

# AOK ATHÉE OKIE

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## ATHEIST ACTIVISM

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As an Atheist I have come up with a set of personal goals to strive for while promoting my particular belief system. These goals are, I think, important to use when deciding what exactly should and should not be done by a group of Atheists acting as Atheists. I have condensed everything that I think an Atheist activist should do into four straightforward goals, which I present here in order of priority:

- 1: Promote the public visibility of Atheism.
- 2: Promote tolerance towards Atheism.
- 3: Eliminate all ties of Church and State.
- 4: Eliminate irrational religious beliefs.

### 1. Promote the public visibility of Atheism

This is the most important goal, the one that needs to be taken care of before you can even think about moving on to the rest. What good can a person or group do if nobody in the wide world knows that they exist? When you are thinking of what to do you've got to think of this. Even if you are seen in a bad light, you've got to be seen.

### 2. Promote tolerance towards Atheism

This is essential, but a bit tricky, given the first goal. The most effective way to get attention may not be the best way to build your reputation. It will get you noticed to deface the billboards purporting to be messages from God, but it will not earn respect, only loathing and intolerance.

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### 3. Eliminate all ties of Church and State

Goal number three is the political goal. Atheists can generally be assumed to agree on only one political issue: total separation of church and state. Because of this widespread consensus among atheists, and because it is a vitally important issue, I have made this my third goal.

### 4. Eliminate irrational religious beliefs.

This is the most extreme and long term of my goals. I would like to stress that *forcing* people away from religion is not the way to achieve this goal. To eliminate irrational beliefs, we must *convince* people with evidence and reasoning, and other such non-coercive methods. I do not expect to ever complete this goal, but I am convinced that it is worthwhile to work towards.

Since I set these goals I have tried to apply them to my own public life. They have not solved everything, but they've made several decisions much easier, the most important of these being my choice to come fully out of the closet -- showing the people around me that we unbelievers are here, and we are (to their surprise) good and decent people.

## PROACTIVE VERSUS REACTIVE APPROACHES TO ATHEIST ACTIVISM

What has activism got to do with such corporate buzzwords as *proactive* and *reactive*? Are they not merely another way for managers to repackage the same old game? Trendy phrases lacking substantive meaning? Not at all. In truth, these words cleave the practice of activism into a meaningful and useful dichotomy – reactive protestation and proactive image-building. Both are useful, both are important, and it is necessary to discern which one to use and when.

Most fields of human endeavor contain both elements in a complementary relationship. For example, preventative medicine is proactive, while symptomatic/diagnostic medicine is typically reactive. If one takes vitamin C to stave off illness, that is proactive and preventive medicine. If instead one is diagnosed with a throat infection and antibiotics are prescribed, that is reactive medicine. In foreign policy, humanitarian aid is proactive, while dropping bombs on the people for whom the humanitarian aid was intended is usually reactive. What then may be said of activism? It too may be proactive or reactive. Hanging a freethought banner in a public park is proactive, while holding it up at a prayer rally is reactive.

### **The Case for Atheist Reactivism** tergiversant@OklahomaAtheists.org

In a real sense, atheism is inherently reactive. Even the word “atheism” itself is derived by prefixing the negation “a” to the term “theism.” Without theism, there would be no atheism, just as no one bothers to coin the terms for unbelief in gnomes and færies (“agnomism” and “afærisim,” respectively).

Beyond etymological hints at the nature of atheism, we must consider the role of the atheist in modern society. In everyday life, the atheist merely wants to go about his or her life without being unfairly discriminated against. If theists did not despise us for an allegedly sinful act of “willful rebellion against God,” we probably would not care overly much about whatever magical phenomena in which they happen to believe. We atheists rarely bother to try to dissuade Theravadan Buddhists, Confucianists, Taoists, or even Universalist Christians from their faith, because their faith is not discriminatory against us.

Fundamentalism, on the other hand, generally begins with the premise that there is only One True Way™ to salvation, and that it involves groveling before some particular deity and accepting the cock-and-bull mythology and barbaric moral code created by ancient nomadic peoples wandering the hinterlands in search of human and animal prey on the fringes of some primitive river-valley civilization.

### **The Case for Atheist Proactivism** thekimmy@OklahomaAtheists.org

Reactive protests can be a very useful activity. They get the issue out into the public eye and encourage debate. They makes known two sides of an issue, and occasionally encourage change. However, depending on the majority public's view of an issue, it can also give a group a very bad name. Put another way, if the public loves the group inside the building they won't be overly fond of the group outside with the signs.

Atheists must do more than point out what is wrong in the world, waiting around to react when someone does something we think is wrong. We can also help to improve the world in some way. We must be more than naysayers if we want to have a good public image. We have to help. And I don't just mean showing people that there is an alternative to religion, although that is important.

We must be active in our community. We need to help with the problems we see around us. Hold a clothing drive, or a canned food drive. Join a recycling program, or begin one. Volunteer at the local library to read to the children. Find any way you can to reach out to the people around you and help them. Most importantly, do whatever you do proudly, as an atheist (or as an atheist organization, if it's a group activity). Then people will begin to realize that we are also active, caring members of the community. Then they will see that we, as people, have just as much to offer as any believer.

## The Case for Atheist Reactivism (cont.)

Such fundamentalism threatens the freedom of unbelievers everywhere and promotes intolerance and discrimination towards us. We must react against it, and forcefully at that. We must let such people know that to believe in a bloodthirsty god bent on torturing humanity is both factually and morally wrong. We must let them know that we will not tolerate the intrusion of their ancient mythologies into our government, most especially our schools.

Reactive protests are entirely essential whenever religious thinking threatens our individual freedom, or works to undermine our common ethic of respect, liberty and tolerance. Whenever religious extremists spout their hate-filled rhetoric, we should react. Whenever they make the slightest move to introduce religious thinking and language into our legal codes, we must react. Whenever they make our children bow their heads in prayer and write the name of their god upon the school marquee, we damn ourselves if we do not react.

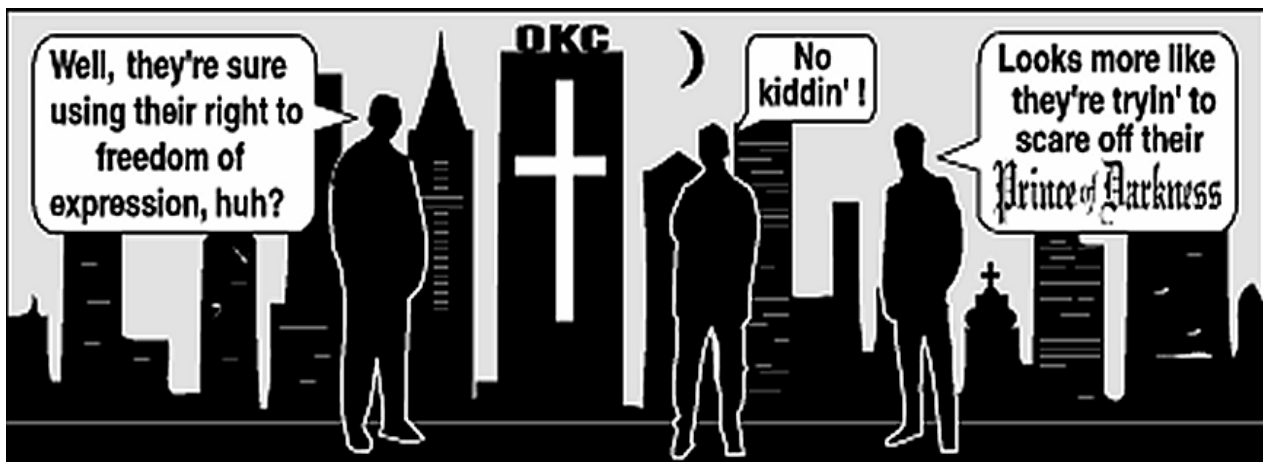
Nevertheless...

What we do must always be done with a sense of mutual respect. We cannot insist on our right to be heard without respecting theirs. We need to understand that they are (for the most part) sincere in their beliefs, however misguided. Whenever it is possible to do so and still be heard, we must speak with kindness. Whether proactive or reactive, we must always remember that hostility usually breeds resentment. It's a long, hard road to acceptance, and we must carefully watch every step of the way.

## The Case for Atheist Proactivism (cont.)

We are engaged in a public relations war. That's the pure and simple truth. They have the history, the organization, the money, and the majority. All we have is what we know to be true, and what we believe about ourselves and humanity. We are very much the minority here, struggling for positive recognition and respect.

Because of that, we have to think twice as hard about what we do. We have to consider everything, especially the public reaction to what we do. Am I saying that we shouldn't protest something if it's going to anger people? No. We'd never accomplish anything that way. But we should try to offer something positive as an alternative. Instead of condemning their beliefs, offer ours. Do not merely condemn their statements, correct them. Never take away without offering a replacement. An example would be to explain how church-state separation benefits the state and strengthens religious freedom. Or offer the pride of self-determination in place of religious subservience. Or suggest volunteer opportunities and active assistance in place of prayer.



## OK Church || State Update

4SB1264 [Moment of Silence -- mandatory -- FAILED](#)  
SB 926 [National Motto "In God We Trust" - FAILED](#)  
SB 815 [Minute of Silence -- PASSED](#)  
HCR 1009 [Character Education Task Force - FAILED](#)  
HB 1145 [Ten Commandments -- FAILED](#)  
HB 1024 [Ten Commandments -- FAILED](#)  
HB 2090 [Required Patriotic Observances -- FAILED](#)

The good news is that the more blatant violations of church/state separation, such as the "In God We Trust" bill and the Ten Commandments bills, never made it out of the legislature. We should seek out those responsible and thank them.

The bad news is that at the end of the session our state legislature passed Senate Bill 815, mandating a moment of silence every day in Oklahoma public schools, in order that each student may "reflect, meditate, pray, or engage in any other silent activity" as he or she so chooses.

On the face of it, this bill is innocuous enough. After all, teachers generally expect moments of silence from their students in roughly one hour blocks. Nevertheless, should this bill be signed into law, it will undoubtedly represent a bold step forward for sectarian indoctrination and prejudice in our public schools.

Those of us who have graduated from Oklahoma public schools are well aware of the unfortunate ignorance of religious liberty which pervades the student body and (to a somewhat lesser extent) the faculty. Should the schools institute a mandatory daily prayer time, do not doubt that many teachers will instruct students to pray particular prayers to particular gods, regardless of those hapless few children who do not practice the majority faith, or any faith at all. Cases of religious discrimination and lawsuits will inevitably ensue (indeed, the final version S.B. 815 has anticipated as much).

As of press time, the governor has neither signed nor vetoed this bill, though he must act prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> of this month. He may be contacted as follows:

State Capitol Bldg. Room 212  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

PHONE: 405-521-2342 FAX: 405-521-3353  
E-MAIL: [governor@gov.state.ok.us](mailto:governor@gov.state.ok.us)

## Events Calendar, June 2002

**June 4<sup>th</sup> – Furr’s Cafeteria – Norman  
2262 W. Main – 11:15AM-1:15PM.**

Americans United for Separation of Church and State will be meeting over lunch. More info, contact Jim Huff ([JAH30@worldnet.att.net](mailto:JAH30@worldnet.att.net)).

**June 21<sup>st</sup> – World Humanist Day and  
Summer Solstice Celebration – TBA**

Check the message board on our website ([OklahomaAtheists.org](http://OklahomaAtheists.org)) for more info.

**June 31<sup>st</sup> – Galileo’s in the Paseo district**  
Monthly chill-out time. Be there or miss out!

## Oklahoma Atheists t-shirts!



Coming soon!

Oklahoma  
Atheists.org  
shirts with  
"AOK" logo!

For info contact:  
[RanceVanDucy@](mailto:RanceVanDucy@OklahomaAtheists.org)  
[OklahomaAtheists.org](http://OklahomaAtheists.org)

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