

NYC ATHEISTS INC.



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AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

10 Reasons Why You Should Go To The American Atheists Convention

Conventions are not just conventions anymore. They have evolved into huge gatherings where history is made and policies are thrashed out. New leaders debut, ideas surface, coalitions form. Conventions are where "it's happening" and if you aren't there, you are out of the loop. You have only to watch a Democratic or Republican convention on TV to know that conventions are like an ant colony, with a thousand things going on at once: some official things, some clandestine corridor stuff, some in front of the cameras, some behind the scenes.



This year in Salt Lake City--home of what may be the biggest cult in the world, Mormonism--American Atheists (AA) is holding its 2014 convention on April 17 to 20th. It will undoubtedly be AA's biggest convention ever. It will be more iconoclastic than ever and will draw more media coverage. It will debut more brashly honest Atheist billboards, inspire more Atheists and irritate more Salt Lake City residents than even the election of Obama did. I plan to be there and hope you will be there, too.

Attendance Has Snowballed

I have been going to AA conventions for nine years now, starting with the 2005 convention in Philadelphia, where some 150 Atheists and 7 speakers showed up. That number grew to about 200 attendees and 14 speakers the following year in San Antonio, the city to which the founder of AA, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, was abducted

and where she and her family were killed. That San Antonio convention was dedicated to the memory of O'Hair and her family.



Madalyn Murray O'Hair

Contrast those early figures to last year's AA convention in Austin, Texas: More than 1,000 attendees listened to 47 speakers. The 2013 AA convention also presented Atheist comedians, an Atheist band, an Atheist Art Show (which sold out all the paintings exhibited), an address by U.S. Congressman Pete Stark, a Costume Dinner Party, scores of booths selling secular products and at least a dozen authors autographing their recently published books. We've come a long way, baby.



P.Z.MYERS

Spectacular 2014 Convention

The 2014 convention promises to be even bigger and more spectacular. This year, AA is expecting some 1,500 attendees to hear more than 50 speakers, including professional football player Chris Kluwe, who is the keynote speaker. Our best-known secular stars will be there: P Z Myers, master of *Pharyngula*, secularism's red hot blog; California's feisty blogger Greta Christina; radio host Matt Dillahunty, Arizona state representative Juan Mendez and youth leader JT Eberhard--to name just a few.

There is going to be a Comedy Show, a Costume Dinner (expect, among the costumes, at least a dozen Jesuses, a handful of Virgin Marys, a Satan or two and at least one Pope). And, new this year, there will be several activist-training workshops on things like “So You Want to Be on Fox News?” and “So You Want to Run for Office?”



Greta Christina

But I’ve found that the best reasons for going to an AA national convention are much deeper, more profound and more satisfying than just the program and the workshops. Here are 10 reasons why you should use your vacation budget to fly out to Salt Lake City for the 2014 AA convention:

10 Reasons Why You Should Go to the Convention

1. It’s a constructive and rewarding vacation. Where else can you stay in a first-class hotel at a discounted price, enjoy the good food of a Hilton chef in a strange American city that you wouldn’t ordinarily explore, surrounded by the smartest, most interesting people in the nation?

2. You will meet national and state Atheist leaders and learn the joys, the woes, the setbacks and the victories of Atheists from Seattle to Miami.

3. You will get new ideas to take home. I always come home from a convention buoyant, inspired, invigorated, eager to escalate my Atheist advocacy. I’ve learned what others are doing in their towns (an Atheist Christmas tree? an Atheist softball team?) and my mind is filled with new ideas for our New York group.

4. You will make new Atheist friends, renew old friendships. I look forward this year to my reunion with my old friends Elaine and Eric Stone, who have moved to the West Coast. I have also made staunch new friends at all the conventions I’ve been to--people from Texas, Oklahoma and California--and we often exchange newsletters with them during the year.



Edwin Kagin

5. You will experience unexpected drama and heart-wrenching events. It happens every year. In Washington

DC in 2012, it was the year of the Clergy Project when disaffected pastors “came out” as Atheists on stage, some weeping. The year before, it was attorney Edwin Kagin “de-baptizing” people with a hair dryer. Every year has an exciting, often-unplanned theme and unexpected drama.

6. You will meet Atheist Stars, Celebrities and Authors.

I was glad to have met Christopher Hitchens at Washington convention before his untimely death. But I’ve also met author Richard Dawkins; I’ve gone pub crawling with P Z Myers, master of the red-hot blog, *Pharyngula*; I’ve urged ex-pastor Jerry DeWitt to come speak to us in New York and I’ve had breakfast with heads of state affiliates. Where else can you meet so many Atheist celebrities in one place?



Jerry DeWitt

7. You will learn new things from the speakers. The speakers include psychiatrists, lawyers, feminists, experts of all kinds--(even once, an Internal Revenue agent, who assured us at the San Antonio convention that Madalyn Murray O’Hair had paid all her taxes before her death.) I have learned from a sex therapist that religion has a bad effect on sex; from a feminist, I heard why there are so few women in Atheism; from a psychologist, I discovered how difficult it is to unlearn religion and from a worried mother/author, I found out how organized religion is creeping into our schools.

8. You can buy Gifts, Books and Souvenirs galore at the dozens of vendor booths. I always stock up on Atheist t-shirts to give to friends, as well as autographed books and calendars. Women conventioners tend to go crazy over Atheist jewelry; a sell-out every year is a neck-chain with the American Atheist logo set in what appear to be diamonds (actually, rhinestones).

9. You can promote your own ideas - I brought up the idea of “de-baptizing” at a convention some years ago and was gratified to see it put into effect by AA at recent conventions.

10. You will have fun! You will find out that nobody has more fun than Atheists, probably because we are among the brightest, hippest people on the planet. We rise to any occasion with quips, banter, witticisms and repartee. We know we have only one life to live, so we try to enjoy every moment. Come and join us in the laughs, the tears, the drama and the newsworthy events that are a part of that national celebration we call an Atheist convention. □

Is Religion a Benign Belief or a Virulent Delusion?



By Tyson Gill, PhD.

When I wrote my book “Belief in Science and the Science of Belief,” I intentionally characterized belief as just that. I purposely avoided engaging in any further characterizations that might be considered unnecessarily inflammatory or personal. However, more recently I wonder whether we shouldn’t be more frank and direct in our language selection.

This change of heart was prompted by the recent debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham on evolution. Ham challenged Nye to a debate on creationism vs. evolution, and the lengthy exchange took place on February 4 at his Creation Museum in Kentucky. You can easily find the debate online if you missed it. You would probably recognize Bill Nye as the amiable “Science Guy” from his highly-regarded science show that ran from 1993 through 1998. Mr. Nye continues to be a passionate advocate and popularizer of science. His challenger, Mr. Ham, the president of the Answers in Genesis ministry, is a tireless evangelist for young earth creationism and a key principal behind the Creation Museum, which you may have glimpsed in Bill Maher’s film, “Religulous.”

As I listened to the specious and even ludicrous arguments put forth by Mr. Ham during the debate, I could not help but wonder whether belief is far too benign a word for what Ham and those like him suffer from. Perhaps delusion is a far more accurate word to characterize his kind of thinking, and perhaps we should not be so very reluctant to call it delusional.

Delusions: Persist Despite Evidence

Now, before the psychologists amongst you get all up in arms that I’m diagnosing my fellow human beings, let me assure you that I use the word delusional purely in a lay sense, not as any kind of clinical diagnosis. My own familiarity with the concept only goes as far as the Wikipedia page on delusion. But according to that page, a delusion is defined as follows:

“A delusion is a belief held with strong conviction despite superior evidence to the contrary. As a pathology, it is distinct from a belief based on false or incomplete information, confabulation, dogma, illusion, or other effects of perception.”

This definition establishes a clear distinction between belief and delusion. A belief is simply an unsupported conclusion based on insufficient or incorrect

information. A delusion is a belief that persists regardless of any amount of evidence to the contrary.

Bizarre Delusions

In the case of Ken Ham, his creationist views go far beyond a mistaken belief based on false or incomplete information. He clearly maintains his unalterable conviction despite incomparably superior evidence to the contrary. Certainly he would argue that the evidence for evolution is not actually superior, but any delusional person would similarly deny all evidence contrary to their delusion. An objective person could not help but conclude that the evidence for evolution goes far beyond superior to overwhelming and that the convoluted arguments that Ham puts forth to deny this evidence are utterly irrational.

Delusions are generally categorized into four distinct groups. According to Wikipedia again, a “Bizarre Delusion” is defined as follows:

“A delusion that is very strange and completely implausible; an example of a bizarre delusion would be that aliens have removed the reporting person’s brain.”

It seems clear that the thinking of Ken Ham and other evolution deniers should be fairly categorized as a Bizarre Delusion. Their creationist view is certainly “completely implausible” and it would be considered “very strange” if it were not so commonplace.

Are We Enabling Delusions?

Words matter and they should be used accurately. In principle, if a more accurate word is available it should be used. It seems undeniable that delusion is a far more appropriate word than belief to describe the thinking of Ham and others. But words also have power, and we should avoid words that convey implications or elicit reactions we would like to avoid. So even if the bizarre thinking of Ham and others like him is delusional by definition, what value is there in labeling it as such? Doesn’t that just necessarily alienate those you would like to bring around to a less delusional way of thinking?

In this case, the word belief is far too benign in my opinion. It is not merely polite and non-confrontational but it actively helps enable these delusions. It suggests something harmless and even reasonable and acceptable. However, delusions are seldom harmless and never reasonable or acceptable. Calling this kind of delusional

thinking “belief” gives it more legitimacy than it deserves. If we were to consistently refer to this kind of thinking as delusions rather than as beliefs, we would more accurately communicate the true nature and real-world implications of this thinking.

Hit Them With Reality

Certainly using the word delusion instead of belief would elicit a much more visceral response by opponents and allies alike, but I for one would welcome that reaction. I say call a delusion a delusion and stand by the implicit assertion that such delusional thinking goes way beyond mere belief and that it is irrational, unacceptable and harmful. Calling a delusion a delusion may be just the hit of reality that these deluded people need, or at least those influenced by them need, to honestly reconsider the soundness of their reasoning.

So the next time someone espouses delusionary thinking, consider calling it out (nicely) as delusion. Instead of responding with the customary “I respect your beliefs but I don’t share them,” you might say something more provocative like: “Sorry but I can’t give any credence to such delusions.” If the other party questions how you can characterize their belief as a delusion, you should now be able to give them a very clear and compelling justification for your use of that word.

Dr. Gill served for several years in the Peace Corps teaching science in rural Africa. His outstandingly readable book, "Belief in Science and the Science of Belief--A Guidebook to Fact-Based Thinking," is available on Amazon.com. □

**ATHEISM
IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF**

**JOIN
NYC ATHEISTS – FACEBOOK**
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/New-York-City-Atheists/187304681037>

**WE JUST BELIEVE
IN ONE LESS GOD**

**WE ARE NOT NON-BELIEVERS,
WE ARE REALISTS**

**“To you, I’m an atheist.
To god, I’m the loyal opposition.”**

— Woody Allen

**“That which can be asserted without evidence,
can be dismissed without evidence.”**

— Christopher Hitchens

**“Is man merely a mistake of god’s?
Or god merely a mistake of man?”**

— Friedrich Nietzsche

**“Those who can make you believe absurdities,
can make you commit atrocities.”**

— Voltaire

**“Religion is excellent stuff for keeping common people quiet.
Religion is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich.”**

— Napoleon

What Is Bad Theology?

An Ex-Pastor Spills the Bad, the Ugly and the Outrageous



By David Madison, Ph.D

“I don’t think you ought to read so much theology,” said Lord Peter. “It has a brutalizing influence.”

One of Sam Harris’ most provocative statements in his book, “The End of Faith,” is: “Theology is now little more than a branch of human ignorance.” But is this really so outrageous? Over the centuries, theologians have claimed to know about the gods. Sacred books are filled with “information” about gods, and theologians have written thousands of books elaborating on this “information”—arriving, by the way, at vastly different conclusions. As we know, they are very good at making things up as they go along. But we are simply not in any position, equipped with a mammalian brain, on one planet, to make claims about “ultimate reality”—as theologians would put it. Actually, we should say that theologians can be credited with thousands of years of guesswork.

From this perspective, it is possible to list examples of bad theology.

- Bad theology claims to know more than we do know or can know, e.g., “god exists outside time and space.” How would anyone know that?
- Bad theology pretends to know about god(s), but fails to demonstrate, beyond a reasonable doubt, that its sources of knowledge of these gods are reliable and verifiable. When I pick up a book about theology, I want to read on page one how the author knows what he is about to tell me about god. But theologians usually skip this step. If they talk about god based on the Bible, prayer, visions, revelations or mediation, I know that bad theology is not far behind.
- Bad theology assumes the validity of personal opinions and feelings about god. But personal opinions and feelings count for nothing when we’re trying to figure out how the cosmos runs. Individual believers and worshippers are even more prone to bias, emotion and guesswork than the theologians.
- Bad theology claims that it doesn’t need verification beyond faith and prayer—and that people who want verification are shallow or arrogant.

- Bad theology commonly caters to wishful thinking and narcissism, e.g., everything is part of “god’s plan”....and he is listening to my prayers. “My god runs the universe” does not align well with “My prayer will get him to cure my mother’s cancer.” He has to be asked or coaxed? No evidence—other than personal feelings—is provided to support this thinking.



- Anything that looks like rationalization of Stone Age barbarism, e.g., human sacrifice or the death of Jesus to satisfy an angry god, is bad theology.
- Bad theology projects the worst aspects of human personality onto deities, e.g., a god is angry or jealous.
- Theology that looks like it emerged from a twisted, fanatical mind is bad theology, e.g., Joseph Smith and Mormonism. Need I say more?
- Bad theology comes up with sophomoric excuses for why god allows so much suffering and evil in the world, e.g., god punishes people or gives them pain to improve character. god is let off the hook because we have free will or because He has a rival (the devil) who causes all the trouble; or even, because god can’t help it. All of these excuses are deeply flawed.
- Bad theology makes promises about what will happen to people when they die. People are commonly terrified by the prospect that, at death, consciousness ceases forever; they don’t like the idea of oblivion. Religions

Cont...

have, throughout history, traded on such fears. They offer promises or threats about the afterlife based on no evidence whatever: the intuitions—and craftiness—of priests and prophets just aren't good enough. In fact, the afterlife pitch is an aspect of theology that is unconscionably immoral. People make decisions on how to treat—and abuse—other people based on their certainties about the afterlife.

- Theology that looks like it is anchored to—and promotes—human prejudice and territoriality is bad theology.
- ‘god of the gaps’ is bad theology: phenomena that cannot yet be explained are credited to god. We do not yet know what caused the Big Bang, but cosmologists keep searching for answers because ‘god did it’ is not an answer at all.
- Theology that glories in ignorance—it can't come to terms with advancing human knowledge and the findings of science—cannot be good theology. Timothy Ferris chose a very appropriate title for his book, “Coming of Age in the Milky Way.” We have been coming of age during the last two hundred years. The knowledge revolution of the last two centuries has generally put theology in a defensive

position. The ad hoc justifications have multiplied, and the result is usually--bad theology. □



Dr. David Madison, an ex-pastor in the Methodist church, has a Ph.D in Biblical Studies

Fun!

Celebrities!

Inspiration!

American Atheists 2014 National Convention, April 17-20 Salt Lake City, Utah at the Hilton Salt Lake City Center

For more information: <http://atheists.org/convention2014>

Top Speakers



Chris Kluwe
Professional Football Player



Rev. Barry Lynn
Americans United



David Morrison, PhD
Astrophysicist



PZ Myers
Biologist & Blogger

Workshops

Dinner with the Stars

Awards Dinner

Panel Sessions

Comedy Show

Costume Dinner

Art Exhibit

Vendor Booths

UPCOMING MARCH EVENTS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

MARCH 9, 2014 (SUN.) 12 NOON
NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER

NOT TO BE MISSED: GREAT ANALYSIS AND ANIMATED FILM

SPEAKER: DAN CRANDEL, Educator

SUBJECT: THE BIBLE CONFIDENTIAL: WHAT DO THEY NOT WANT YOU TO KNOW

When Dan Crandel told a “born again” Christian that he was an Atheist, he was told to read the Bible. Crandel did and was shocked. He wanted to tell this shocking story, especially to children. So he has designed a Bible Studies Coloring Book, a book of “Disturbing Bible Stories” and a puzzle game. He has also made a fabulous animated video. Learn about: 2-Kings 2:23-25 Do not embarrass bald men; Colossians 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters; 1-Timothy 2:11-14 Women, be quiet ...

LOCATION: The Press Box Restaurant, 932 Second Avenue (bet. 49th & 50th Sts.) -2nd Floor.

COST: BRUNCH is \$20, which includes a selection of buffet entrees, salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax and tip.

MARCH 12, 2014 (WED.)
NYC ATHEISTS “LIVING WITH ATHEISM”

**WILL BE ON SABBATICAL
 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**

MARCH 18, 2014 (TUE.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS DISCUSSION MEETUP

GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN



SUBJECT: DORIAN PICKS TIMELY, LIVELY TOPICS THAT SPUR RAMBUNCTIOUS DISCUSSION.

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) – REAR ROOM

COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

MARCH 21, 2014 (FRI.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS PHILOSOPHY CLUB

NYC ATHEISTS HAPPY HOUR / BOOK AND FILM CLUB WILL RETURN IN MAY

HOST: ROGER SMITH, Philosophy Maven



SUBJECT: 'EMERGENCE AND WHITEHEAD,' A RECORDED LECTURE BY PROFESSOR LAWRENCE CAHOONE.

“Whitehead created a metaphysics of the ultimate processes and entities of nature that took relativity and the quantum into account...”

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) – REAR ROOM

COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

MARCH 27, 2014 (THUR.) 6:30PM
NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING

SPEAKER: MITCHELL STEPHENS, Ph.D.



Mitchell Stephens is a professor of journalism and mass communications at New York University

SUBJECT: “IMAGINE THERE'S NO HEAVEN: HOW ATHEISM HELPED CREATE THE MODERN WORLD”

The historical achievements of religious belief have been large and well chronicled. But what about the accomplishments of those who have challenged religion? Traveling from classical Greece to twenty-first century America, *Imagine There's No Heaven* explores the role of disbelief in shaping Western civilization

LOCATION: SLC Conference Center– 15 West 39th St.(3rd Floor)

COST: We ask for a donation of **\$10** to help cover the cost of room rental.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

MARCH 2014

MAR.	LIVING W/ATHEISM - WILL BE ON SABBATICAL UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE			
MAR.	9*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
MAR.	18**	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
MAR.	21**	Fri.	7:00 PM	NYCA Philosophy Club
MAR.	27***	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

APRIL 2014

APR.	LIVING W/ATHEISM - WILL BE ON SABBATICAL UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE			
APR.	13*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
APR.	15**	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
APR.	17-20****	Thur. – Sun.	AMERICAN ATHEISTS CONVENTION	
APR.	18**	Fri.	7:00 PM	NYCA Philosophy Club
APR.	24***	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

- * Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th St.) – 2nd Floor
 ** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) – Rear Room
 *** SLC Conference Center – 15 WEST 39TH STREET – 3rd Floor
 **** SALT LAKE CITY

NYCA CABLE SHOWS

		<u>MNN</u>	<u>RCN</u>	<u>FIOS</u>
Wednesdays:	5:30 PM	Atheism in History	1997	84 35
	6:30 PM	This Week in Atheism	1997	84 35
Thursdays:	5:00 PM	NYC Atheists	67	85 36
	5:30 PM	Atheists Book Club	67	85 36

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