



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

How Technology Will Help Us Outpace Religion

By 2030, Majority Will Be Non-Religious

This month, I will be describing my projection of a dramatic shift in the religiosity of the American culture from a 75-80 percent belief in god to less than 50 percent by the year 2030.

By all indications, religion today is at a dangerous intersection that has come about because of the following influences:

1) World-wide economic instability is causing a shift to financial concerns versus faith and social issues like abortion or same sex marriage. In the recent U.S. election, the Carl Rove strategy of wedge issues (inserting peripheral and sensitive issues into the debate) and character attacks did not work. Voters still chose Obama. I do not think voters will shift back to religious and social issues; their pocketbooks will prevail.

2) Observers of the American scene note that the concept of god is shifting from a personal god (Abrahamic) to an abstract supernatural being or force. People who hold this belief in a spiritual force of nature seem to eschew churches and church dogma.

3) Many people go to church not for religious reasons like god and spirituality, but for social and community reasons. My observation in talking extensively to religious people during my frequent travels throughout these United States is that the motivation to attend church is split 50-50 between religious and social reasons. That is, I'm convinced that fully half of American churchgoers go to

church services simply to network, see-and-be-seen or take part in social activities.

4) The primary American Abrahamic (Jewish, Christian and Islam) religions, which are programmed to uphold medieval philosophy and dedicated to their ancient pageantry, are extremely vulnerable to a dramatic shift downward in membership and attendance because of cyber-technology.

Internet vs. Church

"Technological convergence"—which means combining into a single device the Internet, computer, cell/smart phone, (I-Phone, Blackberry), plus thousands of applications including social networking (Facebook) and video conferencing—will result, in the very near future, in an all-purpose "convergence appliance." This type of advanced communication technology will provide, for many people, a better alternative for social and community purposes than attending church.

I am not claiming the church will disappear, but I am predicting that a portion of Americans will choose the internet over church pews.

All Ages Enjoy Technology

The conventional wisdom is that "early adopters" of new technology are the younger generation, who are able to incorporate new applications and devices quickly into their lives, workplaces and communities.

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Recently, studies of the use of hi-tech products disclosed that middle-aged and older people were bigger fans of “Twitter” than any other age group. Moreover, the study added, blogging, electronic book readers (like Kindle), online social networks and video games were very popular in—surprise—nursing homes.

The High-Tech Future

With "convergence appliance" video conferencing and much higher performance bandwidths, people will soon be able to easily establish social networks and interest groups that will provide benefits like expanded contacts, more ease in making contacts, more timely contacts and more focused contacts. Tech-based communities will be reachable at all times, 24/7, provide easy access to all age groups, and are not restricted by distance or geography.

The online seeker of a community will be able to engage with more people, hold meetings anytime, find succor or conviviality from other compatible contacts when they need it, no matter what the hour is, get answers to problems, find a mate, listen to lectures, blog, argue, network.

Think of it: It will be far easier to dial up your contacts and have a video-based meeting with 10 people who are visible on your “convergence appliance” than to get dressed, drive to a church or conference room and wait for everyone to assemble for a committee meeting. I predict that by 2030, calling a routine meeting in a conventional conference room will be a thing of the past because online contacts and video conferencing will be available and much less expensive in both cost and travel time.

Virtual Rites & Ceremonies

One primary purpose for which people use churches are weddings and funerals. In a new twist, private companies are now offering a “virtual” wedding and funeral and, in the latest version of this service, you can add an interactive capability. This will

enable those who are unable to attend an event because of health, distance or cost to be an interactive participant.

Churches Late to the Party

The Abrahamic religions, because of their ancient heritage, are slow to react or adapt to change, so I do not project that religious institutions will jump on the bandwagon of cyber communities or cyber churches in the foreseeable future.

Another factor that may dilute the interest of religious institutions in technological advances is the concern of church leaders that when there are cyber-communities, churches will lose control of their flock and not be able to manage their congregations.

While it is true that some mega churches are already using sophisticated audio visual technology, (though at this point, only mega churches can afford it), cyber-technology requires a totally different competency and contains some aspects of use that are incompatible with a church’s mission, so I do not foresee a wide acceptance of convergence technology in religious circles in the near future. Additionally, some individuals will always want personal human contact, not virtual contact.

I believe that like most industrialized countries in Europe, America will eventually migrate to a more secular society. The major catalyst that will push nonbelievers to more than 50 percent of the population by 2030 will be, in my opinion, the “convergence appliance” with video conferencing and high broadband connections.

So, will those software mavens of Silicon Valley end up being considered the anti-Christ that religion has feared for generations? Or will churches be able to assimilate convergence technology as they have absorbed television and rock and roll? Only time will tell. However, as both an atheist and an observer of modern trends, my money is on convergence technology. □

NYC ATHEISTS - \$10,000 MATCHING CHALLENGE

**Our \$10,000 anonymous bus poster donor
Is challenging us to match his/her donation.**

SEE INSERT

Editor's Q & A

Religion: The Oldest Con Game in the World

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By Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

I have heard it said by many nonbelievers that religion is the oldest con game in the world, bigger and more widespread than Bernie Madoff's schemes. Don't you think this must be unsettling to those people whose religion provides comfort to them? Aren't we deflating their security bubble by implying that they are being taken in by charlatans?

--Charles from Chelsea

Dear Charles,

I, too, have heard it said that religion is "the oldest con game in the world"—older and longer lasting than any Ponzi scheme known to man so far.

But don't feel sorry for, or be misled by, those religionists who complain that they are being "bashed" by nonbelievers who criticize them in this way. These religious people play the victim game and give you the "atheists are hurting the feelings of religious people" riff.

Religionists have been adept at using the victim card since a bunch of them marched into Rome's Coliseum to offer themselves up as brunch for hungry lions.

Deflecting the whole religious debate to accusations of "bashing" and "rudeness" is the religionist response to criticism because they cannot really answer our questions with logic.

You can also point out to the religious who complain about our criticisms and exposés that they themselves have no compunctions whatsoever about "bashing" us or "hurting atheists' feelings" by threats and insults such as the one a Christian woman threw at me at the Pope picket: "I'll see you burn in hell!" In medieval times, she would no doubt have had me burned at the stake—which, I would argue, is the ultimate rudeness.

Worldwide Religious Web

I think religion is rightly dubbed a "con game" because most religions are a vast, worldwide spider-web of a conspiracy, reaching into all corners of the world to extract money and fealty from ignorant, gullible people in exchange for promises of a luxurious afterlife,

forgiveness of their sins and staying on the good side of some god who supposedly can have bad things happen to you if he takes a mind to it.

But aren't these promises from religion a bit like a Mafia protection scheme? The Mafia would charge shopkeepers a "protection fee," which meant that its wiseguys would not throw bricks in the shopkeeper's window if they got paid weekly to not do so. Isn't paying a priest to pray for you much the same thing except that, with the priest, you don't know what you are being protected against? The wrath of god?

Church Uses Blame, Guilt & Fear

I have a friend who works for a nationwide tax-preparation company, doing income tax returns for the public. During the last tax season, she reported to me that she was astounded by the amount of money given to churches by those families whose tax returns she was preparing. It was not unusual, she said, for a working-class family of modest means to donate as much as \$25,000 a year to their church. (I, too, was surprised, since we at New York City Atheists sometimes get resistance to our modest \$25-a-year dues.)

How does religion manage to wring \$25,000 a year out of a prudent working- or middle-class family, I wondered. Then, examining my own Catholic upbringing, it occurred to me that the church uses blame, guilt and fear as psychological tools that can only be appeased by offerings to the earthly representatives of the "heavenly host." Remember the sacrifices the ancient Incas thought their gods required? Well, the Vatican doesn't require any blood-letting today, and placing a bowl of fruit in front of a Jesus statue is a custom that has pretty much bitten the dust, but the church will accept checks, credit cards and cash.

The church uses blame, guilt and fear to extract cash from its supplicants by subtle, psychological, almost Pavlovian processes, in which religion creates rules, which you break, and then you are offered redemption for the rule-breaking, but there are things you must do for penance, which usually consist of the recitation of ten "Hail Mary" prayers and whatever the church thinks

they can get out of you in the way of monetary gratitude.

Phony Promises

And then there are the phony promises, hyped up schemes and bogus tales that religion tries to sell us, some so bizarre I wonder that any intelligent person can entertain them even for a moment. Here's a small selection of some of the Thou-Shalt-Nots and other deceits that the church tries to peddle to us:

1. **THE CONCEPT OF "SOUL."** The soul is supposed to be an invisible part of you that, spirit-like, lives on and goes to heaven after you die. Nobody has ever seen a soul, there is no tangible evidence that a soul exists and a soul should not be confused with personality or emotions. Your brain is composed of neurons and synapses that cease to function when you die and so your personality dies with you. When a priest or minister says he wants to "save your soul," watch out, because the next words out of his mouth are going to be how much you should donate to the church to get saved.

2. **"JESUS LOVES YOU."** "Look," I say to the beaming Christian who is anointing me with this Jesus-loves-you phrase, "Jesus doesn't even know who I am. So stop trying to get me to feel that someone up there has the warm fuzzies for me. It's just another ploy to separate me from my discretionary income because, of course, you're counting on the fact that I wouldn't want to have this guy stop loving me."

3. **FORGIVENESS OF SINS.** Here's a scam that has got to be the world's most effective producer of guilt-fees on the planet. You can kill, steal or torture dumb animals but if you go to the confessional and own up to it, the priest is duty bound to not only not mention it to the cops, but to expiate your sins and send you to heaven clean as a newborn babe. For that, the priest demands loyalty, of course, plus the usual ten Hail Marys, a promise to sin no more and as much money to fix up the church roof as you can drum up from your last break-in.

4. **VIRGIN BIRTH.** Dig it: Mary gives birth to Jesus, the alleged son of god, without being inseminated vaginally by a human male. She is deified for this, sanctified, held up as a virtuous ideal. But what about the rest of us, we women who were unlucky enough to get pregnant the old-fashioned way: Are we sinful? Of course we are, the church says. The church has managed to dub sexual intercourse "sinful" and "dirty" for some 2,000 years. We are encouraged to hide our shameful sexual organs.

Sex can only be engaged in under the rules of the church, and that means standing up in front of a priest and promising to love, honor and obey till death do you

part, which means being bound to another person for the rest of your life even if he (or she) turns out to be Jack the Ripper.

Celibacy, on the other hand, is considered virtuous and doesn't have a whole lot of rules governing it.

The whole concept of sex as sinful is a moneymaker for the church. Just imagine how full the church's collection plates must be on a Sunday morning after a lusty, sinful Saturday night in bushwhacker heaven. Sex is, after all, a compelling reproductive drive that the church has hijacked to keep us all in line.

5. **HEAVEN AND HELL.** This has to be the all-time most profitable moneymaking scheme in the history of the church. Imagine a punishment that is there for any religious infraction--but you can't see the punishment or experience it until you are dead. The church doesn't have to administer the punishment; all it needs to do is say that it will happen.

Buying Afterlife Serenity

Imagine also the church's reward system: a serene afterlife with no earthly worries; in fact, heaven can be whatever you want it to be. So, say you have confessed to your parish priest that you have indulged in extramarital sex. The punishment for that, the priest whispers through the confessional screen, is two years in purgatory. (How does he know this? Does his cell phone have a speed-dial button to hell?) Or, the priest tells you, ten Hail Marys and a donation of a new roof to the church will do a lot to demonstrate your remorse. I suspect many Catholic churches keep their infrastructure in marvelous repair thanks to the wandering eyes of sinners.

Remember that \$25,000 donated to the church by the average middle-class family? That will buy Granny's way out of purgatory, take a couple years off Junior's stint in hell for drugs, and assure that Dad gets into that big golf club in the sky—dreams imperative enough to justify that \$25K check to the church. That the donation is also tax-deductible doesn't hurt, even though, when you stop to think about it, its deductibility suggests government collusion.

The mind is a terrible thing to waste, they say—and wasted it is when it is hampered by the church's saleable delusions. It takes courage to be an atheist. We provide no security bubbles to our atheist constituents by lying about the hereafter; we offer no false comfort, no expiatory promises of redemption for a bribe. Atheists deal with reality, only reality, honest reality, and we think reality is enough. □

Soon-to-Wed Couple Met at NYCA Meetup



Merillat Ann Staat and Manuel Ernesto De León, both of Brooklyn, New York, have announced their engagement. The bride-to-be is the daughter of Henry and Janice Staat of Norman, Oklahoma. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. She is employed as an editor with John Wiley and Sons, Inc. in Hoboken, NJ.

The prospective groom is a son of Fidas and Carmen De León of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He is a graduate of Colegio Dominicano de la Salle in Santo Domingo and received a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo. He is a self-employed IT consultant in New York City.

The wedding is planned for October, 2009 in Norman, Oklahoma. The bride and groom are writing their own secular ceremony for the wedding, which will take place at the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History.

The couple met at a NYCA Meetup at the Stone Creek Lounge in November, 2007.

Letters to Editor

NYCA Bus Poster Program

To the Editor,

Nice job with the NY Times. I appreciate your ability to project atheism as a positive perspective...Good work!

- Sid Finehirsch
Manhattan

To the Editor,

I saw the article in the NY Times about your bus ads and immediately joined up. Thank you for existing. I've been a lifelong Greenwich Village atheist, was raised by one passionate atheist and sort-of atheist, so I did not feel alienated, but I find, nonetheless, my anger increasing as I grow older. I hope that by being a part of this community, I can find peace enough to be more patient with those around me who dabble in religion. My own motto: Religion is for people who need it. It's not the best motto, but it's how I (superciliously, to be sure) cope.

Thanks again,

- Daphne Uviller
Greenwich Village

**ATHEISM:
A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION**

How I Turned an Invocation Into a Provocation

...and Taught Some Officials What We're About



By Ed Buckner, national president of American Atheists

Ed Buckner, president of American Atheists and a resident of Atlanta, GA, was invited to give the opening invocation at the July 28th meeting of the Cobb County, GA, Board of Commissioners. To everyone's surprise, Dr. Buckner accepted the invitation. He saw it as an opportunity to teach some of our elected officials what Atheism is about. Below, the complete text of Dr. Buckner's invocation.

According to my dictionary, an invocation is done to “call on a higher power”—and since we all know that the only supreme power in Cobb County is the citizenry, I speak now in the name of the 700,000 people who live in this county—especially the majority (yes, over half) of those 700,000 who are not members of any church, mosque, temple, or other religious organization—and even more especially, I speak in the name of the overwhelming majority—including anyone I've ever met—who do not want their government to decide for them anything regarding religion or any gods.

I speak as well for those political leaders who despair that success in politics cannot be achieved without hypocritical piety from politicians, and who would prefer to run for office and to govern based on competence and political philosophy rather than on beliefs, real or pretended, in any super-natural beings.

I speak on behalf of Southern Baptists who know that their own Faith and Message declares in chapter 17 that “Church and state should be separate,” and that “The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work.”

I speak in the name of all Americans who know our history and who know, for example, that in 1797 the

U.S. Senate voted unanimously in favor of, and that President John Adams then signed, a treaty with Tripoli that specified that “The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”

I invoke all of these people to urge all the commissioners here, and the thousands of dedicated employees of Cobb County to work hard, ethically, and honestly on our behalf, to represent us well—all things unrelated to religion, of course—and to please avoid the arrogance of thinking you can or ever should express any religious beliefs other than your own

No More Invocations

For any of you who are made uncomfortable by my remarks, who think this is more a provocation than an invocation, who would prefer not to hear such comments at a meeting you came to expecting to hear about government instead of religion and philosophy, please join me in urging that the Cobb County Commissioners and Planning Commissioners cease to open their meetings with public religious invocations of any kind.

For Christians, such exercises are a plain violation of Matthew 6:5-6, but more importantly, they are for all of us an insult to our right to choose our own religion and religious representatives for ourselves, if we want any at all. And these invocations are a violation of the letter and intent of the Constitution of the State of Georgia, of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and of the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified exactly 141 years ago today.

Go and sin no more. ☐

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

SEPT. 13, 2009 (SUNDAY) 12:00 PM
NYC Atheists Brunch / Speaker

Speaker: Fred Walter, Ph.D
Professor of Astronomy
Department of Physics and Astronomy,
Stony Brook University

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decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Subject: Search for Life in the Universe

Dr. Walter will examine our universe as a habitat for life. He will cover aspects of astronomy (the physical conditions in the universe; extrasolar planets), information theory (how do we recognize signals from alien intelligences?), biology (how does intelligent life evolve?), and chemistry (where does life come from in the first place?).

Dr. Walter's objective is to train his students in critical thinking. His fascinating topic considers how new scientific advances will influence your life.

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

Cost: Brunch, \$20 (includes selection of Buffet entrees and salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax, tip.)

SEPT. 15, 2009 (TUESDAY) 7:00 PM
NYCA Meetup

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

Group Leaders: Alexandra Sidiropoulos
Michael Dorian

Subject: Bus driver refuses to drive bus with
Atheist sign

We're trying something new this time: a hosting duo, a male and female. Alexandra, a legal secretary, is a newcomer; Michael, a long-time Meetup favorite, is known for his highly regarded, fascinating and funny TV documentary, "Pizza, The Movie." You'll have an opportunity to buy a DVD of Michael's movie.

Exciting discussions with fellow freethinkers! You are welcome to say what you think. Hang around afterward and mingle with the beautiful hosts!

Cost: Free, but participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for use of their room.

SEPT. 24, 2009 (THURSDAY) 6:30 PM
NYCA MONTHLY MEETING

Speaker: Lucy L. Brown, Ph.D
Professor, Dept. of Neurology & Neuroscience.
Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

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decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Subject: The Brain: Love, Sex and Religion

Dr. Brown will discuss her research how and why the brain reacts to love, sex and religion. Ever wonder why Angelina Jolie turns you on and Laura Bush doesn't? Aside from the obvious, it's all in the neurons and synapses. Come, Dr. Brown will explain it all.

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

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

SEPTEMBER 2009

Sept.	13**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Sept.	15***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
Sept.	24****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

OCTOBER 2009

Oct.	5*	Mon.	7:00 PM	NYCA Philosophy Club
Oct.	11**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Oct.	20***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
Oct.	29****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

* **Location: Call: Roger Smith - 917-363-7470**
 ** **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)

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

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