

# New York City Atheists Inc.

Serving the Tri-State area

An affiliate of American Atheists & Center For Atheism

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG

Box 6060 NY, NY 10150-6060

212-330-6794

JANUARY 2011

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

## PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

### 2010: A Year of Contrasts and A Season of Moving Forward

I will always remember 2010 as the year we received the American Atheists' Award for Leadership and Activism, the year we went after Bishop DiMarzio of the Brooklyn Diocese for making political robocalls and the year we had our phenomenally successful First Annual Comedy Fest.

But it was also the year we had as speakers both an ex-Muslim woman who hid her identity by wearing a Burqa and **Margaret Downey** in a turn-of-the-Century Women's Lib costume--surely a contrast in attitudes toward women if there ever was one.



Mystery Muslim Speaker

It was also the year we attracted a full house at a Brunch when **Ellen Johnson**, the charismatic deposed president of American Atheists (AA), came to speak to us, and we got a full house again when her successor, once removed, **David Silverman**, came to honor us with one of his very first speeches as president of AA.

#### Early Victory In 2010

But even before 2010 started, we had a victory of sorts: In an unprecedented move, New York's Mayor **Michael Bloomberg** invited NYCA to send representatives to his annual Interfaith breakfast, the first time in the history of the event that Atheists had been invited.

Being accepted at a polite civic function of City Hall did not deter us from taking the fighting stance of serving papers on Brooklyn's Catholic **Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio** for making political robocalls during the last election. The Bishop unlawfully tried to sway voters to back a candidate who would go easy on the church's problem of clergy child-molesters.

And so it went in the year 2010: some polite steps forward that signaled more acceptance of Atheism by American society and other events that propelled us—well, sideways—into a fighting stance to advance the Atheist cause even more. We fight on many fronts.



Media at NYC Atheists Press Conference announcing our suit against the Bishop

On the education front, we brought in top-flight speakers to keep our members informed on cutting-edge topics. In February, Stony Brook University's **Dr. Peter Gergen**, a distinguished researcher on stem cells, came to tell us what's new in stem cell research—and we learned that at Stony Brook, stem cells are *already* being used experimentally to regenerate tissue in victims of heart attacks!

Also from Stony Brook was **Dr. Keith Sheppard**, director of Science Education, who in February shocked us by reporting that 20 to 40 percent of American biology teachers are finding ways to avoid teaching evolution to their students even today.

In May, **Dr. W. Richard McCombie** of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, who had been one of the earliest researchers on the Human Genome Project, told us how genome research is today advancing by leaps and bounds.

A favorite of our membership, **Nelson Tebbe**, associate professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School, spoke on the relationship between law, religion and government in March. The personable young law professor captivated many of the law buffs among our members.

But we also had some contrasting speakers from the other end of the believability scale: In November,

a Pagan Priestess, known only as **Beth Anne**, came to tell us about spells and Stonehenge. In April, **Dr. Walter Pitman** of Columbia university presented archeological evidence of the possibility of there having been an actual Noah's Flood in the Middle East in prehistoric times—though many of our Bible naysayers refused to believe that anything in the Bible could have been real.

#### Celebrities Honor Us

From the pantheon of Atheist celebrities, we had as speakers—besides the aforementioned stars **Ellen Johnson** and **Margaret Downey**—**Dr. Michael Newdow** of Supreme Court fame, via Skype. Dr. Newdow—whose mother and sister came to our Brunch to hear him and joined NYCA while here—is a lawyer as well as a physician, and is renowned for suing to have “under god” taken out of our Pledge of Allegiance—and getting as far as the Supreme Court with his suit.



Dr. Michael Newdow

In July, best-selling author **Gay Talese** came to our Brunch to hear **Roderick Bradford**, who wrote a book about American Atheist pioneer D. M. Bennett. (“The Truth Seeker”) and produced a short film about him. Talese, who has also written about D.M. Bennett, is not the only celebrity to attend Atheist functions: best-selling author **Tom Wolfe** has also been known to hobnob with Atheists.



Gay Talese and Roderick Bradford

Then there was **Jason Hagen**, inventor of the Atheist Pocket Debater, a computer application that helps you debate with religionists. In September, he not only told us how he escaped from his Fundamentalist upbringing in the American South but he brought along his guitar and regaled us with an Atheist song he composed, one of the first Atheist songs we've had the pleasure to introduce to our members.

#### Members Take to the Podium

Nor did we overlook our own talented members in choosing speakers. NYCA Member **Tom Crawley**, originally from Ireland, in May gave an excellent in-depth talk on the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland. In January, Member **Robert Costa**, who holds a degree from Oxford in the Classics, regaled us with “The Influence of Religious Ideas on Sex and Displays of the Human Body.”

In January 2010, **Dennis Horvitz** was named NYCA “Atheist of the Year,” an honor that comes with a check. Horvitz hosts two of NYCA's cable shows, as well as our brunches and lectures, where he famously introduces himself as “The David Letterman of the Hopelessly Damned.”

In November, our NYCA public relations expert, **Jane Everhart** (and our Director of Communications), helped American Atheists' new president, Dave Silverman, launch his presidency by getting top-notch publicity for his billboard campaign, the first Atheist billboard ever to be seen in the location, outside the Lincoln Tunnel in New Jersey. The billboard's message was, “You KNOW It's a Myth (with a nativity scene in the background). This season, Celebrate Reason!”

With Everhart's assistance, Silverman was able to get media coverage in the New York Times, Channel 5, 1010 WINS, Fox News, the Bergen Record, CBS, CNN, Metro, the Brooklyn Courier, Air America and—drum roll, please—in an all-time coup, the Atheist billboard actually made an appearance in the news segment on NBC's “Saturday Night Live” show!

#### Favorite Events of the Year

As your president, I'd like to confess that I have my own favorite 2010 events. The first was the smashing success in December of our **Comedy Fest Winter Solstice party**. We got a record crowd of 117 at M.J. Armstrong's Pub and had to turn people away at the door. Our evening's hero was **Professor Irwin Corey**, who at 96 proved he could still hold an audience enthralled. **Jamie Kilstein** and the other Atheist comedians were also hilarious. In 2011, we will strive to find a bigger venue so more people can enjoy this event.



Irwin Corey

Secondly, I found that being chosen to open the American Atheists' (AA) April convention in Newark (in which I used Atheist humor as an 8 a.m. eye opener) provided a moment of deep camaraderie with fellow Atheists who had come to the New York area from all over the country.

I was deeply humbled by American Atheists awarding me the prestigious Outreach Award for Outstanding Leadership and Activism.

Onward and upward, friends. The world is awaiting further Atheist progress in 2011. □

Editor's Q and A

## NYCA 2010 Year-End Awards



By Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

I appreciate your occasional humorous article and am wondering why you, unlike many other publications, don't give out those amusing and enjoyable end-of-year awards that are often so thought provoking.

--Brad from Bay Ridge

Dear Brad,

Wonder no more. Here's our contribution to the pantheon of end-of-year performance awards.

**The Killing the Golden Goose Award:** To the Board of Directors of the Center for Inquiry (CFI), which ousted its founder and longtime president, Paul Kurtz—who, when he left, took with him CFI's biggest financial contributor.



Paul Kurtz

**The Sock It to 'Em Award:** To Blair Scott, of Huntsville Alabama, Director of Communications of American Atheists, for not mincing words on the Atheist billboard in Alabama. It says, of religion, simply, "You Know It's a Scam."



Blair Scott

**The Captain Bligh Award** goes to Paul Kurtz. Capt. Bligh in *Mutiny on the Bounty* outfoxed the mutineers who dumped him into a lifeboat by paddling for 47 days to safety. Kurtz, after being dumped by his Board, picked up the pieces and, last we heard, was rumored to be starting another Atheist organization virtually across the street from CFI.

**The Bonnie & Clyde Chutzpah Award:** To Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn's Catholic Diocese who had the nerve to make illegal robocalls to try to get his parishioners to vote for a politician who would protect the church from being sued by sexual-abuse victims. That DiMarzio's candidate lost despite the robocalls, gives us some confidence in the American voter.

**The Sarah Palin Quitting Your Job Casually Award:**

To Stuart Bechman, president of Atheists Alliance International (AAI), who on the plane to the Montreal Convention decided to quit his presidency the very next day.



Stuart Bechman

**The Aw Shucks Award:** To Nick Lee, who was unexpectedly elected president of AAI in Montreal after Bechman's resignation and claimed he wasn't sure how it all happened.

**Always Leave 'Em Laughing Award:** To comedian Professor Irwin Corey, known as the World's Greatest Authority, who at age 96 proved at the NYCA Solstice Comedy Fest that laughter is eternal and so is he.

**The Tell It Like It Is Award:** To Minnesota biology prof PZ Myers for using his colorful vocabulary and his popular blog to skewer pseudo-intellectual poseurs in the Atheist community. No word-mincer, he.



PZ Myers

**The Let's Hold Hands and Sing Kum Ba Ya Award:**

To author and Tufts Professor Daniel Dennett, who asked an AAI convention audience to sing along with some Atheist "hymns" he brought to the Montreal convention. Some did, others declared him "kitschy." Where is Pete Seeger when you need him?

**The John Edwards Bad Timing Award:** To New York's so-called Coalition of Reason for holding their Solstice Party the same night as NYCA's smashingly successful Comedy Fest.

**The Rahm Emanuel Grabbing-Opportunity Award:** To AA president Dave Silverman for recruiting Stuart Bechman to oversee AA's affiliates nationwide just days after he resigned from the AAI presidency. Note to Silverman: Just keep him off long plane rides. □

## CHURCH TWISTS PI TO CONFORM TO ITS CONFLICTING REALITIES



By Ron Widelec

Truth is a notoriously difficult term to define. Perhaps truth is simply an accurate statement or a factual bit of information. Maybe truth is a matter of perception in which something is true if it is perceived as true. Turning truth into so subjective a thing makes the word almost meaningless; a hypothetical ideal that we create, rather than a testable, provable, verifying measure of reality. To make truth subjective is extremely dangerous; it creates a world in which truth has no meaning and reality can be anything which someone can choose it to be.

These differing views of truth highlight the very real differences in the outlook of the religious vis-à-vis the scientific and logical. One of the most glaring examples of this can be seen in the debate between supporters of creationism (in its numerous forms) and evolution. Despite the fact that the evidence overwhelmingly supports the fact that evolution has taken place, and continues to take place, creationists persist in claiming that evolution is a myth perpetrated by 'ivory tower,' liberal, Atheistic elites.

To creationists, reality is not something to be studied, but rather, something that is known through the reading of an ancient text. Any "fact" that differs from this ancient text cannot be true under any circumstances; the evidence must be wrong, the fossils forged or dated improperly, the information a hoax, the scientist a charlatan.

### Religion Sought to Change Pi

Recently, while researching the Creationist movement of the 1920s, I came across the most glaring example of this difference in perception of truth.

Our universe has certain mathematical constants. For example, a square will always have four sides and four corners. These sides and corners will all be equal. The corners will be 90 degrees and, when added, will reach a sum of 360 degrees. These mathematical laws cannot change, as they are the very definition of a square. Should any of these measurements change, the shape would cease to be a square.

Circles have laws, too, such as: The circumference will always equal twice the value of the radius multiplied by Pi. The area of a circle will always equal the radius squared multiplied by Pi. These facts are not subject to opinion, but that would not stop some conservative Christians in the 1920s who, based on a biblical passage, sought to have the value of Pi changed.

The passage (I Kings 7:23), as described on the Institute for Creation Research website, states that King Solomon had a basin that was 30 cubits around and ten cubits across, making  $\text{Pi}=3$  exactly. Evidently, in the 1920s, some conservative Christians were under the impression that Pi is something other than a mathematical fact that cannot change under any condition. To conservative Christians, Pi was theoretical; something up for discussion rather than a verifiable assertion of reality.

### Pi Cannot Be Altered

Like evolution, Pi is a fact of nature rather than a contrivance of man. Neither was created by man; they are truths that mankind has discovered by studying reality.

Imagine what math and engineering would look like if students were taught that  $\text{Pi}=3$  rather than 3.14. All 'circles' would spiral inwardly, seeking in vain to complete the circumference like an object circling a star but not moving quite fast enough to achieve a steady orbit, inching ever closer and closer to inevitable destruction. Comparable mishaps would befall the study of biology, medicine, and other related sciences if we allow those with so skewed a view of reality to determine the nature of truth.

With this in mind, we must consider what other truths is religion obscuring with its twisted version of the world? What other misconceptions that go against the grain of scientific reality is religion trying to force down our throats? □

*Ron Widelec, an educator based in Long Island, has been writing thoughtful articles for this newsletter since its inception.*

## Letter to Editor Solstice Comedy Fest

To the Editor,

The Winter Solstice party was thoroughly enjoyable. (Living in the hinterlands as I do, I can only participate once in a while in New York events.) It's nice to have the opportunity to reconnect with like-minded people, an antidote to so much religious nonsense of the holiday season. Also, it seems that the organization has grown considerably; that's great. Finally, the First Annual NYC Atheists Comedy Fest was a hoot.

All this certainly should correct another of the silly believers' beliefs: that Atheists are grumpy loners. Of course, we already knew we're not.

I am happy to renew my membership to help you keep up the good work.  
Happy New Year to all,

Cathy Clare  
Katonah, NY

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### NYCA Members Attend Mayor's Interfaith Breakfast



For the second year in a row, New York City Atheists Inc. was invited to attend Mayor Michael Bloomberg's annual Interfaith Breakfast on the last day of 2010. From left to right are NYCA Members Joe Bonime, Elizabeth Gordon, Dennis Horvitz, Maria Astifidis and Dr. Harry Graber. 2009 was the first year that Atheists were invited to this civic event when the Mayor's Community Affairs Commissioner, Nazli Parvizi, urged the Mayor to include "those of no faith" to the breakfast. It appears that the inclusion of Atheists has become a New York City tradition at City Hall.

### RENEW YOUR 2011 NYC ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP

**(SEE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION PAGE 6)**

New York City Atheists, Inc. is an association dedicated to promoting the total and absolute separation of church and state, to educating and informing the public about Atheism, to providing a forum for discussion about Atheism and to promoting the Atheist lifestyle and values.

Your contribution enables us to continue our in-depth programs for our members of educational and scientific lectures, support groups, Brunches, a philosophy club, discussion meetups and social events. It also enables us to sue when the cause is just, (such as our suit of Brooklyn's Catholic Bishop for making political robocalls), to publicize the Atheism lifestyle with our street tabling, bus poster campaign and lobbying, our Web site and four Cable TV shows a week.

We conduct a Blood Donor program to counter the so-called National Day of Prayer, we have produced Atheist plays and musicals, sponsored an Atheists' cruise to Canada, stopped religious displays in New York parks, demonstrated in Washington and resolved workplace complaints about prayer meetings in work places.

**We could not do this work without your support. Send in your membership application today!**



**NEW YORK CITY ATHEISTS INC.**  
WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG 212-330-6794

**NYC ATHEISTS — 2011 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM**

**Subject: Membership (January 1 to December 31, 2011)**

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

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

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

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

**YOUR 2011 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE**

Basic \_\_ \$ 25      Friend \_\_ \$ 100      Sustainer \_\_ \$ 250  
Patron \_\_ \$ 500      Benefactor \_\_ \$ 1000

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Two Payment options:**

1) NYC Atheists Website: [www.nyc-atheists.org](http://www.nyc-atheists.org)

2) CHECK PAYABLE TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC.

**SEND APPLICATION TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. (Membership)**  
P.O. Box 6060  
NY, NY 10150-6060

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

**JANUARY 9, 2011 (SUN.)      12:00 PM**  
**NYC Atheists Brunch & Speaker**

**SUBJECT: QUESTIONING RELIGION VIA  
 COMEDY / HUMOR**

**“Why Comedy Can Enhance Our Atheist Lives and  
 How to Use Comedy as a Tool in The Religion  
 /Atheism Debate,”** a presentation by psychotherapist  
 Paul Herzich with audio/visual assistance by Gabe  
 Rodriguez. Herzich will speak after each video and then  
 open the floor to discussion.

WHERE: THE PRESS BOX PUB & RESTAURANT  
 932 Second Avenue (bet. 49<sup>th</sup> & 50<sup>th</sup> Sts.) -2nd Floor

COST: BRUNCH is \$20, which includes a selection of  
 Buffet Entrees and salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax and  
 tip. We encourage seconds on the delicious Eggs  
 Benedict and Eggs Florentine.

**JANUARY 12, 2011 (WED.)      7:00 PM**  
**NYC Atheists Living Without Religion Group**

GROUP LEADER: LINDA BLAIKIE, L.C.S.W

SUBJECT: THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER

"Everybody needs somebody sometime...." If you're a  
 religious fanatic, evangelist or fundamentalist, you've  
 got god to talk to when you're lonely. Or your favorite  
 saint. Or an angel. Or a dear departed friend who, you  
 fantasize, is talking to you from heaven. Or from that  
 other place.

But what are Atheists supposed to do? It's New Year's  
 Eve and everyone you know is in Maui, Club Med or a  
 Yoga camp in Arizona. Your ex-wife met someone on  
 Match.com. Your ex-girlfriend has hooked up with a  
 Presbyterian. eHarmony has turned you down. (Is it  
 because you are a smoker, you wonder. Or because you  
 are an Atheist?) So you are nursing a Stella Artois at the  
 Stone Creek and wishing that Honey, Tiffany, Juliet or  
 Betsy were there too. Well, at least it's Chicken Wing  
 night, with Buffalo wings ten cents each. How many of  
 those will incinerate a lonely heart?

Hang in, we've got a couple of good answers for you.  
 Atheists may not have a Big Guy in the Sky who is  
 available all the time for consultation; Saints are just a  
 football team to us; an angel is a silhouette you make in  
 the snow and our dear departed friends are--hey, really,  
 really gone.

But Atheists are smart, we've got some answers, we've  
 got each other. Come and share with us how you handle  
 that blue, blue night when Jay Leno isn't enough, you've  
 read all of Dawkins and not even Jamie Kilstein can  
 make you laugh about being alone. Tell us all about it.

LOCATION: MOONSTRUCK DINER  
 449 THIRD AVE. /31ST -2ND FLOOR

COST: Free to members (can join at meeting if  
 desired), but participants are expected to purchase a  
 drink or food to compensate Moonstruck for use of  
 their space.

**JANUARY 17, 2011 (Tue.)      7:00 PM**  
**NYC Atheists Meetup**

GROUP LEADER: Michael Dorian



SUBJECT: What Are the Worst Harms That Have Been  
 Done Over the Centuries by the Irrational Thinking of  
 Religiidiots? Come and share your list of Bads with us!  
 Drowning witches? Silencing Galileo? Outlawing  
 abortion? Making us eat wafers at Communion? O, the  
 horror, the horror...

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

COST: Free. Participants are expected to purchase a  
 drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for use of their  
 space.

**JANUARY 27, 2011 (Wednesday.)      6:30 PM**  
**NYC Atheists Monthly Meeting**

SPEAKER: TBA

SUBJECT: TBA

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

COST: We would appreciate a donation of \$5 to help  
 cover the cost of room rental.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

### JANUARY 2011

|      |        |       |          |                                    |
|------|--------|-------|----------|------------------------------------|
| Jan. | 9*     | Sun.  | 12:00 PM | NYCA Brunch / Speaker              |
| Jan. | 12**   | Wed.  | 7:00 PM  | NYCA Living Without Religion Group |
| Jan. | 17***  | Tue.  | 7:00 PM  | NYCA Meet-Up                       |
| Jan. | 27**** | Thur. | 6:30 PM  | NYCA Monthly Meeting               |

### FEBRUARY 2011

|      |        |       |          |                                    |
|------|--------|-------|----------|------------------------------------|
| Feb. | 4**    | Wed.  | 7:00 PM  | NYCA Living Without Religion Group |
| Feb. | 13*    | Sun.  | 12:00 PM | NYCA Brunch / Speaker              |
| Feb. | 15***  | Tue.  | 7:00 PM  | NYCA Meet-Up                       |
| Feb. | 24**** | Thur. | 6:30 PM  | NYCA Monthly Meeting               |

- \* Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50<sup>th</sup> St.) – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor
- \*\* Moonstruck Diner – 449 Third Ave. (31<sup>st</sup>) – 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

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

NYCA  
P.O. Box 6060  
NY, NY 10150-6060

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