreeing to not manipulate the video footage. YouTube is a

wonderful source of information, but far too often the videos are not accurate representations of what actually took place.

Preacher’s Absurd Arguments

I think Dawkins must take this debate because it is a wonderful opportunity. Comfort, mainly due to his friendship with Kirk Cameron, has a big enough name so that when teamed with the eminent professor Dawkins, it might actually be enough to get a TV station (even if it is PBS or C-Span) to televise the event. Comfort has also made some of the most absurd arguments ever heard in favor of his beliefs and against science, evolution, and atheism. He is a very easy target. Anyone who is unfamiliar with his work should look him up on YouTube, where he has posted many of his own videos from the Way of the Master. His “Banana: an Atheist’s Worst Nightmare” argument is a personal favorite of mine. He has often argued that evolution could not have worked because when an individual of one species evolves into another species it would die off because it could not find another to mate with, demonstrating a complete ignorance of the concept of evolution. Was there ever a better punching bag for the science community on which to pound?

The true believers that are out there may never be reached with Dawkin’s logic, but there are plenty of people out there who haven’t given the topic enough thought and would benefit from this kind of exposure. The alternative is to allow people like Comfort to go around making these statements unchallenged, and that may be the most dangerous scenario for the scientific community. □

Ron Widelec is an educator who lives on Long Island.

UPCOMING JUNE EVENTS
CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

JUNE 14, 2009 **12:00 PM**
NYC Atheists Brunch

Speaker: William Jungers, PhD



Subject: Hobbits

William L. Jungers is an American anthropologist and the chair of the Department of Anatomical Sciences at State University of New York at Stony Brook on Long Island, New York. He is most famous for his work on the biomechanics of bipedal locomotion in hominids such as the 3.4 million-year-old Lucy and the 6.1-5.8 million-year old Millenium Man.

More recently, Jungers has been a subject of media attention due to his analysis of the remains of *Homo floresiensis*, ("Flores Man," nicknamed Hobbit) discovered on the Indonesian island of Flores.

Jungers has authored well over 100 peer-reviewed articles about the relationship between form and function in many primate species, both extinct and extant. Due to his publication record, academic service, statistical savvy, willingness to help students, journal editorship and focus on media-worthy subjects, Jungers is often considered one of the most influential biological anthropologists living today.

Location: Press Box Restaurant & Pub
 932 Second Ave. (bet. 49th & 50th Streets)

Cost: Brunch, \$20 (includes Buffet entrees, one drink, coffee, tax, tip.)

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 16: "Is Religion Child Abuse?"

Need not have read the assignment to participate.

JUNE 16, 2009(Tuesday) **7:00 PM**
NYCA Meetup

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

Group Leader: TBA

Exciting discussions with fellow freethinkers!

Cost: Participants are expected to purchase a drink or food.

JUNE 25, 2009 (Thursday) **6:30 PM**
NYCA MONTHLY MEETING

Speaker: Warren Allen Smith



Subject: What Atheists Can Learn From The Gay Civil Rights Activities

Warren Allen Smith is a gay Atheist activist and writer who participated in the Stonewall riots. Smith has published *Who's Who in Hell*, a handbook and international directory for humanists, freethinkers, naturalists, rationalists, and non-theists.

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

Cost: We ask for a donation of \$5 to help cover the cost of room rental

PROUD TO BE AN ATHEIST

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION

NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

JUNE 2009

June	14**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
June	16***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
June	25****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

JULY 2009

July	4*	Sat.	10::15AM	NYCA July 4 th Barbeque / Fireworks
July	12**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
July	21***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
July	30****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

* **Location: Call 212-535-7425**
 ** **Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th 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.)**

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)

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