

NYC ATHEISTS INC.



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AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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MAY & JUNE 2015



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

LETTER TO MAYOR de BLASIO DESTROYING SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE BEGINS AT HOME

Recent news articles have reported that Mayor de Blasio, attempting to expand his pre-Kindergarten school program for four-year-olds, has invited the participation of New York's Hasidic Jewish community.



Mayor de Blasio with pre-kindergarten students

As a condition of their participation, the community's Yeshivas (schools for Orthodox students) have demanded the right to hold formal half-hour prayer periods after lunch for all students. They have already won the right to discriminate in the hiring of teachers with a believers-only policy, and to use religious books as texts for non-religious subjects, such as math. Their ultimate goal is to receive public funding from the pre-K program with no supervision or restriction, enabling them to devise their own curriculum, rather than be guided by the city's.

Unintended Consequences

By extending these concessions, we have not only permitted a clear breach of the Separation of Church and State, but have created opportunities for the city's many other religious groups to follow suit in their own schools: Muslims (who pray five times a day), Catholics, and even other less well-established communities on the fringes of society—all eager to receive the bounty of public funding without having to comply with the basics that govern public school education. Having given an inch, the city will be besieged by those who are planning to hijack a mile:

for single-gender schools, separate busing for boys and girls, non-English curricula, Special Ed, Personal Lifestyle, and Beliefs. Drawing a line between admirable goals and the blackmail that can be required to reach them will become impossible.

Religious Texts Used for Secular Subjects

Yeshivas traditionally teach most of their courses in Yiddish, and others in Hebrew. They favor Jewish history over American history and culture. So non-English texts must be used by students, leaving them (despite their American citizenship) deficient in the language skills and knowledge needed for higher education and participation in our secular society. I once asked a Hasidic rabbi how geometry could be taught using the Talmud. I cannot forget his response: "What is geometry?"

Trust

There are no precedents in the city for the current pre-K initiative, nor as yet to any of the problems that its inclusion in the private religious school sector will generate. But certainly—given the eye-popping budget items it will underwrite—being able to trust both the city officials who will disburse the funds and the school administrators who will receive (and spend) them, is an essential concern, especially as the program begins rolling out through the city. So it is critical that oversight be in place.



Yeshiva pre-kindergarten students

Without pointing a finger at anyone before the fact,

I have been following what is happening in a similar situation in East Ramapo, NY, and urge that it be considered as a cautionary tale for what could easily happen right here at home, where many of the same elements are waiting in the wings to converge.

East Ramapo's public school population is primarily Hispanic (29%) and African-America (57%), but the primarily Orthodox Jewish men who have come to dominate the school board support low taxes (even though they have many children and send them to private religious schools). As a result, the board has been quick to cut programs and personnel in the school district, and to divert the money saved by these "economies" into local Orthodox schools. Along with senior citizens (who have no children), they have formed an informal voting bloc that keeps taxes down.

Following a classic give-'em-an-inch-and-they'll-take-a-mile strategy, expenses for private school items previously covered by public funds (transportation, textbooks, and Special Ed) have ballooned as more and more Jewish children have been transferred into private religious schools, leaving less and less money for public school needs. Currently, 9,000 students are enrolled in East Ramapo's public schools, and 20,000 in its Yeshivas.

The board has mismanaged and wildly overspent its budget. Heightened tensions have boiled over into shouting matches and confrontations at meetings with town and state officials, who are insisting that the district budget be balanced. No easy solution is in sight, and it's become an ugly story that newspapers, magazines, and YouTube can't get enough of. You can Google the storm of print reportage, and view many of the videos online. So don't relax just because East Ramapo is out of town; many of its Orthodox Jews have relocated there from the very same Brooklyn Hasidic community now strong-arming the mayor for pre-K favors. Like I said, a cautionary tale...

Ultimate Strategy/Objectives

While the struggle to organize New York's pre-K program continues and will take time to settle down so that all New York's children can benefit (without all New Yorkers having to pay for those who will join in while destroying a basic American principle), there are other more troubling long-term goals lurking behind the pre-K issues:

1) Income tax deductions for *all* school expenses (tuition, books, etc.) for non-public school

students. This initiative is being spearheaded by Cardinal Dolan, who is seeking Governor Cuomo's endorsement.

2) Total governmental financial support (from the city, state and Federal government) with no restrictions or evaluation of religious schools (Yeshivas and Parochial schools). According to the *Forward*, The Orthodox Union (OU) has launched a "multi-million-dollar advocacy campaign" to advance their agenda. They have retained an A-list political strategist (whose name they will not make public) and have added ten full-time staffers.

Segregation, Not Inclusion

Although the basic goal of the universal pre-K program is to provide a free and equal early education for every New York City child, by including religious schools in the mix, harsh reality works against free-and-equal. Children who attend Religious schools do not mix with their peers—rather, they are isolated from them and develop a sense of elitism.

This is not only another aspect of the separation of Church and State, but also directly contrary to the mayor's basic goal. And it is extremely unlikely that secular parents will want to send their children to a Yeshiva or a Manarah (Muslim school), where classes are segregated by sex, and religious dress is required, to say nothing (in the case of Yeshivas) where Yiddish is the language of instruction.

Rate of Return

Finally, since we live in a time where the bottom line rules, extending the pre-K program to religious schools is no exception to it. The investment in the pre-K program by the city, state and Federal government is enormous—far greater than anything required by simply adding teachers and classes for an additional school year.

For instance: because of the half-hour daily prayer periods required by Yeshivas, four-year-olds would have too long a school day. The solution (so far) has been to keep the school day at its current length, and add a sixth day to provide the necessary time for classes *and* prayer. In some cases, it would be necessary to require schools to be open on Christmas and Easter to provide classroom time. Of course the taxpayers would have to shoulder this extra burden of teachers, security, and utilities, and it would be punitive.

Even Rabbi David Zeibel, executive director of Agudath (an ultra-Orthodox umbrella organization), predicted that these concessions, despite their cost, would lead at best to a very modest increase in membership by the Hasidic community in the pre-K program.

So the bottom line here is that the escalating concessions both seriously undermine the Wall of Separation of Church and State that is the basis of

our democracy—and also add an insupportable burden to our already cash-strapped city—without even providing an educational return that would justify the costs involved. Since an educated electorate is the basis of a working democracy, we must find a better solution to the problem. There are those who think Charter Schools may do the job. I disagree, and will explain why in these pages in the near future. □

"GONE WITH THE WIND" ACTRESS BUTTERFLY MCQUEEN



"I'm an atheist," she declared, "and Christianity appears to me to be the most absurd imposture of all the religions, and I'm puzzled that so many people can't see through a religion that encourages irresponsibility and bigotry." She told a reporter, "As my ancestors are free from slavery, I am free from the slavery of religion." These quotes was used by the Freedom From Religion Foundation in advertisements inside buses in 2009 and in an Atlanta market in 2010.

GIVE THE GIFT FOR LIFE - NYC ATHEISTS BLOOD DONATION EVENT MAY 7, 2015 (THURSDAY) 4:00 - 7:00PM

NYC Atheists will counter the National Day of Prayer with blood donations--a lifesaving action, not passive prayer. While religious people are on their knees, we Atheists will be on our feet, giving a part of ourselves for the benefit of humanity. Atheists know that prayer does not work--but medical science does.

Afterwards, we will celebrate together in a small anteroom with coffee, juice and light refreshment supplied by the Blood Bank.

LOCATION: New York Blood Bank - 310 East 67th Street - (between 1st & 2nd Ave)

RESERVATIONS: NOT REQUIRED

**ATHEISTS
LIVE FOR NOW,
NOT FOR AFTER DEATH**

RICKY GERVAIS

**SCIENCE / FACTS
NOT
DREAMS / MYTHS**

Solidarity and Power Words

The essentials of successful movements



By Tyson Gill

The vast majority of people, religious or not, have great difficulty understanding and remembering, let alone articulating, what seems like absurdly nuanced differences between a dizzyingly variety of religious denominations. Whether it be Pentecostals, Adventists, Baptists, or Evangelicals, to name just a few, even those who deeply self-identify with one of these groups are typically hard-pressed to explain the differences between them. But in the end, they all share the same essentially religious worldview, and more importantly a fundamental way of thinking that overwhelmingly influences their collective opinions on a wide range of consequential public policies.

Likewise, we in the secular community have also splintered off into a fair number of our own non-religious denominations. We have Secularists, Humanists, Secular Humanists, Skeptics, Rationalists, Freethinkers, Agnostics, Atheists and more. Even many of us would be challenged to explain the differences. But just as with religious people, the similarities in our way of thinking makes those differences seem relatively insignificant in the big picture. Our tremendous commonality, in particular our respect for natural reality and human-centered ethics, far outweighs any minor differences between us.

Since our shared secular values are so clear, and since our views stand in such stark contrast to religious thinking, it is especially unfortunate that we do not do better in showing solidarity, common purpose, and concerted action to achieve the public policy goals that we all agree with. Goals like freedom from religious extremism, separation of church and state, and secular public education are principles we all hold in common, yet we are needlessly isolated and divided in working toward those shared goals.

We are weakened by this lack of solidarity. Not only does this reduce our apparent numbers but it allows our opponents to “divide and conquer” to counter any numerical advantage we may truly have. Beyond the self-inflicted damage we do by our own segregation, the Right pits us against each other quite successfully. As one example, they typically point to Agnostics and say see, those Agnostics are at least rational. They admit the possibility that god exists. Even Agnostics agree that our belief in god is perfectly

rational. Those Atheists by comparison are far too irrational and unscientific!

In this way our larger secular community is easily divided and collectively diminished. One is pitted against the other to move the middle ground ever further toward the Right.

Just as important as showing solidarity is the need for us to defend our power words. Words shape attitudes and attitudes drive policy. But not just any words. Potent and effective words with the power to influence are relatively rare and precious assets in shaping attitudes and policy.

The Right understands this and has been incredibly successful in dominating the ongoing battle for power words. They create and nurture many of their own power words like “family values.” Even worse, they effectively hijack or co-opt power words from their opponents, effectively taking the sword from their adversary to use against them. Where they cannot co-opt the power words of their opponents, they wage unrelenting campaigns to distort and discredit those words, destroying their power.

The religious Right has methodically gathered a formidable arsenal of power words like love and patriotism and family and principles and morality. We on the secular side have few if any. Arguably our most potent power word is “Atheism.” No other word on our side has such power to communicate, incite, challenge, and inspire. The religious Right has long understood this and therefore it is natural that, since it cannot be co-opted, they work so hard to discredit it. They campaign tirelessly to make Atheism synonymous with words like extremist, angry, rabid, militant, radical, divisive, and unscientific.

Regardless of your secular denomination, it is in your own self-interest not to allow the Right to subvert and diffuse the power of our strongest secular power word. We should not allow them to convince us that the word Atheist is too divisive and should never be spoken by reasonable people. It is a great strategic loss if we allow them to convince even us that it should be abandoned and shunned in favor of weak, benign words that hold little power to influence minds and passions.

Too many groups have sacrificed their power words, only to fail in their struggle. Those that have embraced their power words, words like “Black” and “Gay,” vigorously, taking pride in them just when their opponents try to weaken them with negative connotations, have succeeded in their larger efforts.

Unfortunately we are too often our own worst enemy and play right into the hands of our opponents. As one example, right now the religious Right is vigorously attacking women and women’s rights. Some women in the liberal community press to eliminate the word “women” for something far more dilute like “people” in order to not offend those who are differently-gendered. Katha Pollitt, among others, has passionately tried to point out the folly of such

well-intentioned abandonment. To do so would be like substituting “Black Power” with “People Power.” There is a good reason that the latter is safer and less offensive to anyone, and the reason is that it is totally innocuous, meaninglessly diffuse, and has no power at all. It is critical that everyone who is Pro-Choice, regardless of their gender identification, embrace the label and cause of women in this battle. □

Tyson Gill is a scientist who has served in the Peace Corps in Africa. He is the author of the highly recommended book, “Belief in Science and the Science of Belief: A Guidebook to Fact-Based Thinking,” available on Amazon.com.



IN THE NEWS



**GET READY FOR 2015 STREET TABLING (COLUMBUS CIRCLE)
STARTING MAY 9, 2015 (SATURDAY) / 10AM – 6PM**



Greg

Rad

Julie

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‘KILLING JEWS IS WORSHIP’ POSTERS APPEARING ON NYC SUBWAYS AND BUSES

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3049731/Judge-Pro-Israel-group-post-Killing-Jews-ads-buses.html>

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FAITH VS. FACTS

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/opinion/sunday/t-m-luhrmann-faith-vs-facts.html?ref=opinion>

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LEAVING YOUR RELIGION? NOW, THERE’S A HOTLINE TO HELP

<http://www.religionnews.com/2015/02/27/new-hotline-launches-help-people-leave-religion-behind/>

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AMERICANS ARE TURNING AWAY FROM ORGANIZED RELIGION IN RECORD NUMBERS

<http://www.alternet.org/belief/americans-turning-away-organized-religion-record-numbers>

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RABBI AND TWO OTHERS CONVICTED FOR TORTURING HUSBANDS IN JEWISH DIVORCE SCAM

<http://www.metro.us/news/new-jersey-rabbis-convicted-for-torturing-men-to-grant-divorces/zsJodv---Yg71aC46cpXok/>

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U.S. COURT NIXES BAN ON ‘PROFANE, RUDE, INDECENT’ SPEECH OUTSIDE HOUSES OF WORSHIP

<http://brianpallot.religionnews.com/2015/03/10/missouri-profane-free-speech-worship-religious-freedom-first-amendment/>

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NEW MORMON MISSION: HOW TO TEACH MEMBERS THE MESSY PART OF LDS HISTORY, THEOLOGY ...

<http://www.sltrib.com/home/2229999-155/new-mormon-mission-how-to-teach>

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‘SHARIA COMPLIANT’ SEX SHOP TO OPEN IN MECCA SELLING HALAL SEX TOYS FOR MUSLIMS

<http://religion.einnews.com/article/261380244/yeYhorAkgrGVTwag?n=2&code=nqixXbTys3aPw9Rs>

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SEX CLUB SEEKS NASHVILLE BLESSING BY VOWING TO BE A CHURCH

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/sex-club-seeks-nashville-blessing-vowing-church-30549289>

AMERICAN ATHEISTS - NATIONAL CONVENTION MEMPHIS - APRIL 2-5, 2015

There were about 800 of us attending the convention and, in a nearby side street, about 30 members of a Jesus Choral Group praising their namesake. It was an opportunity hard to resist. So I asked them who they were. "Lovers of Jesus," they replied. I asked them what church they were from. "Jesus." I asked them what they believed in. "Jesus!" Then I asked them "How is Earth?" They had no idea.

On Wednesday evening, a pre-convention debate included Dave Silverman (President of American Atheists); Muhammed Syed (President of Ex-Muslims of North America); Dr. Cole Huffman (Senior Pastor, First Evangelical Church, Memphis); Dr. Yasir Quadhi (Islamic scholar and Professor at Rhodes College, Memphis). It was a promising lineup, but a disappointing debate because Dr. Quadhi kept defending Islam and accusing British/French/American colonialism for today's problem. Also, the moderator asked too many questions and didn't allow enough time for answers or rebuttals.

Friday morning Dave Silverman opened the convention with his Five-Year Project Report. This alone was worth the trip and definitely a convention highlight. It established a positive and optimistic mood that lasted throughout the entire four days.

Silverman described how AA initiatives, such as billboards, Atheist TV, and growing media exposure have expanded interest in Atheism by 10 times (Google hits) in the past five years. AA commissioned a study to determine the public's knowledge and understanding of Atheism, Agnosticism, Humanism, Free-Thinking, and Skepticism.

The results showed that Atheism prevailed, with an 85% name-recognition and definition, versus the others at between 15-30%. Silverman's advice: "Let's keep calling ourselves Atheists and use the term Atheism – we've achieved brand recognition for both of them. Our next goal is universal acceptance of us and understanding our views."

Silverman also discussed AA attendance at the recent Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) in February. We know that many Libertarians (personal freedom) are Atheists and that the Religious Right (who limit personal freedom) want government restrictions (i.e. abortion,); they have a major incompatibility. Silverman claims that he has begun to establish a potential wedge between Libertarians and the Religious Right. He informed the Libertarians that in the near future, the "Nones" (Atheists, Agnostics, free thinkers, non-affiliated, etc.) who are now about 20% of the population, and for 18-35- year-olds over 30% and quickly increasing, will shortly outnumber the Religious Right. By distancing themselves from the Religious Right and joining with the "Nones," the Republicans will be in a stronger position. There was considerable interest in Silverman's position; lots of attendees were wearing AA buttons by the end of the convention.

Finally, Silverman announced that there will be a Reason Rally in Washington, DC in the spring of 2016, but no National AA Convention until the following year.

One of the strengths of this year's convention was the selection of speakers. Among those I heard there were several who deserve attention:



AYAAN HIRSI ALI (Islam: the Most Dangerous Religion): Ms. Ali is a Somali-born American (formerly Dutch) activist who believes strongly that Islamic extremists have to be destroyed. When Van Gogh's son was assassinated, the knife that killed him bore an inscription about her, "You will be next!"



TODD STIEFEL—OPENLY SECULAR/COMING OUT: Using the example of gays outing themselves, Stiefel urges every Atheist to come out and identify as a member of the group. As more people recognize outed Atheists, we will be granted greater acceptance.



LUCIEN GREAVES - SATANIC TEMPLE—GREAT IMPACT ON RELIGIOUS DISPLAYS/RIGHTS: Satanic Temple has active strategies in Florida and Oklahoma: when an organization puts up a religious display (including the ten commandments), Satanic Temple attempts to place a large, Satanic monument nearby. In both states, the government has denied them the right. They are suing the states. AA is hopeful that these activities will stonewall any religious symbols on public property. The courts have ruled that if believers do it, everyone has to have equal displays.

ASIF MOHIUDDIN: ISLAM & ATHEISM: Mohiuddin spoke about the dangers of extreme Islam. He was stabbed and jailed in Bangladesh for contributing to an Atheist blog. The blog has roughly 80 Atheist contributors; three have already been hacked to death.



SARAH MOOREHEAD—HOTLINE 1-84-I-DOUBT-IT: A new hotline that people can call 24/7, 365 days for support and help in their outing as Atheists and advice for dealing with backlash. The group has over 100 trained volunteers to staff the phones.

As you can see, the four days in Memphis were time well spent. Full of good ideas, good people, and a great resource for identifying speakers for our meetings. Based on what I heard, they should draw an enthusiastic audience in New York.

I urge all of you to attend American Atheists conventions in the future. ☐

UPCOMING MAY EVENTS

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

MAY 7, 2015 (THURS.) 4:00 – 7:00 PM
NYC ATHEISTS BLOOD DONATION EVENT
(THE GIFT FOR LIFE)

NYC Atheists will counter the National Day of Prayer with blood donations --a lifesaving action, not passive prayer.

RESERVATIONS: NOT REQUIRED

LOCATION: New York Blood Bank - 310 East 67th Street - (between 1st & 2nd Ave)

MAY 10, 2015 (SUN.) 12 NOON
NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER

SPEAKER: SUSAN COX: SURVIVORS VOICE
EUROPE: Survivor of sexual abuse by a Catholic priest when she was ten years to thirteen.



SUBJECT: HOW TO BE A SURVIVOR RATHER THAN A VICTIM.

We do not believe that the church can play a part in our healing.

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.

MAY 15, 2014 (TUES.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS DISCUSSION MEETUP

GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN



SUBJECT: MICHAEL, AS USUAL, WILL SELECT AN EXCITING AND CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC.

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.

MAY 19, 2015 (FRI.)
6:00 PM - HAPPY HOUR
6:30 PM - BOOK CLUB

NYC ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB

HOST: DAVID ORENSTEIN, Ph.D



BOOK: "LIVING THE SECULAR LIFE: NEW ANSWERS TO OLD QUESTIONS"



Phil Zuckerman is Professor of Sociology at Pitzer College. His research interests include Secularity, Atheism, Apostasy, and Scandinavian Culture. Dr. Zuckerman will be Skyped in for the meeting because he lives and teaches in California. This is will be an interactive discussion with the author.

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.

MAY 28, 2015 (THURS.) 6:30PM
NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING

SPEAKER: LUCIEN GREAVES, CO-FOUNDER OF THE SATANIC TEMPLE



SUBJECT: THE SATANIC TEMPLE

The Satanic Temple: a non-theistic, anti-supernaturalist religious organization. TST has gained national media attention in their attempt to place Satanic monuments in public spaces.

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.

BECOME A NYC ATHEISTS MEMBER

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

MAY 2015

MAY	7****	Thurs.	4:00 – 7:00 PM	NYCA Blood Donation Event
MAY	10*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
MAY	15**	Fri.	6:00 / 6:30 PM	NYCA Book / Film Club
MAY	19**	Tues.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
MAY	28***	Thurs.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

JUNE 2015

JUNE	14*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
JUNE	16**	Tues.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
JUNE	19**	Fri.	6:00 / 6:30 PM	NYCA Book / Film Club
JUNE	25***	Thurs.	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
 **** New York Blood Bank - 310 East 67th Street - (between 1st & 2nd Ave)

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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