

# NYC ATHEISTS, INC.



WWW.NYCATHEISTS.ORG

An Affiliate of American Atheists

BOX 6060

NY, NY 10150-6060

212-330-6794

VOL. X11 / ISSUE 7/8

JULY/AUGUST, 2015



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

## PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

### WHERE ARE YOU RIGHT NOW, WHEN YOU'RE REALLY NEEDED?

As Atheists, we often feel embattled, standing up to the tide of believers and piety that wash over our political process. Refusing to be swept away by them takes commitment and energy. Because connecting with our fellow NYC Atheists is a source of satisfaction, we look forward to the brunches, book and film club talks, the discussion groups, the weekly TV shows and the monthly meetings—commitment strengthened, energy renewed. A process taken for granted.

**But there is real danger in taking NYC Atheists' benefits for granted. Maintaining them, keeping them current with fresh ideas and issues also takes commitment and energy. To grow and strengthen the organization requires that we all pitch in. Not just attend meetings and get-togethers, but actively participate in organizing and running the activities that we are used to simply enjoying. With our primary mission, the Separation of Church and State under threat in the city as never before, we must use our energy, our skills and our time to make sure that our mission is accomplished.**



**danger in  
Atheists'  
granted.  
them, keeping  
with fresh**

### THE CURRENT THREAT

In last last month's newsletter, I included a letter to Mayor de Blasio expressing our opposition to his expansion of the pre-K program to religious/charter schools at the taxpayers' expense—a clear breach of the Separation of Church and State. Since then,

a campaign has been mounted by expansion supporters to confuse the public and to specifically target those members of the Assembly and Senate who are walking the walk in stubborn opposition.

For example: constituents of Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal (D, 67<sup>th</sup> District) have been bombarded for weeks by daily snail mail: expensive full-color cards urging them to pressure Rosenthal to drop her opposition to expanding the pre-K program to religious/charter schools. They have also been receiving daily robotcalls with the same purpose and—recently—a flood of electronic banner ads on their computer home pages!

All of this costs money. According to *Who/What/Where/Why* (6/11), The Coalition for Opportunity in Education, "an assemblage of wealthy financiers, including several billionaires," among them Bruce Kovner, Ira Rennert, Julian H. Robertson, Jr., and Paul E. Singer, with the strong encouragement of Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan. Because voting in Albany is ongoing and the pre-K program starts in September, we must do everything we can to ensure the Separation of Church and State in this crucial issue; not fighting it will have permanent consequences.



money, *lots* of to *Who/What/Where/Why* its source is Opportunity in

Although NY State Assembly Democrats just defeated a proposal favored by Governor Cuomo and Senate Republicans to create a tax credit for private school donors (including religious/charter

schools), both sides agreed to a one-time, \$250 million increase in funding for nonpublic schools.

**What does this signify for the future? That the Coalition for Opportunity in Education will have a year to mount an even tougher campaign next year in Albany, with the goal of weakening the public school system further and permitting religious/charter school parents to receive tax credits for the entire cost of tuition, books, supplies, etc., (instead of the \$500 for those with incomes under \$60,000 that was their opening shot for 2015). Cardinal Dolan, like Arnold Schwarzenegger, has vowed to return to the battle in 2016. He means business!**

**While the pre-K issues will not be completely resolved until the start of the school year this coming September, we must use the next year to prepare to fight back—hard!**

### **WHAT WE MUST DO TO PREVENT PUBLIC FUNDING FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS**

It's time for NYC Atheists to turn professional; to use the skills and talents of our members for effective, targeted campaigns that enhance our mission. Right now, public funding for the pre-K program in religious schools is around the corner; preventing it from becoming permanent is essential. **It must be our first priority.**

I have two goals for our members: First, to become more active and more efficient in our activities—to spend more time on executing our plans, and spend it better. Second, to enjoy the satisfaction of seeing positive results from expanding and professionalizing our efforts.

In the past, although attendance at our many member events has been robust, whenever I've raised the issue of volunteering, I've been told "But I don't have time!" Of course your time is precious. But let's put it this way: if you have time to enjoy our meetups, brunches, and discussions, as an Atheist there's more you can do to ensure that our purpose is not weakened by choosing socializing over volunteering. We can, and must, do much more. Here's how to begin:

### **OPTIMIZE YOUR TIME**

What areas of your life eat up the greatest percentages of it? Do the percentages correspond with your priorities? If not, it's time to take a good

hard look at the numbers and make some changes. It's not just about cutting out the dead wood, but being smarter about how you spend and balance your time, and about having something to show for it—nothing beats knowing you've made a difference.

Practice multi-tasking: try combining activities (watching *True Blood* and using an exercise bike while you watch). Or get some books on CD for your long commutes to work and while food shopping. Start reducing and eliminating the low-priority items and identify your newly available time. It can be used for positive, essential work on behalf of our organization that will have a lasting impact.

### **LET'S CREATE AN EFFECTIVE STRUCTURE**

Given how close the pre-K deadlines are (and how finding creative strategies to combat the Coalition for Opportunities in Education is a challenge we should take on), assembling a structure within our organization to prioritize and pursue our goals is a step we must take in unison. We will need committees for working together, and chairs for each committee to make sure the work gets done. **"I haven't got time" won't cut the mustard.**

**First:** A legal committee with members who have a legal background and experience to help us pursue lawsuits (the most immediate: the pre-K program in religious schools and escalating tax breaks for parents who take advantage of it, sure to resurface in 2016). Research into the issues and writing legal letters are part of the package.

**Second:** An Internet committee to update and maintain our Website; it must be current and include late-breaking developments as they occur so our membership can stay on top of them.

**Third:** A responder committee to monitor print, Internet, and social media daily and suggest and implement ways to counter relevant news in a timely manner. Getting our news out to social media is part of the plan.

**Fourth:** A lobbying committee to track elected officials whom we support (or oppose) and to find the best ways to convey our support (or our opposition). You have only to experience the blitz of the Coalition for Opportunity in Education to realize how important elected officials are, and how the legislation they pass (or table) affects our future. Influencing them before laws are passed is far

more efficient than having to mount a lawsuit after the fact.

**Fifth:** A creative committee for writers, editors and graphic designers to be responsible for our newsletter, press releases and posters.

**Sixth:** A special events committee to plan celebrations for July 4<sup>th</sup> and the Winter Solstice; our semi-annual blood donation campaign; organize theatre parties...

**Seventh:** A membership committee to greet new members, make them feel welcome, and

encourage them to participate in our events and activities.

The goal is to create an autonomous structure which will coordinate our efforts, keep information flowing through the pipelines of our newsletter, Website and e-blasts, and make organizing actions like lawsuits and demonstrations more efficient. And, while committee members and committee chairs are doing their work, they are bound to discover candidates who would make dynamic speakers for our member events. I encourage them to come forward with their suggestions! ☐

## C'MON OUT, NO MORE REPRESSION!



By Lawrence S. Shaw

We Atheists are people whose honesty and fealty to scientific reasoning make it impossible for us to accept belief in a supernatural being--i.e. god, which we feel must be defended with blind faith and illogical reasoning. It is no surprise that nearly all scientists are Atheists, or that religion so often leads to irrational destructive conduct. Al Qaida and ISIS, while extreme examples, are a consequence of religiosity. But even mainstream religious thought often leads to absurd behavior. Muslims miss daytime nourishment during the month of Ramadan. Catholics eschew birth control. Jews have Kosher laws that hold that some animals are sinful to eat. Hindus condemn certain castes to degradation from birth because of sins from their past lives, and the Amish reject electricity.

Today, Atheists are a persecuted minority. (There is no cause-and-effect here. That is, criminal behavior is not what causes most people to be persecuted. There is also race and ethnicity.) And, few politicians seeking office have the courage to openly admit to not believing in god, fearing voter disapproval.

New York City Atheists is dedicated to bringing repressed atheists out into the open, and to advocating for our mainstream acceptance. **We also engage in legal struggles with religiously inspired groups trying to undermine the United States First Amendment principles that were intended to keep our government secular.** In many places religious groups are trying to undermine science education by pushing for inclusion of such totally unscientific subjects as "intelligent design" as a religious alternative to the scientifically accepted concept of evolution.

As "not for profit" entities, churches are not taxed, but many churches are in fact profit-making businesses, their leaders living in luxury with mansions and private jets. And why does our currency carry the words, "In god we trust?" or our pledge of allegiance contain the words "under god?" Atheists are dedicated to removing these official signs of religious fealty from all official governmental papers or statements.

New York City Atheists provides a support group where members can meet other rational people and partake in our lectures, films and group discussions on a wide variety of subjects. ☐

**ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION  
NOT A BELIEF**

## CHANGING MINDS



By Tyson Gill

Can we Atheists ever convince any believer that they are wrong to put their faith in fantasies? Indeed, can anyone ever even change anyone's mind about *anything*? Most people would answer this question with a resounding no! The prevailing view is that no matter what evidence or logic you present, people are unwilling, even incapable, of ever changing their opinion, let alone their deeply held beliefs.

Haven't you found this to be true? If so, let's test it by seeing if I can change your mind about changing your mind.

You almost certainly like to believe that you're open-minded—that if you're presented with reasonable proof you will adjust your beliefs accordingly. Well like you, everyone else believes the very same thing about themselves. Either you are the only one with this capacity while everyone else is deluded; or you are as deluded as everyone else; or everyone else is actually quite capable of changing their minds just like you.

I'm pretty confident it's the last option. One proof is simply that we are here. We could not have survived the gauntlet of evolution without an innate ability to adjust our beliefs in response to new information. It is unreasonable to think that we could have adapted to a rapidly changing world without that capacity. And it is consistent and reasonable to assume that this malleability cannot inherently differentiate between religious beliefs and beliefs about anything else.

Another proof is that we actually see beliefs change all around us all the time. Our beliefs have been and are being continually re-shaped, even transformed, by sales and marketing, education, culture, indoctrination, religion, brainwashing, media, personal experiences, life events, new information, and a host of other influences. Indeed, beliefs are among our most fluid ideas because they are not fettered by physical constraints. Missionaries, seeking converts, prove this every day.

Sure, you are quick to say. It's easy to adopt beliefs, but once formed it's virtually impossible to eliminate them. But religion itself disproves that idea, too. The mere fact that organized religion must expend such enormous

resources to instill and maintain their fantasies acknowledges the inherent fragility and vulnerability of even the most deeply held beliefs.

Still, it is understandable that one might come to the conclusion that beliefs are impervious to reason. Most of us personally seldom succeed in convincing anyone of anything. Whenever we try, whenever we put forth what we think is a clearly indisputable rational argument, we seem to be talking to a brick wall.

No doubt it is quite difficult to change minds. But that doesn't make the effort futile. Consider that dating is one particular form of persuasion. For many of us it's frustratingly difficult to find a date let alone true love. We can't seem to convince anyone we're worth dating and so we conclude that dating itself is hopeless. But people all around us do it all the time and we can, too. And as with dating, there are well-known techniques that have proven to work extremely well in the art of persuasion in general. These include establishing trust, reframing the debate, making it personal, making it their idea, systematically dismantling rationalizations, and moving the other party along in small incremental steps.

So we should not be discouraged if our efforts to evangelize atheism do not seem to yield perceptible results. Our collective efforts do matter. Sure, they are unlikely to be rewarded with some "come to atheism" epiphany. But we must trust that every little drip, drip, drip of reason erodes away at the brittle sandstone upon which religion is constructed and does make a real difference even if we don't often see it.

And as my final proof, do you feel even a bit more optimistic about your chances of having a real impact on individuals and on society? If so, I have changed your mind at least a bit. If not, that only proves that I failed to make my case or that you cannot perceive how your thinking has been influenced. **Either way, I rest my case.** □

-----  
*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,"*

**ATHEISTS ARE VOTERS**



## IN THE NEWS

### NEW NYC ATHEISTS STREET TABLING SETUP



Front row: Larry, Julie, Rad

---

#### BIG DROP IN SHARE OF AMERICANS CALLING THEMSELVES CHRISTIAN

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/12/upshot/big-drop-in-share-of-americans-calling-themselves-christian.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&\\_r=1&abt=0002&abg=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/12/upshot/big-drop-in-share-of-americans-calling-themselves-christian.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&_r=1&abt=0002&abg=0)

---

#### THIRD ATHEIST BLOGGER KILLED IN BANGLADESH KNIFE ATTACK

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/12/third-atheist-blogger-killed-in-bangladesh-after-knife-attack>

---

#### OUR LADY OF REVENUE: NYC CHURCHES GO ON THE MARKET, LEAVING PARISHIONERS CYNICAL

[http://www.uscatholic.org/news/201503/our-lady-revenue-nyc-churches-go-market-leaving-parishioners-cynical-29876?utm\\_source=March+10%2C+2015&utm\\_campaign=ebulletin+Mar.+10%2C+2015&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.uscatholic.org/news/201503/our-lady-revenue-nyc-churches-go-market-leaving-parishioners-cynical-29876?utm_source=March+10%2C+2015&utm_campaign=ebulletin+Mar.+10%2C+2015&utm_medium=email)

---

#### ANNE GAYLOR, 88, DIES; GUARDED WALL BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/17/us/anne-gaylor-passionate-atheist-is-dead-at-88.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/17/us/anne-gaylor-passionate-atheist-is-dead-at-88.html?_r=0)

---

#### WAR ON FREE SPEECH

<http://nypost.com/2015/05/05/to-strike-at-all-rights-the-war-on-free-speech/>

---

#### CASE OF PREGNANT 10-YEAR-OLD DIVIDES PARAGUAY

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/14d43808f8131e0b>

---

#### ULTRA-ORTHODOX JEWISH SECT TELLS LONDON MOTHERS TO STOP DRIVING

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/may/28/hasidic-sect-london-mothers-stop-driving>

---

#### ANTI-LGBT 'MINISTER' FRANKLIN GRAHAM HATES FOR JESUS

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/11/anti-lgbt-minister-franklin-graham-hates-for-jesus.html?via=newsletter&source=DDMorning>

---

#### PRIMARY SCHOOLS BAN CHILDREN FROM FASTING DURING RAMADAN

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11669767/Primary-schools-ban-children-from-fasting-during-Ramadan.html>

---

#### WHY MUSLIMS IN ALASKA WILL FAST 9 HOURS MORE THAN MUSLIMS IN CAPE TOWN

<http://www.religionnews.com/2015/06/16/british-fatwa-calls-shorter-ramadan-fast-longer-northern-european-days/>

---

#### WHAT IS EACH COUNTRY'S SECOND-LARGEST RELIGIOUS GROUP?

[http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/22/what-is-each-countrys-second-largest-religious-group/?utm\\_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm\\_campaign=4a7919a56d-Religion\\_Weekly\\_June\\_25\\_2015&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_3e953b9b70-4a7919a56d-399904469](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/22/what-is-each-countrys-second-largest-religious-group/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=4a7919a56d-Religion_Weekly_June_25_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-4a7919a56d-399904469)

## UPCOMING JULY EVENTS

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

**JULY 12, 2015 (SUN.) 12 NOON**  
**NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER**  
**SPEAKER: PAUL OFFIT MD.**



Paul A. Offit, MD, is the director of the Vaccine Education Center and an attending physician in the Division of Infectious Diseases at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

**SUBJECT: *BAD FAITH: WHEN RELIGIOUS BELIEF UNDERMINES MODERN MEDICINE***

When Jesus said, "Suffer the children," faith healing is not what he had in mind. Tragically, children suffer and die every year from treatable diseases, and in most states it is legal for parents to deny their children care for religious reasons. In twenty-first century America, how could this be happening?

**LOCATION:** The Press Box Restaurant (2nd Floor) 932 Second Avenue Street (bet. 49<sup>th</sup> & 50<sup>th</sup> Sts.).

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

=====

**JULY 17, 2015 (FRI.)**  
**6:30 PM HAPPY HOUR / 7:00 PM FILM CLUB**

**HOST: DAVID ORENSTEIN, Ph.D**



**FILM: *GOD ON TRIAL: A Debate on the Existence of god.*** Christopher Hitchens and Dinesh D'Souza face off. It's a real winner for the Atheist community!

**LOCATION:** Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) (rear room)

**COST:** Free, (but buy drink/food).

**JULY 21, 2014 (TUES.) 7:00PM**  
**NYC ATHEISTS DISCUSSION / MEETUP**  
**GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN**



**SUBJECT: MICHAEL'S HOT TOPIC**

**LOCATION:** Stone Creek-140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) rear room

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

=====

**JULY 30, 2015 (THURS.) 6:30PM**  
**NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING**

**SPEAKER: AUSTIN COOPER, SECULAR COALITION FOR AMERICA**



**SUBJECT: WHY DO WE NEED THE SECULAR COALITION FOR AMERICA?**

The Secular Coalition for America is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit advocacy organization whose purpose is to amplify the diverse and growing voice of the nontheistic community in the United States and lobby the Federal and State governments..

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

**COST:** \$10 Donation covers cost of room rental.

"The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."  

-- Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1781-82

**BECOME A NYC ATHEISTS MEMBER**

## 2015 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM



NYC Atheists Inc.

NYCATHEISTS@ GMAIL.COM

PHONE: 212-330-6794

### 2015 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

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

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

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

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ @ \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

### YOUR 2015 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

- Basic: \_\_ \$ 25
- Basic Plus: \_\_ \$ 50
- Friend: \_\_ \$ 100
- Sustainer: \_\_ \$ 250
- Patron: \_\_ \$ 500
- Benefactor: \_\_ \$ 1000
- Life: \_\_ \$ 5000

Additional Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total: \$ =====

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

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

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

**JULY 2015**

<b>JULY</b>	<b>12**</b>	<b>Sun.</b>	<b>12:00 PM</b>	<b>NYCA Brunch / Speaker</b>
<b>JULY</b>	<b>17***</b>	<b>Fri.</b>	<b>6:30 / 7:00PM</b>	<b>NYCA Book / Film Club</b>
<b>JULY</b>	<b>21***</b>	<b>Tues.</b>	<b>7:00 PM</b>	<b>NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group</b>
<b>JULY</b>	<b>30****</b>	<b>Thurs.</b>	<b>6:30 PM</b>	<b>NYCA Monthly Meeting</b>

**AUGUST 2015**

**NYC ATHEISTS IS ON VACATION FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST**

**EXCEPT**

**STREET TABLING (SATURDAY / 11AM – 6 PM)**

\*\* 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

**NYCA CABLE SHOWS**

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

**NYC ATHEISTS**  
**BOX 6060**  
**NY, NY 10150-6060**

**In This Issue**

**PAGE 1: WHERE ARE YOU RIGHT NOW**

**PAGE 3: C'MON OUT, NO MORE REPRESSION**

**PAGE 4: FRIENDLY PERSUASION**

**PAGE 5: IN THE NEWS**

**PAGE 6: EXCITING UPCOMING JULY EVENTS**

**PAGE 7: MEMBERSHIP APP**