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# NYC Atheists Inc.

An Affiliate of American Atheists



## THE REASON RALLY 2016 WASHINGTON D.C.

[www.nycatheists.org](http://www.nycatheists.org)  
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# PRESIDENT'S "SERMON": REASON RALLY 2016: WERE' GOING ON THE ROAD!

June 4th (10 am - 6pm) On the Mall, Washington D.C.

by Kenneth Bronstein

Last fall I asked our members to contribute their time and energy, and got them, in spades: Our dynamic newsletter and Web site redesigns have drawn increased attention, commitment, and new members. In November/December's sermon, I pointed out the enormous importance of the single-issue (Separation of Church and State) 2016 voter campaign for NYCA. Now that the primaries are almost over and the conventions are coming up, we have a crucial role to play in mapping out our future and the future of the entire country.



Reason Rally 2016 June 4, 2016, Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

On June 4 (10am-6pm), at the Lincoln Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C., we will celebrate our secular, atheistic, agnostic, humanist, freethinking and non-religious beliefs with groups from all across America. It's going to be a very big party! You can expect awesome speakers (wait until you see the list!), bands, entertainment, and political leaders—all there to meet, support, listen to, and take the secular community very seriously. So yes, it's a very big party, but a party with a purpose. NYCA must be a presence at the rally, and—for as many of us as can possibly make them—the planning sessions and meetings that will precede and follow it. [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)

This the most crucial election year in US history. We all know how urgent it is for us to come together as a unified voting bloc when so much is at stake! Celebrating who we are and what we've accomplished will give us the power to make our voices heard in November, and to reach our goals then and in the future. It's a tough fight; we can win it by standing up for reason and making our presence felt. The more of us there are on June 4th, the more we can accomplish. Do whatever it takes to be there!

Who will be there with us? Margaret Cho, Ricard Dawkins, Johnny Depp, Lawrence Krauss, Bill Nye, James Randi, Eugenie Scott, Julia Sweeney, Cara Santa Maria, Yvette d'Entremont, Paul Provenza... and they are just the tip of the iceberg. Visit our Web site for updates. [www.nycatheists.org](http://www.nycatheists.org)



Reason Rally, June 4, 2016

Of course it's not just about the election of a new president, but about the members of Congress with whom (s)he will have to work. And also about the long-term implications of the next Supreme Court nominee. The Supreme Court is vital to our future. Without a Justice who is open to our briefs, and who can break the looming tie votes of a court with only eight members, we are unlikely to make any progress for decades, or even lose some ground hard-won in the past. So it all starts at the Congressional level: who will be elected to write and pass laws and confirm the next Supreme Court nominee.

**UNLESS WE VOTE FOR AN ALL-DEMOCRATIC SLATE,  
AND SPECIFICALLY FOR THE  
2016 DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE,  
IT WILL NOT HAPPEN, AND WE WILL NOT PREVAIL.**

**Everyone counts at  
The Reason Rally  
You most of all!  
Be there. Be counted.**

# DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE

by Tyson Gill

Do you have one of those wacky friends? The ones with a deep, sincere, heartfelt conviction that Elvis still lives; that he is actually in seclusion preparing for his epic comeback? Busy rehearsing for the ultimate Elvis concert that will transform the world?

Your friend undoubtedly has an articulate rebuttal for every possible reason you can throw at him for dismissing the possibility that Elvis might still be alive. His death was staged. The witnesses are all in on it. The corpse in Graceland is a DNA-identical clone of him. He is being kept young by a chemical concoction that the pharmaceutical industry has suppressed.

Your friend probably turns the tables on your skepticism quite easily. How can you be so arrogant as to claim to know everything? Are you that close-minded? Surely you can't prove and therefore can't know for certain that he isn't still alive. If you are as scientifically open-minded as you claim you must admit some possibility that he might still be alive. Surely you can admit that reasonable people can disagree on this unless you believe he is dead purely as a matter of faith. The only intellectually honest position on this question must be agnosticism.

Your friend points to several well-regarded scientists who admit that it is possible Elvis is alive. He recommends a plethora of scholarly books that debunk all those fallacious "scientific" arguments claiming that Elvis is dead or perhaps your friend has a different but similarly wacky belief that he clings to and argues for with great passion.

All that was my way of setting the stage for the real point of this article - that I do not need to read any of those books purporting to prove that Elvis might be alive. Elvis is dead. Period. Any book that starts with the premise that he may still be alive is necessarily idiotic. There is no need for me to actually read them in order to legitimately dismiss them out of hand. Good scientists dismiss an infinite number of implausible claims all the time every day.

So there is no need for me to entertain arguments about how Elvis might still be alive. And there is no reason for me to read a book that starts with the premise that Elvis is alive or the Holocaust did not happen or the Moon landing was faked or alien overlords built the pyramids. I can dismiss them all out of hand without even reading the book jacket. The only reason to read them may be if your interest is in studying delusional thinking or the infection of magical thinking amongst otherwise healthy individuals.

And I have read a great many of these books that purport to present a logical or scientific argument for at least allowing the possibility that god might exist. When I wrote my book *Belief in Science and the Science of Belief*, I took the time to slog through a four-foot stack of books that undoubtedly made Amazon the lucrative enterprise it is today. It was largely a waste of time and money on my part. Believers have had two millennia to come up with arguments so there are simply no new ones to be found.

As a concrete example, I bought several books on Neurotheology. I did the world a service by throwing them out rather than reselling them. Written by Andrew B. Newberg and a host of his followers, these books typically spend 250 pages citing brain imaging and cognitive studies related to belief and god. Their real goal is to establish their science creds so that you will believe them when, in the last 50 pages, they leap to outlandish claims that go something like "since we have clearly evolved to believe in god, the only conclusion must be that god himself designed us to believe in him."

The only conclusion is that this is an idiotic conclusion. But then again what can you hope to get from any author that starts from the silly premise that god exists and works backwards?

Religious books purporting to be scientifically legitimate examinations of the "evidence" for god pop up on Amazon every day like so many weeds. I can't read them all but I can still dismiss them all out of hand. There simply is no god, can be no god, and therefore every book claiming to argue this point is necessarily as idiotic as books arguing that Elvis is alive and well and living in a secret wing of Graceland.

And thus, dear reader, we finally reach the heart of my dilemma: Do I read these silly books and respond to them or do I simply ignore them?

Ignoring them is not easy. If no one pushes back on them, they seem to win the argument. And there are so many of them saying the same silly things that many readers mistake quantity as an indication of quality. On the other hand, the time for engaging in these silly debates is over. At this stage of the atheist movement, we must move past engaging in and thereby legitimizing these ridiculous debates. We should give no more consideration to religious ideas than we do to racist ideas or homophobic ideas or sexist ideas or the idea that Elvis is alive and well.



Still, it's hard to resist getting sucked in. Recently a new book appeared on Amazon called *Can Science Explain Religion* written by a priest who is also a Professor of Religion. It apparently “debunks” the very theory of the evolution of belief that I present in my own book. Do I buy this and read it so I can credibly criticize it and defend my position, and thereby risk encouraging this nonsense? Or is it best not to even respond and hope that the rest of the country follows my sensible example?

**Do I read these silly books and respond to them or do I simply ignore them?**

After struggling with this dilemma for many years, I have come to believe that refusing to engage is the best strategy moving forward. Engaging in further debate with them only feeds the beast. Like booing Donald Trump at a rally.

It's not an easy course of action nor is it without risk or criticism. But in science, we must first ask whether our basic assumptions are valid before we enter into discussions of the resulting questions. We must not let ourselves get caught up in grand debates over how Santa manages to deliver all those presents in one night when the very premise of Santa is pure fantasy.

And that is how we should respond to these books and these arguments—by dismissing them out of hand and with great prejudice and by refusing to entertain dependent arguments arising out of purely implausible assumptions.

△ 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*. Also see Tyson's blog: <https://figmentums.wordpress.com>

**WHY DO  
RELIGIONS  
KILL OTHER  
RELIGIONS  
TO SEE  
WHO HAS  
THE BEST  
GOD?**

# WHEN RELIGION MAKES PEOPLE WORSE

From *Christians, Conflict, and Change* Blog, April 6 2016

by David Gushee

Religion can do a great job helping believers discern right from wrong and helping them relate kindly and justly to other people. And it can stiffen their will when they face unjust suffering for their faith. I was taught these things when I studied Christian ethics; they continue to motivate me in my work as an ethics professor today. But hard experience has me seeing the negation of these claims more clearly than I did at the beginning of my journey.

Now I see that religion can sometimes do a very poor job of helping believers discern right from wrong—or in helping them relate kindly and justly to others. And it can also persuade people that the rejection of their hurtful or ill-considered convictions is actually martyrdom for God's Truth, leaving them even more entrenched in their destructive beliefs.

My two most inspiring teachers of Christian ethics in the 1980s were the Baptist Glen Stassen of Southern Baptist Seminary and the Lutheran Larry Rasmussen of Union Seminary. They knew each other and shared scholarly interests that shaped me as well: the Nazi period in Germany; the extraordinary life of the scholar-pastor-resister Dietrich Bonhoeffer; the challenge of overcoming racism; and opposing the nuclear arms race during the Cold War.

Both men taught me an essentially hopeful vision about the role that Christian convictions can play in making society better. Their faith had been impacted very deeply by the lessons of the Nazi period; it honored Dietrich Bonhoeffer for standing fast against Nazi seductions when so many of his fellow Christians surrendered their souls; it resisted America's own racism; and rejected the idea that more nukes would make the world safer.

My own dissertation focused on that small minority of Christians who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. What kind of character and faith motivated these people who risked their lives while their neighbors stood by indifferently? Thus, I have spent much of my career trying to teach "rescuer Christianity," instead of "bystander Christianity."

But now, as a wizened old veteran of the fight, I sometimes struggle with discouragement. It's not just that many Christians fail to live up to the clear demands of Christian discipleship. It's that we can't even agree on what those demands are. We all say we believe in Jesus, but what we make of that belief is so marked by irreconcilable differences that I'm not sure we are in any meaningful way members of the same religious community.

I should have seen this more clearly all along. After all, could it really be said that a Dietrich Bonhoeffer who died resisting Hitler shared the same religion as the "Christians" who murdered children in Hitler's name? What religious commonality linked white Christian KKK members and Black Christians fighting for an end to segregation and lynching? And how much do pro-torture, Islamophobic Christians have in common with those who take the opposite path? A faith that stands with the crucified ones of this world is very different from a faith that does the crucifying. The question becomes not whether you say you follow Jesus, but which Jesus you follow.

Worst of all has been my recent discovery of versions of Christianity that actually make people worse human beings than they might otherwise have been. Here, churches, pastors, or individuals interpret Scripture or faith in such a way that they do more harm than they would do if they were just good old-fashioned pagans. I never anticipated that I would think: "If we could just keep people out of (such a version of) church, they would be better people."

Christian leaders wonder why Christianity in America is declining so steeply. Here's a reason: some highly visible versions of Christianity are so abhorrent that sensible people want nothing to do with Christianity or with the people who practice it.

The same, of course, holds true for abhorrent versions and followers of other religions. But that's their problem, and this one is mine.

△ David P. Gushee, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Center for Faith and Public Life at Mercer University, Macon, Georgia

# IN THE NEWS

## NEWS ITEMS

- Meet the 'Nones,' the Democratic Party's biggest faith constituency: <https://goo.gl/fj9WGY>
- Judge says Kentucky theme park can hire people based on religious beliefs: <http://goo.gl/OeAeD1>
- New Zealand now legally recognizes weddings performed in the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster: <http://goo.gl/yzm1c4>
- Three deaf women in Haiti ritualistically beaten, killed: <http://goo.gl/xlVxvh>
- Thousands of ill-educated Yeshiva boys: <http://goo.gl/Dhcr45>
- Bible becomes official State book of Tennessee: <http://goo.gl/q64yKR>
- Mormon growth slows to its lowest level since 1937. Here's why that's great news: <http://goo.gl/jeXRii>

### WANTED PRO BONO LAWYER

Contact Ken Bronstein  
212-535-7425 / [nycatheists@gmail.com](mailto:nycatheists@gmail.com)

### 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; it will become a memory, not the law of the land.

## NYCA CAMPAIGNS

- Petition: Stop ending your speeches with "God bless America" with 125 NYC Atheists signatures sent to: President Obama and every member of the U.S. Senate and House; Governor Cuomo and every member of the New York State Senate and Assembly; and Mayor DeBasio and every member of the New York City Council.
- Sign Up via the NYC Atheists website: [www.nycatheists.org](http://www.nycatheists.org) to attend the 2016 Reason Rally (June 4th / Saturday / 10am – 6pm) at The Mall – Washington, D.C.



10am - 6pm / **FREE!**  
[www.reasonrally.org](http://www.reasonrally.org)

**NYC ATHEISTS STARTS SATURDAY STREET TABLING  
MAY 7TH**

**COLUMBUS CIRCLE - IN FRONT OF THE  
TIME WARNER BUILDING  
11 AM - 6 PM**

**First Shift:** 10:55 am - 2 pm (setup assistance welcomed)

**Second Shift:** 1pm - 4pm

**Third Shift:** 2 pm - 6 pm

Part-time shifts available as well.

To assist please contact via: [nycatheists@gmail.com](mailto:nycatheists@gmail.com)

# UPCOMING EVENTS



**May. 8, 2016 (Sun.) 12 Noon**  
**NYCA Brunch / Speaker**  
**Speaker:** Elizabeth Raymond, MD, MPH

For over two decades, has been a prominent researcher in two fields, contraception and abortion, that have both been primary targets of relentless religious interference. She will share her insider perspectives on the current struggle over the labeling of mifepristone and will also relate many other experiences that illustrate the ways in which religiously motivated obstructionism disrupts and undermines important scientific research.

Dr. Raymond is a senior scientist for Gynuity Health Projects in New York City, a leading international research organization. Over the past 20 years, she has published over 75 peer-reviewed scientific papers in women's health and has served as an expert witness in multiple high-profile legal cases involving abortion and contraception. Her research has been pivotal in support of FDA approval of various contraceptives and has led to numerous significant policy changes in reproductive health.

**Subject: Conducting Scientific Research in a Religion-Infused World:** *A Scientist's Behind-the-Scenes Insight into the Struggle to Conduct Science in the Face of Religious Opposition*

On March 30, 2016, the FDA approved an update of the package label for mifepristone, the primary drug used to induce medical abortion. This important revision was long overdue as knowledge about the drug had advanced substantially since its initial approval in 2000. Within mere weeks, U.S. Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey, a leading advocate for "God-given rights", and Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma, who believes that freedom is "given to us by God", rallied the support of 73 fellow Congressional legislators to launch an effort to harass both the FDA and the scientists involved in the research under the pretense of concern for women's health. a gorilla).

**Location:** The Press Box Restaurant (2nd Floor)  
932 Second Avenue (49th/50th St.)

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



**May. 17, 2016 (Tues.) 7PM**  
**NYCA Discussion / Meetup**  
**Group Leader:** Lee Moore  
**Location:** Stone Creek  
140 East 27th St. (Rear Room) (3rd/Lex)  
**Subject: Free Will**

*Abelief in free will touches nearly everything that human beings value. It is difficult to think about law, politics, religion, public policy, intimate relationships, morality—as well as feelings of remorse or personal achievement—without first imagining that every person is the true source of his or her thoughts and actions. And yet the facts tell us that free will is an illusion.*

— Sam Harris.

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

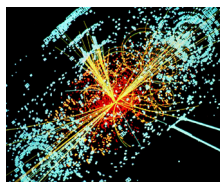


**May. 20, 2016 (Fri.) 6:30/7PM**  
**NYCA Book/Film Club**  
**Host:** David Orenstein, Ph.D  
**Location:** Stone Creek  
140 East 27th St. (Rear Room)  
(3rd/Lex)

**Film: Crimes and Misdemeanors**

An ophthalmologist's mistress threatens to reveal their affair to his wife, while a married documentary filmmaker is infatuated by another woman.

**Cost: Free**, recommended purchase of drink or food to



**May. 26, 2016 (Thurs.) 6:30PM**  
**NYCA Monthly Meeting**  
**Location:** SLC Conference Center  
15 West 39th St. (3rd Floor)  
**Subject: Particle Fever (video)**

Follow six brilliant scientists during the launch of the Large Hadron Collider (CERN) and the search for the Higgs boson.

**Cost: \$10**

## TWO HANDS WORKING CAN DO MORE THAN A THOUSAND CLASPED IN PRAYER

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### May 2016

**May 5** - NYCA Blood donation - 4-6:30 pm \*\*\*\*\*

**May 8** - NYCA Brunch / Speaker - 12 pm \*

**May 17** - NYCA Discussion Group - 7 pm \*\*

**May 20** - NYCA Book / Film Club - 6:30-7 pm \*\*

**May 26** - NYCA Monthly Meeting - 6:30 pm \*\*\*

### June 2016

**June 4** - Reason Rally - 11 am - 7 pm \*\*\*\*\*

**June 12** - NYCA Brunch / Speaker - 12 pm \*

**June 17** - NYCA Book / Film Club - 6:30-7 pm \*\*

**June 21** - NYCA Discussion Group - 7 pm \*\*

**June 30** - NYCA Monthly Meeting - 6:30 pm \*\*\*

\* **PRESS BOX RESTAURANT & PUB**

932 Second Ave. 2nd Floor

\*\* **STONE CREEK BAR AND LOUNGE**

140 East 27th St. Rear Room

\*\*\* **SLC CONFERENCE CENTER**

15 West 39th Street, 3rd Floor

\*\*\*\* **THE MALL**

Washington D.C.

\*\*\*\*\* **NY BLOOD BANK**

310 East 67th St.



NYC Atheists

### 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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