

**PRESIDENT'S  
SERMON:  
WHY BE A  
NYC ATHEIST**

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# NYC Atheists Inc.

An Affiliate of American Atheists

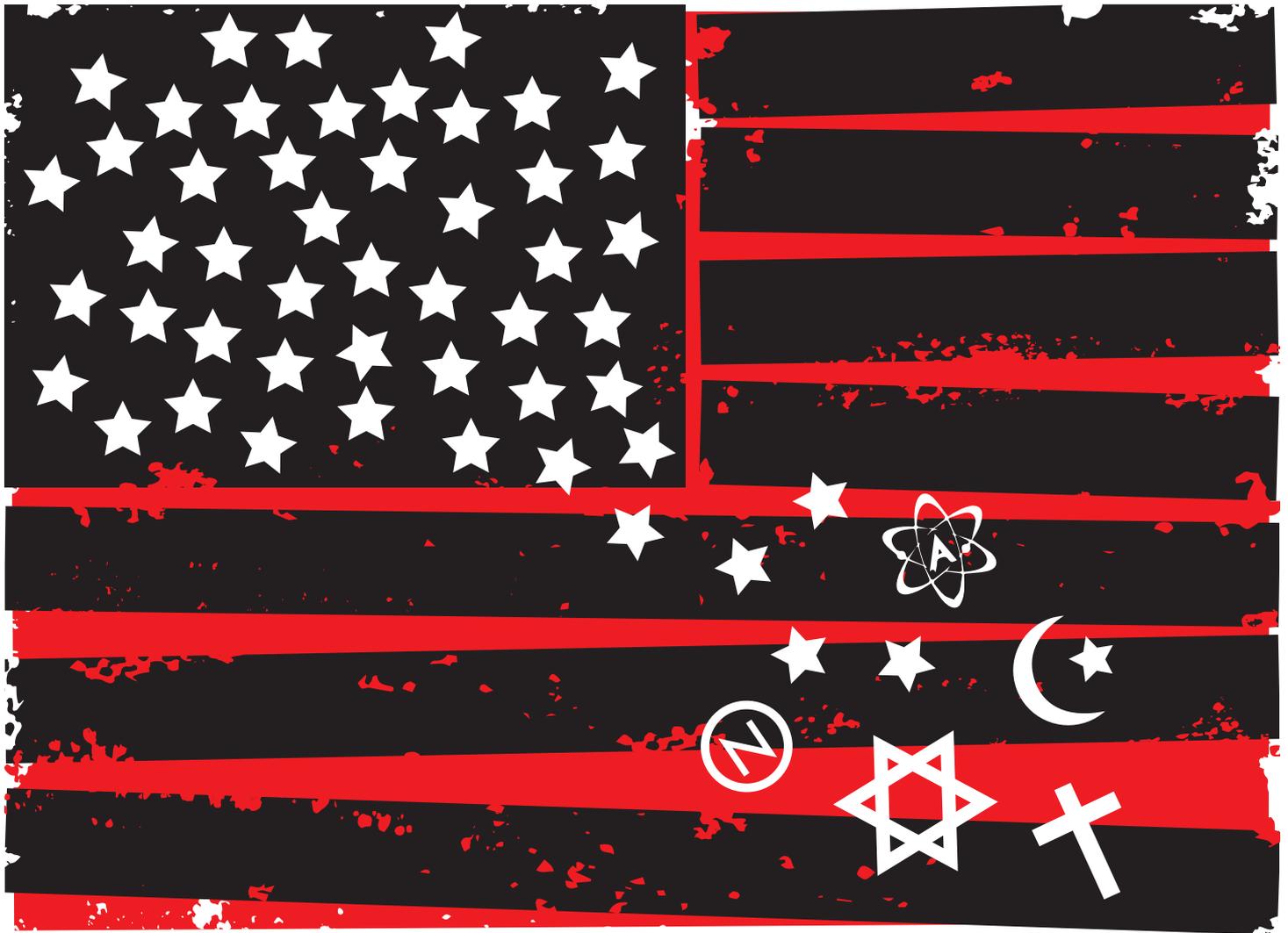


Illustration by: Edwin Vazquez

[www.nycatheists.org](http://www.nycatheists.org)

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# PRESIDENT'S "SERMON": WHY BE A NYC ATHEIST

by **Kenneth Bronstein**

Societal change takes time and effort. We sometimes forget that the NAACP, one of the early movements to improve the lot of African Americans, has been going for more than 100 years. For Atheists, separation of church and state has become the important cause to defend as our nation has moved relentlessly to the religious right in the past quarter century.

The Atheism movement has made huge strides in the past decade, but our job is not done. We must be vigilant to keep religion from constant encroachment into our schools, military, local government and public places.

NYC Atheists, the most active Atheist-rights organization in New York, works on many fronts – educational, legal and community engagement. We need your support and participation to continue our work. Every person counts, every dollar helps.

Here are ways we work for the freedom, the dignity and the equal rights of the freethinking American citizen:

## Educational

We have become known citywide for presenting two lectures a month by illustrious speakers on cutting edge topics in science, politics and philosophy. No other freethinkers' group in the nation provides as many top speakers we do. We've had professors from Harvard, Princeton, Yale and NYU speak to us on everything from archeology to Vatican politics. When Richard Dawkins visited our group, we held two sessions in one evening to accommodate the huge turnout.

Our Book and Film Club, led by CUNY professor Dr. David Orenstein meets once a month. Dr. Orenstein presents a vivid dissection of current literature and cinema from an Atheist point of view.

A monthly Discussion Group, led by Lee Moore, presents a forum for young people and new members to thrash out controversial topics in a friendly, open-minded, give-and-take environment.

We present three Cable TV shows a week on Channels 57 and 67. Our newest, "*My Road To Atheism*" features more than 50 NYCA members telling the story of why they became an Atheist.

Our Advanced Writers Group supports and encourages Atheist authors of both fiction and non-fiction in their efforts to get published by mainstream publishing houses. The group was formed three years ago in an effort to combat the huge amount of books currently being published by religious publishing houses.

## Activism

We have initiated a number of lawsuits to enforce the constitutional right to separation of church and state:

- We sued the Brooklyn Catholic Diocese for making Robocalls to support a questionable state candidate helping the church try to evade lawsuits by victims of clergy abuse.
- We sued the states of New Jersey and New York for allowing a 20-foot "Miracle Cross" placed on government property in a museum supported and maintained by tax funds.
- We were plaintiffs in Michael Newdow lawsuit to take "In God We Trust" off our money and to take the words "Under God" out of the pledge of allegiance.



Pope John Demonstration

- We conducted demonstrations for separation of church and state at various events including one Republican convention.
- We were a huge working presence, the largest delegation from any city in the U.S., at the Reason Rally in Washington D.C. in 2012.
- We picketed Pope John Paul II when he came to NYC, carrying banners protesting his do-nothing attitude on priest pedophiles.
- We demonstrated at Foley Square before and after the Miracle Cross suit in Appeals Court.
- Our demonstration made every TV channel in New York and many nationwide.
- We lobbied in Albany and Washington for various Atheist issues.
- We succeeded in having religious holiday displays removed from a Manhattan park and a prayer booth removed by issuing formal complaints to the City.
- We advocate for Atheists in workplace complaints when they wish to remain anonymous.
- We have resolved six workplace complaints from members who said they were being coerced to engage in prayer meetings on the job. Our peaceful method of resolving these involved calling the Human Resources department, and without disclosing the employee's name, reminding them that coercion to prayer on the job violates the U.S. constitution. This has been successful in all the cases.

Our methods of reaching out to the community vary from letting our presence be seen in public places to building our Atheist community through social events.

To mingle with the public, we do the following:

- We do street tabling at Columbus Circle every Saturday during the warm weather seasons.
- We maintain a Web Site that gives you up-to-date information about NYCA.
- We provide Meet-up sites for every event we hold.
- We maintain and keep three Facebook pages current to keep people informed up to the minute.



Bus Poster Campaign

- We conducted a month-long bus poster publicity campaign that got nationwide publicity.
- We march in the Greenwich Village Halloween parade under the NYCA banner.
- We conduct a Blood Donor program once a year on the so-called "National Day of Prayer" in May to point up the fact that praying doesn't help--but medicine does.
- To build community within the Atheist movement, We celebrate the Winter Solstice with a party for our members and friends.
- We feature a Halloween party and a New Year's Eve party to add Atheist festivity to non-religious holidays.
- We celebrate the Fourth of July with a picnic honoring patriotic Atheists who have died for our country.
- We visit sick members in the hospital and provide support to members when there is a death.

We could not do all this without your participation and support. Please sign in once more as a member of the NYC Atheists family and join our ongoing campaign for a better, more science-based society. You can also donate more than the very minimal annual dues we ask for, which we keep low in order to be inclusive. You can upgrade your membership by donating a tax deductible \$100, \$500 or \$1,000. NYC Atheists Inc. can keep on giving lectures and events for you only if you keep on giving. We can pursue equality and justice for Atheists via our U.S. court system only if you help with the legal fees.

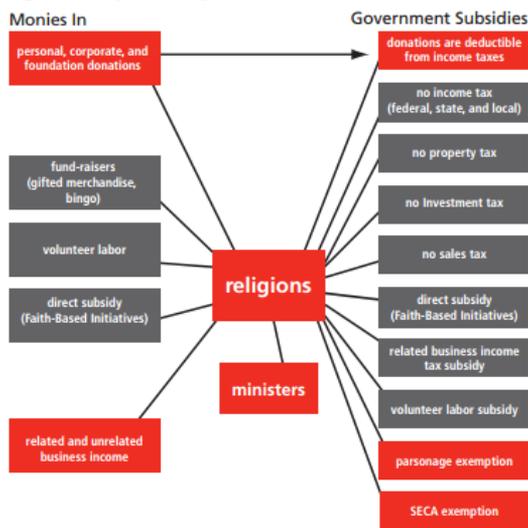
# SECULAR POLICY INSTITUTE - WEEKLY NUMBERS REPORT -

Oct. 16, 2015

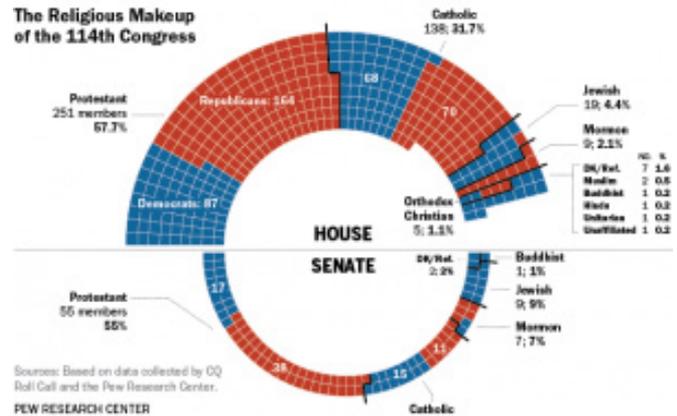
by Deanna Cantrell

With all of the recent threat in the U.S. Legislative branch of another government shutdown, Congress is looking for ways to bring the budget into the black. Republicans are inciting that defunding Planned Parenthood is a stellar way to do this. Why? Planned Parenthood is against their ideology. They provide birth control, testing and yes... abortions for those in need of them. Last year, Planned Parenthood received \$528.4 million of federal money. That is a lot of tax payer dollars going toward helping people that a portion of the population does not believe in... could there be another cause that a significant number of Americans do not support taking an even greater amount of money yearly?

Figure 1. Diagram of religious finances and subsidies



How about \$71 billion? That makes Planned Parenthood's funding look like mere peanuts, yet such income is lost every year and the cost passed on to the taxpayer. How so? Churches. If churches were taxed like for-profit agencies, it was found that this could generate upwards of \$71 billion per year in tax revenue. Even if churches were merely held to the standards of other non-profit agencies, this could generate \$16.75 billion in tax revenue per year.



Here comes in the notion of bias; it is arguable that no member of Congress has ever been to a Planned Parenthood clinic, though the Hill is overwhelmingly populated with theists, with only one member unaffiliated.

The debate against Planned Parenthood doesn't resolve solely around abortion. Planned Parenthood also provides contraception, including surgical sterilization. According to a Pew Forum survey, 31.7% of the House and 26% of the Senate are Catholic. Catholics are an outspoken group opposed to contraception. Looking at the numbers, one could draw the conclusion that conservatives pushing for the defunding of Planned Parenthood are attempting to legislate morality.

It is noted that churches fall into the category of 'charitable' entities. This is often a stretch.

The researchers calculated the Mormon Church, for example spends roughly .7% of its annual income on charity. Their study of 271 congregations found an average of 71% of revenues going to 'operating expenses,' while help to the poor is somewhere within the remaining 29%. Compare this to the American Red Cross, which uses 92.1% of revenues for physical assistance and just 7.9% on operating expenses. The authors also note that Wal-Mart, for

instance, gives about \$1.75 billion in food aid to charities each year, or twenty-eight times all of the money allotted for charity by the United Methodist Church and almost double what the LDS Church has given in the last twenty-five years.

Which brings us to the second category of giving, or ‘spiritual’ charities.’ Unfortunately, churches do not meet the requirement of a charitable organization for tax purposes. Here’s why: Church employees pay taxes on their salaries (although clergy get a handful of write-offs that non-clergy cannot, including their physical living expenses.) Therefore, when they are doing things like praying for god’s intervention or to heal sick children, that’s not charity; that’s doing what they are paid to do.

“... The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS, or Mormon Church)... gave about \$1 billion to charitable causes between 1985 and 2008. That may seem like a lot until you divide it by the twenty-three-year time span and realize this church is only donating about 0.7 percent of its annual income.”

Do religions engage in charitable work that addresses the physical needs of the poor? Many do, but that is not their primary focus. Religions are quick to advertise when they do charitable work—ironically for Christians, since the Bible explicitly says not to. In Matthew 6:2 it states: *So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others.* However, they don’t do as much charitable work as a lot of people think, and they spend a relatively small percentage.

Why? Charity is the giving of something, not the exchange of something for something else. When religions give, whether it be money, clothing, labor, building materials, etc. to address the physical needs of the poor; they are giving without receiving payment in return. There is no exchange of goods or services. Yes, those giving may feel good about what they’ve done, but that feeling is not given to them by the recipients of their charitable actions in exchange for the actions; it rather results from the charitable actions themselves.

**Table 1.**

Estimated annual government subsidy of religion in the U.S. per year

Subsidies estimated	Amount
Federal income tax subsidy	\$35.3 billion
State income tax subsidy	\$6.1 billion
Property tax subsidy	\$26.2 billion
Investment tax subsidy	\$41 million
Parsonage subsidy	\$1.2 billion
Faith-Based Initiatives subsidy	\$2.2 billion
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$71 billion</b>

**Subsidies not estimated**

Local income and property tax subsidies	—
Sales tax subsidy	—
SECA exemption subsidy	—
Donor tax-exemption subsidy	—
Increase in donations from donor tax-exemption subsidy	—
Related business income tax subsidy	—
Fund-raising subsidy	—
Volunteer labor subsidy	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>probably billions more</b>

In contrast, when a pastor preaches a sermon or a priest performs a baptism, this is done out of obligation and is what these religious functionaries are paid to do. It is no more “charity” than a doctor performing a surgery to save a life or a social worker intervening in an abusive family situation. If the people you are helping are paying you to help them, it’s not charity; it’s labor. You may like your job and feel that it offers value beyond what you receive in compensation, but that doesn’t change the fundamental nature of the exchange taking place. In short, if someone is paid to address spiritual concerns, it is not charity when they do so.

For those individuals who argue that religions should receive subsidies because of their charitable work, there is an easy solution for that problem. If religions want to engage in charitable work, they should separate religious activities and finances from their charitable activities and finances. The charities run by religions could be tax-exempt, but the religious organizations would be treated like civic leagues or sports clubs or any other volunteer organization that exists for entertainment or the benefit of its members. Those groups are not tax-exempt and are not subsidized by the government. It is clear that these organizations are not as charitable as the image they project.

# IN THE NEWS

## NEWS ITEMS

- Put an Atheist on the Supreme Court:  
<http://goo.gl/6PmJda>
- Towns restrict door-to-door solicitation amid Hasidic influx: <http://goo.gl/MHTYqb>
- Abortion Clinics closing at a record pace - At least 162 providers have closed since 2011:  
<http://goo.gl/sqv0k9>
- Atheism has ancient roots and is not 'Modern Invention,' claims new text:  
<http://goo.gl/rp4Kep>
- Correction: Ancient Migration-DNA story:  
<http://goo.gl/i0qDOF>
- On Darwin Day, 5 facts about the evolution debate | Pew Research: <http://goo.gl/5DkT4i>
- Phoenix council favors silence over Satanists for now: <http://goo.gl/neiwIS>
- Business mounts opposition to W.Va. religious exemption bill: <http://goo.gl/DhsHxh>
- Why we can now declare the end of 'Christian America': <http://goo.gl/0xo2ZM>
- She Was Asked to Switch Seats. Now She's Charging El Al With Sexism:  
<http://goo.gl/QugHww>

### OUR MOST IMPORTANT 2016 ELECTION ISSUE

#### *Who Controls The U.S. Supreme Court?*

Because of Justice Scalia's death, the next U.S. President will most likely appoint one to three justices.

If any of the Republican candidates is elected, it will be a disaster for the separation of church / state

## NYCA CAMPAIGNS

- NYC Atheists has requested that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to stop using their airport digital displays message "God Bless Our Troops." They responded, claiming that would continue using the message.

NYC Atheists then contacted the American Atheists for legal support. AA legal counsel has sent them a lawyer's letter to remove the message. We are awaiting their response.

### WANTED

### PRO BONO LAWYER

Contact Ken Bronstein  
212-535-7425 / nycatheists@gmail.com



11am - 7pm

**FREE!** No Ticket or Registration Required!

### Transportation Options

AMTRAC \$100 (3.5 Hours)

Bus \$50 (4.5 - 5 Hours)

Carpool - Call Kenneth Bronstein

212-535-7425

[www.reasonrally.org](http://www.reasonrally.org)

# UPCOMING EVENTS



**Mar. 13, 2016** (Sun.) 12 Noon  
**NYCA Brunch / Speaker**  
**Speaker:** Dr. Patricia Wright,  
Distinguished Service Professor  
Stony Brook University  
**Location:** The Press Box  
Restaurant (2nd Floor)  
932 Second Avenue  
(49th/50th St.)

**Subject:** *Lemurs - Earth's Most Diverse  
Group of Primates*

Madagascar is a strange place. It's sometimes called the 8th continent due to its unique evolution and physical isolation. Ninety percent of its wildlife is found nowhere else. With no monkeys to compete with, Madagascar's lemurs evolved into over 100 species, from the 3.5-inch Berthe's mouse lemur (the smallest primate in the world) to the now-extinct giant sloth lemur (which weighed as much as a gorilla).

**Cost:** \$20, includes brunch (5 entrees, tax, tip and one soft drink)



**Mar. 15, 2016** (Tues.) 7PM  
**NYCA Discussion / Meetup**  
**Group Leader:** Lee Moore  
**Location:** Stone Creek  
140 East 27th St. (Rear Room)  
(3rd/Lex)

**Subject:** Lee picks timely, lively topics that spur rambunctious discussion.

**Cost:** \$10, includes one free drink.

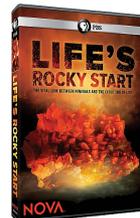


**Mar. 18, 2016** (Fri.) 6:30/7PM  
**NYCA Book/Film Club**  
**Host:** David Orenstein, Ph.D  
**Location:** Stone Creek  
140 East 27th St. (Rear Room)  
(3rd/Lex)

**Film:** *Spotlight*

The true story of how the Boston Globe uncovered the massive scandal of child molestation and cover-up within the local Catholic Archdiocese, shaking the entire Catholic Church to its core.

**Cost:** \$10, includes one free drink.



**Mar. 31, 2016** (Thurs.) 6:30PM  
**NYCA Monthly Meeting**  
**Host:**  
**Location:** SLC Conference Center  
15 West 39th St. (3rd Floor)

**Subject:** *How Did Life Emerge on Earth?*

We will watch and discuss a fabulous PBS Nova Video "Life's Rocky Start." Four and a half billion years ago, the young Earth was a hellish place – a seething chaos of meteorite impacts, volcanoes belching noxious gases, and lightning flashing through a thin, torrid atmosphere. Then, in a process that has puzzled scientists for decades, life emerged. But how?

**Cost:** \$10

## FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## March 2016

- Mar. 13** - NYCA Brunch / Speaker - 12 Noon\*
- Mar. 15** - NYCA Discussion Group - 7PM\*\*
- Mar. 18** - NYCA Film Club - 6:30/7PM\*\*
- Mar. 31** - NYCA Monthly Meeting - 6:30PM\*\*\*

## April 2016

- Apr. 10** - NYCA Brunch / Speaker - 12:00 PM\*
- Apr. 15** - NYCA Discussion Group - 7:00 PM \*\*
- Apr. 19** - NYCA Book / Film Club  
6:30 / 7:00 PM\*\*
- Apr. 28** - NYCA Monthly Meeting - 6:30PM\*\*\*

- \* **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

Wednesday	MNN	RCN	FIOS
Atheism in History 5:30 PM	1997	84	35

Thursday	MNN	RCN	FIOS
NYC Atheists 5 PM	67	85	36
My Road to Atheism 5:30 PM	67	85	36

**NYC ATHEISTS**  
**P. O. BOX 6060**  
**New York, NY 10150-6060**

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