



Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture •
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The Death of Real Religion

by Dr. Joseph Chuman, Leader of the Bergen Ethical Society

In previous generations what one religiously believed made a difference. Religious devotees affirmed doctrines, articles of faith, and the ritual practices which they symbolized because they were comforting. But not merely comforting -- because they were true. Belief was the fabric of conscience and often inspired moral sacrifice and deeds of courage. Martin Luther's proclamation "Here I stand, I can not do otherwise" has echoed through the ages as an example of the power of conscience to guide one's actions.

Religious belief made demands evoking a sense of obligation and duty which often lifted the person beyond his or her immediate interests to serve the interests of others. In our own day, Martin Luther King reflected the force of religion to impel moral action when he said, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

Today, the search for religious truth and ethical obligation is greatly replaced by the quest for personal, "spiritual" fulfillment. In this sense it imitates the aims of therapy albeit with a different approach

and content. The questions people often ask before joining a congregation or engaging a spiritual discipline is "How will it enhance my personal life", "How will it bring me greater fulfillment?" "Does the ambiance of this congregation -- its music, the vitality of the congregation, the personality of the minister -- meet my personal needs? In short, "what's in it for me?" These questions, needless to say, have little to do with belief.

The shift of religion away from theology to matters of psychology may make congregational life a warmer, more engaging, but less serious, affair. In the worst cases, it becomes an arena for self-indulgence at the expense of higher, more outer-directed callings. The search for commanding truths by which to assess one's own shortcomings and challenge the ethical shortcomings of society is falling by the wayside. This transformation of American religion, sweeping across the American landscape like a whirlwind, whether in organized churches or among private seekers, by its nature does not readily evoke strong moral conscience nor passionate commitments extending beyond the individual alone.

The Problems of Religious Surfing

It used be disparaged as syncretism, but today it has become fashionable to borrow not only the wisdom of other traditions, but the very ceremonies, rituals and doctrines that lie at the sacred center of the faiths of various peoples. New Agers don the appropriate regalia and engage in Native American rites. Christians build sukkot and hold Passover seders. Justified in the name of greater understanding, ecumenism, and spiritual fulfillment, few practitioners or critics question this appropriation of the rituals of others as one's own.

But what appears on its face complimentary (Isn't imitation the sincerest form of flattery?) raises very serious problems. Not least of these is the unwitting issue of political condescension. When religious practices of subjugated or marginalized people are appropriated by religiously dominant groups, and not the other way around, some questions as to the dynamics underlying the current craze of shameless borrowing need to be posed. When surveyed, Native Americans are not flattered by Caucasians sitting in sweat lodges and passing the peace pipe. Rather, many see it as the last insult in a tragic history of theft and exploitation which has characterized the cultural genocide of native peoples.

Such borrowing also makes religion more superficial. Virtually every religious practice is an expression of a tradition and often a religious culture with complex roots that penetrate deeply. Living the religious life involves immersing oneself in that tradition. To skim off what is best and most appealing is to ignore the contradictions, subtleties and historical reach which augments religion's edifying power. Behind this surfing of the religious landscape is often an intention to jerrybuild an overly optimistic spiritual outlook while sidestepping confrontation with the reality of suffering and evil. The easy importation of exotic and foreign rituals, may, again, fulfill the desire for immediate spiritual gratification. The cost is a forfeiture of deeper moral commitment.

2005-2006 THEME - BSEC: BEGINNING OUR SECOND CENTURY PUTTING ETHICS FIRST

MAY PLATFORMS

May 7 — Putting Ethics First Series: "Fair Compensation All Around - What's Both Right and Possible Today ?" With Lisel Burns. Bring your own real life situations and join this important community conversation with Brooklyn-based fair compensation organizers. Hear about the campaigns having some success addressing the increasing inequities in employee compensation (including non profit organizations like ours.)

May 14 --Mother's Day Colloquy- Led By Constance Pigozzi. Theme: "Simplicity" A colloquy is a more meditative Ethical Culture ceremony on a theme, with music, sharing and reflection. The format is based on Dr. Arthur Dobrin's book "Spelling God With Two O's."

May 21—BSEC MEMBERSHIP SUNDAY: Celebrate the founding of the Ethical movement (May 1876) with us by getting to know new and prospective members, and reflect on how important BSEC membership can be in these uncertain times.

May 28 — Memorial Platform--Members and Friends will remember and honor those who have died with a personal candle lighting ceremony.

June 4 — Children's Sunday Assembly Recognition and Graduation Program 2006.

Platforms begin at 11 am each Sunday and are free and open to the public.

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY ASSEMBLY 10:30-12:30

May 7, 14 and 21

**THE BROOKLYN SOCIETY
FOR ETHICAL CULTURE**

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year by BSEC. This month's issue includes
contributions by Lisel Burns, Audrey Kindred,
Constance Pigozzi, Rita Wilson, Tina Aridas,
Maureen Egginton

Send contributions to Maureen at
brooklynethicalsociety@yahoo.com.

**June Newsletter Deadline
May 19**

Unfortunately, space constraints sometimes
dictate whether a contribution can be included.

Cont'd from Front Page...

Religion' s Mimicking of the Market Religion' s most important role is to stand outside society and criticize its evils and excesses from a plateau of higher moral values. It points a finger at government and the wielders of secular authority and speaks "truth to power." Religion' s social role needs to uphold those ideals which money cannot buy and which lie outside the realm of financial exchange justice, charity, human dignity, compassion, righteousness and peace among them.

Most ominous of religion' s current tendencies is its aggressive appropriation of the values of the marketplace. The free market is all the rage, and religion lamentably has fallen prey to its seductions. Large churches are modeled on shopping malls. Ministers have become entrepreneurs increasingly preoccupied with body counts and keeping the collection plates brimming. With self-fulfillment a motivating impetus behind religious seeking, the religious leader is being transformed into an entertainer in order to fill the pews and retain the interests of parishioners in an era of diminishing attention spans. Today religion is a consumer item, and people shop around for a church or spiritual regimen as they would a new refrigerator.

But what happens when religions sells out to the marketplace? What effect does it have on religion' s traditional prophetic function when it envies, mimics and jumps on the bandwagon of the unfettered market? Clearly, it yields its vitally necessary role as a standard bearer and protector of those values which civilize society and give meaning to individual lives. Throughout American history, religion' s authority to criticize the abuses of power has been its greatest gift to a society much in need of reform. This proud legacy has all but disappeared in an era awash in "spiritual" seeking, when religion' s rewards begin to look too much like the blandishments of the world.

The abolition movement, the movement for women' s suffrag in the 19th century and the civil rights movement of the 20th exemplified religion in its prophetic role; religion at its best. Masses of Americans were liberated from conditions of oppression, and the American character was transformed and uplifted. Today, American religion has greatly ceded its grandeur and high moral purpose. In many quarters it has abandoned its distinctive calling. In this era of religious triumphalism, American religion is in danger of losing its soul.

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Membership News

We send love and best wishes to our friends and members who have recently been ill in hospital, or recuperating at home.

We are sad to let you know that our beloved Board Member Donna Roberts was in Methodist Hospital but glad she is home now. Call the office for her address or phone number. We send loving thoughts to her and her partner, Leonora.

Anne Marie had a fall and has been homebound with sciatica symptoms. She is seeing a physical therapist soon and will know when she can move around after that visit.

Rose Castro had to go to rehab after a hospital stay after being knocked over by a car.

Dorothy Klein- is now at home after her long hospital and nursing home stay.

Lisel' s sister Stephanie is recovering in NH from arthritis related hospitalization over Easter weekend.

* May 10 EAC/CISPES event at BSEC with the Raging Grannies, El Salvador trip debriefing and auction.

* Bi-weekly Writing Group Friday evenings at 6:30. Contact Kim Brandon at via email at Kimdarniece@hotmail.com

* May 13, 4pm reception with AEU Board which is meeting at BSEC, contact Vandra Thorburn at v.thorburn@earthlink.net for information.

* Lisel will be in Vancouver Canada leading a Train the Trainer sequence for leaders in GROOTS INTL from three continents prior to and during the United Nations' World Urban Forum, June 19-23. She will meet the BSEC delegation to the AEU Assembly in Chicago, June 30.

Bringing Peace to Darfur

Last night over a dozen aid and human rights organizations, including Brooklyn Parents for Peace, Human Rights Watch, Citizens for Global Solutions and American Jewish World Service, set up tables on the lower level of the New York Society of Ethical Culture to provide information on how we can help them help the Darfurians. Their actions are part of the response to a crisis examined by the panelists who spoke to an overflow crowd in the auditorium on "The Best Hope for Peace in Darfur." Sponsored by NYSEC (www.nysec.org), Amnesty International (www.amnestyusa.org) and Human Rights First (www.humanrightsfirst.org), the program, moderated by Karima Bennoune, Professor of International Law at Rutgers University School of Law-Newark and a member of the Board of Amnesty International USA, featured Nicholas Kristof, NY Times Op-Ed columnist awarded the Pulitzer Prize this week for Commentary on Darfur, Mark Malloch Brown, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, Juan Mendez, UN Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide and President of the International Center for Transitional Justice and Tragi Mustafa, a Darfuri refugee living in Ontario, founder of Save Women-Sudan and a member of the Executive Committee of the Darfur Association of Canada.

The current crisis in Darfur began in early 2003 and according to UN figures, as many as 180,000 have died and over 2 million have been displaced. The speakers conveyed first-hand testimony of the horrors experienced by the Darfurians and the difficulties the UN has faced in gaining the cooperation and resources to mount an effective response. They challenged the audience to not rest until the killing ceased (see possibilities for action below). It is their belief that the time is right, through consistent and continuing action, to move the world to respond to this genocide.

Ms. Mustafa, who has family still living in Darfur, spoke with great urgency. She described the disappearance of refugees who sought UN assistance in Egypt and asked that pressure be put on the UN to investigate the Egyptian government for its actions in support of the Sudanese government. She also called for demonstrations in front of the Chinese Embassy in NYC and a boycott of Chinese-made products, accusing the Chinese government of also supporting the government of Sudan. China has many businesses operating in Sudan. Divestment demands now being made by students on many college campuses harken back to the anti-apartheid struggle. Though these divestments may not make a significant dent in the economy of the Sudan, they serve to draw attention to the problems there.

WHAT WE CAN DO AT BSEC

The Board of BSEC endorsed a proposal to engage our community in support of relief efforts already underway. There is much we can do.

Brooklyn Parents for Peace, one of BSEC's community partners, has been working with the Darfur Rehabilitation Project (www.darfurrehab.org) to provide direct assistance to Darfur refugees.

To assist their efforts, we are:

- 1) Collecting
 - Clothing - light in color & weight for children, men and women. Please be sure the clothes are clean and in good condition.
 - Powdered milk
 - School supplies – pencils, pens, markers, notebooks, erasers, etc.

These items can be left in the BSEC office during office hours or delivered on Sunday before or after Platform.

- 2) Splitting the Platform collections for 8 Sundays between BSEC and Darfur relief. This money will be used to help mail the collected items to Darfur, with any surplus going to another direct relief agency.

Additionally, you can

- Contact your Congress members and the White House. (www.house.gov and www.senate.gov to locate your Senators and Representatives. Tell them that the US must exert leadership within NATO and the UN to ensure there is adequate funding and logistical support for the African Union mission in Sudan, a multinational force in Darfur by October 2006 with a robust mandate to protect civilians, and accountability before the International Criminal Court. (Also write to President Bush at www.whitehouse.gov/) **There will also be letters and postcards to sign at Sunday Platform tables.**
- Join the Save Darfur Coalition Rally April 30 March in Washington, DC at the National Mall.
- Go to www.hopefordarfur.org and sign the petition for appointment of a high-level envoy – another key action for peace.
- Call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to ensure ICC fact-finding missions collect evidence on crimes targeting women and indictments are issued that cover those crimes. Write: Mr. Luis Moreno-Ocampo, Chief Prosecutor, International Criminal Court, PO Box 19519, 2500 CM, The Hague, The Netherlands.

Tell 5 friends what you're doing and ask them to join you in one or all of these actions. The time to act is now.

Diane Kirschner,
April 20, 2006

**Have you noticed the script above the Meeting Room Door?
It is now "The Marshall Dubin Meeting Room."**

Words for Marshall Dubin By Rita REB Wilson

Marvelous Man, always ready to take justice stanz,
Mister Man, an outstanding one that walked this land

Activist, law of love for humanity, law of respect for all,
His statue was deceiving, he stood very tall

Radiant Rebel, Roaring for Right....
Racism, discrimination, led him to march and fight

Shining Star, Smiling Face....Injustice and prejudice would erase,
He found both a disgrace

Husband to Etheline, he was glad to be so,
He loved her dearly yet he had to let her go... she passed years before

Assertive and had absolute position on what he believed,
If this Board becomes a member of the XYZ, I will leave!

Loyal to his memberships, he endorsed good works and actions,
He took pride in his associations, he honored allegiance with passion

Lively with his poems, liberated and spoke his mind,
He loved haiku, he quoted sonnets, he recited his own lines

Devoted Dad to Jonathan & Jason, dedicated to his family,
He loved his grandchildren and spoke of all with pleasure and pride

Union Man, 1199 was always on his mind,
He talked passionately about eleven ninety nine,
Sometimes he could be found on a picket line

Benevolent, brilliant, bold,
He was considerate, he was a phenomenal man,

Immeasurable knowledge, he was intelligent, witty and wise,
Fighter for justice without any disguise

Natty with a red beret, neck tie slightly out of place,
Readying himself for the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture
He loved us too, he said it often to our faces.

The voice of Marshall is silent, his words are laced with wisdom

Bach to Brooklyn

Sunday May 21 at 3:30 PM

Brooklyn Baroque

Andrew Bolotowsky, flute;
David Bakamjian, cello;
Rebecca Pechefsky, harpsichord

An afternoon of solos and sonatas for
Flute, Harpsichord and Cello by

Johann Sebastian Bach



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Suggested Donation: \$10 (Fund raiser for the Society)

SAVE THE DATE

THE 2006 PEACE SITE AWARD

JUNE 11, 2006

11AM

HONOREES

THE GRANNYS' PEACE BRIGADE

This organization is made up of a coalition of peace action groups including, The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Grandmothers Against the War and many others.

Solidarity Soiree "Espectacular" May 10, 7pm

Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) and the Ethical Action Committee of BSEC present an evening of solidarity, creativity and song. Hors d'oeuvres and a report back from New Yorkers recently returned from elections in El Salvador. Suggested donations \$10-20.

**"Heart of Humanity: When Life Itself is the Mystery"
May 12-13**

Join members of BSEC and NVC (Non Violent Communication) communities in a two day workshop (Friday 7pm -12pm & Sat 10 am) exploring spiritual and wisdom practices relevant to both Ethical Culture and NVC. Arts, meditation, etc. Proceeds split between guest NVC instructor and BSEC Children's program; price your choice up to \$1,000, but no fee is too small. For information contact Nellie Bright at nellie_bright@yahoo.com or Audrey at ethicalkin@hotmail.com. small. contact nellie_bright@yahoo.com

**American Ethical Union Meeting at BSEC
May 13, 9am-4pm**

BSEC is happy to welcome the American Ethical Union's Board of Trustees who will be meeting at the Society on Saturday, May 13. Arnold Fishman, AEU President, welcomes any member of the Brooklyn Society to attend and to observe their meeting.

Are You Interested in Running for the AEU Board?

Elections for the AEU Board members and officers will be held at the upcoming Assembly. The AEU Board Development Committee encourages individuals interested in being part of the future of the AEU to join in as a "write-in" candidate for a position on the AEU board or as an AEU officer, or to apply for membership in one of 16 AEU committees. The material is available from Maureen Egginton via email at brooklynethicalsociety@yahoo.com and is also posted on the AEU website at (www.aeu.org).

HAPPY MAY BIRTHDAYS

Greta Gladney--13
Anne Klaeyesen--21



Simba Yangala--23
Lydia Last--31

WWW.BSEC.ORG



MAY 2006 AT BSEC

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 7pm Story-telling Group	2 7-9pm Brooklyn Women's Chorus	3 7-9pm Community Sing	4 7-10pm Board Meeting	5 GCH: 8-10pm	6 7:45-9:45am: Tai Chi w/Sy 10-12 Yoga & Kids Arts Play w/Audrey
7 10:30 CSA 11am: Platform 3-4pm Yoga with Audry Kindred	8	9 7-9pm Brooklyn Women's Chorus	10 6-9pm CIPES Fundraiser, co-sponsored by EAC	11 7-9pm: Platform Meeting	12 7-10pm NVC & BSEC Fund-raiser GCH: 8-10pm	13 7:45-9:45am: Tai Chi w/Sy 9-5 AEU Board Meeting 10-12 Yoga & Kids Arts Play w/ Audrey
14 10:30am CSA 11am Colloquy	15	16 7-9pm Brooklyn Women's Chorus	17	18 6:30 – Buildings & Grounds Meeting	19 GCH: 8-10pm	20 7:45 9:45 Tai Chi w/Sy 10-12 Yoga & Kids Arts Play w/Audrey PS 44 Fund-raiser/Nettie
21 10:30am CSA 11am Platform 3:30 Brklyn Baroque Chamber Concert – BSEC Fundraiser	22	23 7-9pm Brooklyn Women's Chorus		25	26 GCH: CLOSED	27 7:45-9:45am: Tai Chi w/Sy Tepper
28 11am Colloquy	29	30 7-9pm Brooklyn Women's Chorus	31	<p>The Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture <i>is a humanist religious organization dedicated to improving the ethical quality of relationships in personal lives and in the world.</i> Affiliated with the American Ethical Union. www.aeu.org</p>		

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY ASSEMBLY NEWS FROM AUDREY KINDRED

This past month, the Children's Sunday Assembly hosted the Spring Festival THE FELIX FESTIVAL - named, on the one hand, after Ethical Culture's inspiring founder, Felix Adler, and on the other hand, used to stand for Family Ethical Living Is X-citing! Because...as we discover, through CSA, IT IS! We focused on family practices of ethics within our everyday home-lives, contributing collectively to a large mural of one day in an ethical culturist's life. In the garden room, we celebrated inspiring people in our Hall of Ethical Heros. In the Peace Garden, we potted seeds for our own familial peace gardens. Special guest Carol Horowitz shared news of our beloved Charlie, thanking CSA for the saffron tapestry that hangs in his healing room. This was an extraordinary day.

CSA held a committee meeting of our newly reformed RE-EE committee chaired by parent, Pam Mills, whose thoughtful initiatives toward leadership in the CSA community are invigorating. We followed that up with the first of regularly scheduled parent meetings.

CSA's graduates-to-be have mightily led the Fair Trade CSA Fundraiser, selling Equal Exchange coffee, tea and chocolates. A few more fund raising efforts will take place in May including a collaboration with Non-Violent Communication, to host a workshop on May 12-13, recommended highly to all!

CSA Meets May 7, 14 and 21: Parents Meeting: 5/21 10-11am

PLEDGING

Member pledges sustain our BSEC Community - the people, facilities, and programs of the Society. Pledges can be paid in a one time full amount or spread out over the Season. We are getting towards the end of our Season so please make sure that you are up to date with your pledge payments. Please contact the Pledge Secretary, Ruth Pikitich, with any questions at ruthpikitich@fuse.com. Thank you

NEWS FROM THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

May 13: AEU Board of Directors Meeting, Brooklyn
May 27-29: Future of Ethical Societies (FES), Philadelphia
June 28-30: National Leaders Council June 30:
AEU Board of Directors - Chicago
June 30-July 3: AEU Assembly - Chicago

**THE GOOD COFFEEHOUSE MUSIC PARLOR - 31ST ANNIVERSARY SEASON
BROOKLYN'S HOME FOR ACOUSTIC ROOTS MUSIC**



Shows start at 8 PM – (See prices posted beside each performance)

May 5 **James Reams & The Barnstormers** – Bluegrass (*adults \$10, kids \$6*)
Bluegrass Unlimited magazine writes: "...delightfully unadorned 1950s-style bluegrass that draws heavily on, yet doesn't mimic, the best-loved bands of that era." And here's what *Sing Out* magazine says: "...tight instrumental excellence and hard-edged vocals ...uncompromising, hard-core bluegrass..." Heavy on grit, not glitz, and packed with soul, not packed with notes, **James Reams & The Barnstormers** (www.jamesreams.com) dishes up that raw excitement of "old-school" bluegrass music. Yes, this *is* your father's bluegrass music, but with a very 21st-century sensibility, not a nostalgia act. This is the way bluegrass music was meant to be played.

May 12 **Mike Dowling** – *Country Blues Guitar – Traveling Troubadour Series* (*adults \$15, kids \$6*)
Mike Dowling is quite simply one of the best guitar pickers in the universe, a virtuoso in country blues, slide and swing styles. For years a sought-after session player in Nashville, Mike has released seven CDs, teaches at guitar camps nationwide and runs his own guitar instruction program, Wind River Guitar (www.mikedowling.com), in Wyoming, where he makes his home. The late mandolin great Jethro Burns once said of Mike, "I don't play guitar when Mike is in the band. You don't take the game warden hunting."

May 19 **Third Friday with the Park Slope Food Coop** (*adults \$10, kids \$6*)
Jezra Kay and Jerome Harris

May 26 *CLOSED*

Contact Justin Stallard if you are a member and would like to volunteer at the Good Coffee House.

**LOOK FOR INFORMATION COMING SOON REGARDING OUR
ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING SLATED FOR SOME
TIME IN JUNE.**

**WE'RE ON THE WEB
WWW.BSEC.ORG**

Ethical Culture members join together in Ethical Societies to assist each other in developing ethical ideas and ideals and to work together to improve our world and the world of our children.



"Always act to elicit the best in others and thereby in oneself."

Felix Adler, Founder

BSEC is a member of the American Ethical Union



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