

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

September 2005

Summer's over and we're back with an expanded PIQUE — we hope you find our new Calendar insert useful. This month, several of us take a NYTimes-featured professor to task for world-class naiveté ... we suggest cashing in on the religious right's lust for violence ... celebrate an American champion's honesty and the Catholic church's intellectual dishonesty ... and explain how really, really stupid ideas gain traction. But we begin with a fool's quest, asking honesty of politicians.

QUESTIONS FOR THE NEXT MAYOR

John Rafferty

In anticipation of the September 13 primary elections, the following, on SHSNY letterhead, was e-mailed to Mayor Bloomberg and—with appropriate address and text changes—to Democratic mayoral aspirants Fernando Ferrer, Gifford Miller, and Anthony Weiner. Since Virginia Fields doesn't have a campaign website I could find she was snail-mailed a hardcopy letter. (And virginiafields.com is an anti-Fields smear site—who is managing this woman's campaign?)

July 27, 2005

Honorable Michael Bloomberg, Mayor
mikebloomberg.com

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

The Secular Humanist Society of New York would like to know your position on several issues of importance to our membership before this fall's primary and general elections. Would you please advise us of your policies regarding the following:

1. Will a Bloomberg administration, with or without anti-discrimination enforcement from the White House, ensure that NYC service providers receiving "faith based funds" not discriminate in their hiring and service practices?

2. Do you support the extension of the right of legal marriage to all persons, regardless of gender?

3. Will a Bloomberg administration continue to allow the display of religious objects and texts in taxpayer-supported public buildings (e.g.: the Ten Commandments and the Quran at 1 Police Plaza)?

4. Steel girders twisted into the shape of a Christian crucifix are on display at Ground Zero. Some groups are campaigning for their permanent installation. Will you allow such a display?

5. Congress is short-changing New York and other large cities on anti-terrorist funding. What do you intend to do about it?

We would like to publish your answers to the above in the September issue of PIQUE, our newsletter, before this fall's primary elections. To that end, may we have your response by August 15, either by mail to SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, New York, NY 10150-1913, or directly to me at john@rafferty.net.

Cordially,

John Rafferty, Secretary, SHSNY; Editor, PIQUE

Update: August 15 has come and gone, and even by the time this issue of PIQUE went to the printer, a week later, none of the mayoral aspirants had replied.

SHSNY BYLAWS REVISIONS APPROVED

Fifty-three members of SHSNY returned ballots in the bylaws revision referendum by the August 15 cutoff date, and overwhelmingly approved the changes recommended by the Board of Directors. 51 members voted Yes to all the changes recommended, 1 voted No, and one ballot was spoiled (voting Yes and No doesn't work).

The revised Bylaws will be signed and certified by the Board members at our September 20 meeting. After that date, a copy of the complete new bylaws will be included in each "Welcome" mailing to new members, and along with each "Thank you" letter to renewing members.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE BIKE, OR ABOUT GOD, EITHER

Lance Armstrong

(Excerpted from It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life, by Lance Armstrong, seven-time winner of the Tour de France, and testicular cancer survivor, reported in Secular Student News, 8/1/05)

The night before brain surgery, I thought about death. I searched out my larger values, and I asked myself, if I was going to die, did I want to do it fighting and clawing or in peaceful surrender? What sort of character did I hope to show? Was I content with myself and what I had done with my life so far? I decided that I was essentially a good person, although I could have been better — but at the same time I understood that the cancer didn't care.

I asked myself what I believed. I had never prayed a lot. I hoped hard, I wished hard, but I didn't pray. I had developed a certain distrust of organized religion growing up, but I felt I had the capacity to be a spiritual person, and to hold some fervent beliefs. Quite simply, I believed I had a responsibility to be a good person, and that meant fair, honest, hardworking, and honorable. If I did that, if I was good to my family, true to my friends, if I gave back to my community or to some cause, if I wasn't a liar, a cheat, or a thief, then I believed that should be enough. At the end of the day, if there was indeed some Body or presence standing there to judge me, I hoped I would be judged on whether I had lived a true life, not on whether I believed in a certain book, or whether I'd been baptized. If there was indeed a God at the end of my days, I hoped he didn't say, "But you were never a Christian, so you're going the other way from heaven." If so, I was going to reply, "You know what? You're right. Fine."

I believed, too, in the doctors and the medicine and the surgeries — I believed in that. I believed in them. A person like Dr. Einhorn [his oncologist] ... a person with the mind to develop an experimental treatment 20 years ago that now could save my life. I believed in the hard currency of his intelligence and his research.

Further, in *ET Magazine*, Armstrong was quoted as avowing: "If there was a god, I'd still have both nuts."

**ON THE UPTOWN #2 TRAIN,
MORNING RUSH HOUR, JUNE 24**

Colin Rafferty

A woman leans into the car at the Penn Station stop and shouts, “*Jesus is coming!*”

I reply, “Should I hold the doors?” and a woman standing next to me laughs coffee out her nose.

Not a bad beginning to the day.

**DO EVANGELICALS AND SECULARISTS
WANT THE SAME AMERICA?**

John Rafferty

The cover story of the July 3 *New York Times Magazine*, “A Church-State Solution,” was written by Noah Feldman, NYU law professor and author of the just-published *Divided by God: America’s Church-State Problem*, from which the Times article was extracted. The article, which argued that “legal secularists” (us) and “values evangelicals” (them) can ameliorate their differences in all-American harmony, elicited several disbelieving (and no supportive) responses from readers of PIQUE, all of whom agree that Professor Feldman is kidding himself that the leaders of the American religious right want to find compromise with secularists — or even with the religious of faiths other than their own brand of evangelical Christian fundamentalism. Compromise? Try this, by Pat Robertson:

“You say you’re supposed to be nice to the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians and the Methodists and this, that, and the other thing. Nonsense. I don’t have to be nice to the spirit of the Antichrist.”

Or this, by Randall Terry of Operation Rescue:

“Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a biblical duty, we are called by God to conquer this country. We don’t want equal time [or] pluralism.”

“Conquer,” not compromise. And no need to “be nice.”

“Nice” try, Prof. Feldman, and an “A” for ecumenical effort, but as Ed McCartan and other PIQUE readers write below, your view is distorted by the distance of your ivory-tower window from the real world.

But first, for those readers who missed the original *Times Magazine* article, a critical overview of Professor Feldman’s argument.

ONE NATION, DIVISIBLE

Michelle Goldberg

(Excerpted from “One Nation, Divisible,” on salon.com, 7/25/05, where the complete text may be found.)

Divided by God: America’s Church-State Problem — and What We Should Do About It ... takes a brisk, fair and fascinating tour through the history of church-state separation in America. It culminates in a plan for resolving the furies of the culture war that is theoretically elegant and historically grounded. Unfortunately, it is almost completely divorced from political realities and the facts on the ground.

In *Divided by God*, Prof. Feldman frames America’s divisions over religion in the public sphere as a struggle between two camps that he calls “legal secularists” and “values evangelicals.” He believes—falsely, I think—that both groups have essentially compatible visions of national harmony. ...

“Values evangelicals think that the solution lies in finding and embracing traditional values we can all share and without which we will never hold together. Legal secularists think that we can maintain our national unity only if we treat religion as a personal, private matter, separate from the concerns of citizenship.”

The last section of *Divided by God* outlines a possible compromise between these two sides. Feldman’s plan is just on its own merits, but it’s highly unlikely to result in a cultural rapprochement because Feldman seriously mischaracterizes the issues at stake and the motivations of the antagonists. He takes far too much of the Christian right’s propaganda at face value, arguing as if, for example, there really were a concerted attempt by secularists to banish the celebration of Christmas from public view. “Just what is threatening to religious minorities about Christians celebrating the holiday and the state acknowledging that fact?” he asks.

The answer is precisely nothing, which is why Christmas decorations and the like pose almost no public controversy, contrary to the fevered sputterings of Fox News anchors and talk radio demagogues. ...

Divided by God deserves to be read for its compelling and insightful first two-thirds. As a constitutional scholar, Feldman seems far better grounded in the legal history of the Establishment Clause than in the political nuances of current culture war battles. At a time when the very idea of separation of church and state is under broad attack from right-wing historical revisionists and politicians, Feldman clarifies the thinking of America’s founders and of subsequent leaders about the role of religion in the life of the nation. ...

Feldman is absolutely right about the supreme paradox of our current church-state legal regime, which bans prayers at high school football games but allows billions of taxpayer dollars to flow into sectarian charities under President Bush’s faith-based program. “The fascinating irony of the church-state debates is that, in the era of the endorsement test” — which renders laws “endorsing” religion unconstitutional — “legal secularists have failed to hold the line on the ban of government funding for religion, the cornerstone of early legal secularism and indeed of the American tradition of the separation of government institutions from the institutional church,” he writes. “Values evangelicals have simultaneously found themselves frustrated in the symbolic sphere about which they care most, and the loss of which inspired them to action in the first place.”

To remedy this backward situation, Feldman proposes a bargain — more tolerance for public religious expression in exchange for tighter restrictions on government funding of religion. He distills it down to a slogan: “No coercion and no money.” This approach makes a lot of sense, not least because it could address some of the inevitable incidents of secularist overreach—the elimination of Christmas songs in public schools, for example—that infuriate local communities and ricochet around the right-wing media, sparking howls about anti-Christian persecution It is not a good idea for liberals to spend too much time fretting about crèches in public squares. As in so many First Amendment disputes, the answer to speech (or, in this case, symbolism) that makes someone feel excluded or alienated is more speech — menorahs, Diwali displays, images that reflect America’s polyglot spiritualism rather than suppressing it. “Ultimately, the nation may have more success generating loyalty from religiously diverse citizens by

allowing inclusive governmental manifestations of religion than by banning them,” Feldman writes.

The trouble with Feldman’s suggestion is that even if liberals embrace it—and I think they should—it would do almost nothing to quell the sense of evangelical grievance currently deforming our politics. That’s because Feldman is very wrong about the America that the Christian right is seeking, and about the aims of the group he calls legal secularists. ...

Many legal secularists are already doing what Feldman says they should — focusing on coercion and money rather than symbolism. That’s where the significant battles are being fought, and unfortunately, Feldman’s formula offers little hope of a truce. Values evangelicals, he writes, “ought to reconsider their position in favor of state support for religious institutions and re-embrace the American tradition of institutionally separated church and state. The reason they should be prepared to do so is that such state funding actually undercuts, rather than promotes, the cohesive national identity that evangelicals have wanted to restore or re-create.”

Indeed, values evangelicals *should* do this, but they will not. Millions of individual born-again Christian voters probably sincerely desire an end to America’s fierce polarization, but the movement’s leaders believe themselves to be fighting a civil war against a hateful enemy, and they are in no mood to compromise. ...

These fights are not about the right of values evangelicals to be heard. They are about their right to rule. As a secularist myself, I wish to God that Feldman were correct about the possibility of finding common ground and ending America’s divisions, but I don’t have much faith.

“Pope Benedict recently deplored the fact that the number of churches is diminishing and he doesn't understand why. Well, churches interpret God's message, but that job has been taken over by the federal government.” — Jay Leno

THE ROSE-COLORED VIEW FROM THE IVORY TOWER

Edward F. McCartan

Professor Noah Feldman’s proffer of a “Church-State Solution” brings forth a sense of déjà vu about the days when academics were assumed to be sheltered in “ivory towers.” While NYU has rarely been classified as such, the good professor seems to be isolated from reality.

There is no “camp” or “school of thought” that can be accurately classified under the blanket heading of “values evangelicals.” Those groups — variously labeled Right Wing, Religious Right, and Neo-Conservative, and which include politicians, televangelists and members of the judiciary — are not so much concerned with informing the world of their values as they are with using public displays and advocacy to impose their religion-oriented agenda on America and to gain political control. To allow, as the professor suggests, “greater latitude for religious speech and symbols in public debate,” would only increase the power of these groups to gain control. The opposition, labeled “legal secularists,” but which also do not exist as a “movement,” are simply citizens who want to live in a democracy, not a theocracy.

Non-religious people such as humanists, atheists, agnostics and many others do not feel “excluded” by religious displays in public because they do not have to—or need to—display their values through symbols. They simply do not want to be subjected to efforts to topple the wall between church and state and, logically, seek legal means to keep it erect.

Note: Mr. McCartan is a past President of SHSNY

**“NO” IS NO
Barbara Lifton**

Feldman’s article elicited almost unanimous, if a bit wary praise from *Times Magazine* readers. Several letter writers sort of agree with him, but remind us of how important it is for us to have an independent judiciary that supports “strict separation of Church and State.” This naiveté among supposedly educated Times readers is breathtaking. Feldman and these readers fail to realize that allowing religious beliefs of any kind, even as a part of an organized curriculum, to be sponsored by public education and funds, will lead to battles over which group gets the money and writes the study outlines, and who will do the teaching. Religious conflict in the past has always led to war, oppression and suffering. That is why the Founders of our nation made it so clear, in the First Amendment to the Constitution, that religion and State should be separate for all purposes. The First Amendment says, “*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ...*” (my emphasis added).

“No” is no! No exceptions. That means no religious group should be getting federal or state money to help teach its doctrines, no matter how “benign” those doctrines seem to others. It also means that there should be no “symbolic” government endorsement of any religion. As one Times reader pointed out, symbols are powerful — they are a form of coercion to endorse the government position. There is a very short distance between “symbolic expression” of government supported religious belief, and coercion through economic, then political oppression.

I think Feldman’s article was a farrago of muddled thinking. It contained proposals for dangerous compromises of my freedom and that of those of us who are secularists, that are unnecessary. There are plenty of churches, synagogues and mosques around for people to belong to, where they can freely and vehemently express their religious beliefs. If they don’t like the public schools’ secularism, (for example, teaching established scientific facts about the origin of our species), then they can send their children to parochial schools, as did my religious relative, where religious propaganda can be fully inculcated. And where religious parents can be assured that their children will be turned out as cookie-cutter clones of themselves. After all, haven’t we, in the past five years, abrogated all ability to think independently, and examine facts on their merits? What are we left with, according to the electorate, except “beliefs,” which for some strange reason it thinks are less dangerous?

My husband and I intend to live out our lives as best we can and enjoy our grandchildren. I have spent 50 years as an advocate of religious freedom and secularism as envisioned by our Constitution, and now am tired. My only philosophy of life is, “If you make your bed, you have to lie in it.” The American electorate has more or less made their bed, and chose the safety of orthodoxy over the uncertainty of a chaotic universe

without any rules except those made by nature's physical world, and ourselves. May the bedclothes be on their heads.

Except for my membership in this wonderful group, I'm opting out of the fray. If anyone tries to drag me and my husband out to church to be baptized in our dotage, we will then fight and die for the cause, taking a few of them with us! Till then, we will watch, wait and speak when we can.

EXCLUSION IS EVERYBODY'S RIGHT

Chic Schissel

Feldman's sometimes bewildering and sometimes impenetrable article apparently offers a simple solution to the Church-State question: allow latitude for public religious speech and symbols, but more strictly ban state financing of religious institutions and activities. I approve of his second suggestion, but his first endangers the separation keystone of our liberty.

He says that keeping religion private and out of government makes many citizens feel excluded. But they shouldn't complain since "exclusion" applies to us all; in this sense the exclusion is really inclusive. The religious who feel "excluded" are concerned about restricting their ability to foist their religion on the rest of us.

I tend to agree with Sandra Day O'Connor that there is no government endorsement if the religious symbol is "longstanding and common." I don't object to people saying "Merry Christmas" or displaying a Christmas tree on public land. But I would stop short of public prayer to a deity or a public display of Jesus in the manger or of the Ten Commandments. Two or three of the commandments (killing, stealing, perhaps false witness) relate to our laws; the rest are religious obligations.

Feldman would allow prayers opening sessions of Congress, and religious speech and symbols in public places, or a "moment of silence" in schools "as long as there is no public money involved." But public money is always involved in public places, and schools and sessions of Congress are quite expensive.

Re: Terri Schiavo and same-sex marriage. Feldman says it's ok that congressmen act according to their religious conscience. I would rather congressmen act according to the Constitution, and be reminded, when they "quote" God, that God does not make the law.

Feldman says that saying "Merry Christmas" simply acknowledges "the preferences of a majority." I think Feldman here forgets his approval of O'Connor's depiction of "longstanding and common" symbols as not representing endorsement of any majority preferences.

Feldman approvingly mentions the 9/11 televised memorial service as inclusive since it included Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims. But it didn't include atheists!

Feldman would allow "under God" and other public religious expressions. Would he permit atheists to display, on public sites, signs saying "Belief in God is unscientific, illogical, socially divisive, and unsupportable"?

Throughout, he speaks of religious "values," quotes Ralph Reed (of all people) that there is "a broad national consensus on core values." But they are not values, they are arbitrary rules. Many of us do not accept many of these rules, particularly those held by Ralph Reed.

But I suspect the religious right, if granted greater access to public religious expression, will not stop there, will never accept a strict ban on government funding, but

will seek much more of the same. When I was a kid my parents paid for me to attend Sunday school, where I was given religious instruction. My parents were pleased to live in a country where they were allowed to buy me religious instruction but were not required to pay for the religious instruction of others. Sunday school was a one-morning-a-week deal that was inexpensive. But full-time parochial school not only provides an every-day, religiously-saturated program, but is very expensive, and to make me pay for it is un-American. Sandra Day O'Connor has put it this way: "Why would we trade a system that has served us so well for one that has served others so poorly?"

ADD RELIGION, SUBTRACT FREEDOM

Peter Marinelli

By the very nature of freedom and of religious diversity, it should be obvious to anyone that inserting any particular religion (or religion in any form) into any area of government violates the free and unbiased representation of the people being governed. History has shown quite cogently that mixing religion with matters of state inevitably leads to violence and loss of freedom.

HOW ABOUT WICCA AND VOODOO?

Emily Kingsley

I read Feldman's article, and was more confused after reading the damn thing than before. Somehow I can't get my head around the idea that encouraging more public displays of religious messages will lead to more inclusion and tolerance.

Seems to me you can't be inclusive unless you include *everybody*—and there are too many religions and factions and cults and belief systems to include. What's more, non-belief is *never* included, even when the religious right is *trying* to be inclusive—so why not eliminate them all? — the only way to be fair to everybody.

See, they basically think they're being so damned modern by including Islam. Well big deal. When they start including Wicca or Voodoo or bunches of sects most people have never even heard of ... or *us!* ... then maybe they'll be working towards real inclusion. But you know damn well they're never gonna do that.

NEWS FLASH: CATHOLIC PRIEST SAID TO PREFER ADULT WOMEN

In what appears to be a stunning reversal of accepted practice among Roman Catholic clergy, Msgr. Eugene Clark, who has railed on his radio program against a decline in marital fidelity in "our sex-saturated society," has resigned as rector of Saint Patrick's Cathedral over accusations, in divorce proceedings, of a long-time affair with his church secretary, an adult married woman.

In fairness to Msgr. Clark, it should be noted that he hired now 46-year-old Laura DeFilippo as his secretary directly out of high school, so the affair may have begun before she was fully grown.

IS VIOLENCE PART OF THE "CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVE LIFESTYLE"?

Conrad Claborne

From "The Passion of the Marketers" in the Times, 7/18:

Evangelical and fundamentalist Christians number an estimated 30 million in the U.S., and Hollywood—faced with a prolonged slump in ticket sales—has followed its natural instincts in trying to tap one of the country’s most powerful markets. ... A new study suggested that not only do Christians watch mainstream entertainment, but the most conservative among them are also drawn to violent fare. ... The study of 1,000 moviegoers asked respondents to define their level of religiosity and their leanings, whether conservative, traditional or liberal, based on a list of social issues. About 70 percent of respondents said they were “somewhat” or “very” religious. ...

“When it comes to popular movies and popular shows, tastes don’t differ at all,” between religious and nonreligious, said Joseph Helfgot, president of MarketCast. “What you find is that people with conservative religious doctrine are the most likely to see movies rated R for violence. If you compare it to liberals, it’s a third more.”

So Christian conservatives have been caught with their pants down! I wonder if conservative Muslims feel the same yearning for violence? To the outside observer, there does seem to be a pattern: I believe I’ve heard cries for the death penalty and for more jails from this community. There is definitely a lust for school and college football (next to ice hockey the most violent of popular sports), and the “God hates fags” movement definitely promotes violence. Many of the people who protest abortion clinics and their doctors have, to put it mildly, violent tendencies. Outside the U.S., Muslim suicide bombers are certainly violent, and Islamic fundamentalists seem to find beheadings thrilling.

Perhaps we should start a worldwide movement to get religious conservatives to *give up their violent lifestyles*. Perhaps the same kind of “reparative therapy” they think “cures” gays can be used to wean the most rabid followers of Rick Santorum, Tom DeLay and the Saudi beheaders from their violent lifestyles to a life of loving kindness — after all, violence is only a *lifestyle choice*.

Or maybe we should simply apply good old laissez-faire capitalism to this ready-made market: Let’s create a national chain of S&M clubs for religious right-wingers.

IT’S NOT ABOUT THEM, IT’S ABOUT US

(Excerpted from NBC’s “Tonight” show, and from “Who We Are,” by Bob Herbert, The New York Times, August 1.)

Jay Leno asked Sen. John McCain to comment on a Drudge Report story that chastised him for appearing in the movie “Wedding Crashers,” characterizing the film as a “boob raunch fest.” “In Washington,” McCain said, “I work with boobs every day.”

As if to prove the point, when McCain and fellow Republican Senators John Warner and Lindsay Graham, all on the Senate Armed Services Committee, introduced amendments to the pending Pentagon authorization bill that would “expressly prohibit cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment of detainees in U.S. custody,” the boobs turned out in force.

Dick Cheney argued that not being able to use torture “would interfere with President Bush’s ability to fight terrorism ... the White House threatened a veto ... Senate majority leader Bill Frist has put off further consideration of the bill until September ...” in order to buy time for the right wing to rally in support of the Bush administration’s god-given right to torture ... and Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama argued against the

amendments, saying the “detainees” we are holding (and torturing) in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are not prisoners of war, “they are terrorists.”

McCain, who was himself tortured for five years in North Vietnamese prisons, answered that the debate “is not about who *they* are. It’s about who *we* are.”

ABOUT, FACE. BACKWARD, MARCH!

John Rafferty

Marching boldly into the 19th century, the Roman Catholic Church under its new pope is turning its back on evolution, on science, and on the modern world. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Arch-bishop of Vienna, but even more importantly, a close buddy of new Pope Benedict XVI and the lead editor of the Catechism of the Catholic Church—the summary of those basic beliefs by which Catholics are expected to live—dropped the anti-reason bomb in an Op-Ed piece in the July 7 *New York Times*, “Finding Design in Nature,” to which the *Times* added the subhead: “The official Catholic stance on evolution.”

The last pope, John Paul II, although no enlightened liberal, famously said in a 1996 address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences that the scientific case for evolution was growing stronger and that evolutionary theory was “more than a hypothesis.” Ever since, the church has been regarded as an ally of science on at least this subject, and at odds with Neanderthal biblical literalists, including those of our American religious right.

But now the old guy is gone, and Schönborn argues that “our beloved John Paul” didn’t really mean what he said in “his rather vague and unimportant 1996 letter.” Rather, the Cardinal says, look to what John Paul said in 1985 — *eleven years before* — when he wrote “... the truth of faith about creation is radically opposed to the theories of materialistic philosophy.” No consideration that the old pope’s ideas might have, um, *evolved* over a decade. What’s more, the Cardinal’s own “authoritative Catechism” insists that the world “is not the product of any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance.”

Case closed.

And who’s that cheering on the sidelines? America’s evangelical right-wing reactionaries. In a page 1 follow-up two days later, the *Times* reported that the Cardinal’s essay was at least prompted by, if not a collaborative effort with Mark Ryland of the Discovery Institute, promoters of “intelligent design.” Some of the Cardinal’s points seem to be lifted directly from the Discovery Institute’s website, and the finished essay was placed with the *Times* through the Institute’s public relations agency. Mr. Ryland, understandably, is “very excited.”

We, equally understandably, are not.

MALEVOLENT DESIGN

Flash Light, Artist

In response to Cardinal Schönborn’s assertion about “the overwhelming evidence for design in biology,” I ask, “What evidence?”

The evidence of crippling birth defects like spina bifida? The evidence of the creation of devastating diseases like AIDS and Mad Cow disease? The evidence of inherited disorders such as mental retardation and schizophrenia? The evidence of the debilitating mechanisms of aging? The evidence that dinosaurs were “designed” only to

face extinction? That parasites were “designed” only to afflict their hosts? The evidence of crop blights “designed” to cause widespread famine?

If these are “evidence of design,” then they surely prove the designer is malevolent. Unless believers in Jehovah are prepared to give Satan credit as co-designer of the universe, their argument of “intelligent design” is completely specious. Otherwise only a random process can account for this kind of “a universe which presents such a complex organization in its elements.”

Flash, this newsflash, just in:

On August 1, when asked whether “alternatives” to Darwinian evolution should be taught in the schools, President George W. Bush answered, “Yes.”

According to the Cardinal and the President, “students should be taught that evolution is just one of many theories.”

Duh! And the earth is flat! — *Joan Kanel Slomanson*

EVOLUTION IN OKLAHOMA? THANK GANESH!

(This July 10 NYTimes editorial, “It’s all happening at the Tulsa Zoo,” is reprinted in its entirety.)

Christian creationists won too much of a victory for their own good in Tulsa, where the local zoo was ordered to balance its evolution science exhibit with a display extolling the Genesis account of God’s creating the universe from nothing in six days. A determined creationist somehow talked three of the four zoo directors, including Mayor Bill LaFortune, into the addition by arguing that a statue of the elephant-headed god Ganesh at the elephant house amounted to an anti-Christian bias toward Hinduism.

After the inevitable backlash from bewildered taxpayers warning that Tulsa would be dismissed as a science backwater, the directors “clarified” their vote to say they intended no monopoly for the Adam and Eve tale but rather wanted “six or seven” creation myths afforded equal time. There was the rub: there are hundreds of creation tales properly honored by the world’s multifarious cultures, starting with the American Indian tribes around Tulsa.

You want creationism? How about the Cherokee buzzard that gouged the valleys and mountains? And why should Chinese-Americans tolerate neglect of P’an Ku and the cosmic egg at the zoo, or Norse descendants not speak up for Audhumla, the giant cow?

The futility of this exercise was emphatically made clear last week when a crowd of critics demanded reconsideration. With the speed of the Mayan jaguar sun god, zoo directors reversed themselves, realizing they had opened a Pandora’s box (which see). In stumbling upon so many worthy cosmogonies, Tulsa did us all a favor by underlining how truly singular the evolution explanation is, rooted firmly in scientific demonstration.

Second thoughts are a creative characteristic of Homo sapiens, and the Tulsa Zoo directors did well by theirs. They were fortunate to have Ganesh, known to true believers as the remover of obstacles and the god of harmony, on the grounds.

ADAM AND EVE AND T. REX IN NEVERLAND

Paul Harris

(Excerpted from “Mixing Science with Creationism” on salon.com, 5/24/05)

Nestled deep in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, in the heart of the Bible Belt ... the Museum of Earth History (www.moeh.org) ... is the first dinosaur museum to take a creationist perspective. Already thousands of people have flocked to its top-quality exhibits, which mix high science with fundamentalist theology that few serious scientists accept. ...

Even as America's scientists make advances in paleontology, astronomy and physics that appear to disprove creationism, Gallup surveys have shown that about 45 percent of Americans believe the Earth was created by God within the past 10,000 years. ...

To enter the museum is to explore a surrealistic parallel world. Biblical quotes appear on displays. The first has dinosaurs, alongside Adam and Eve, living in harmony. The ferociously fanged T. rex is likely to be a vegetarian. Then comes the "Fall of Man" and an ugly world where dinosaurs prey on one another and the first extinctions occur. The destruction of the dinosaurs is explained, not by a comet striking the Earth 65 million years ago, but by the Flood. This, the museum says, wiped out most of the dinosaurs still alive and created the Grand Canyon and huge layers of sedimentary rock seen around the world.

Some dinosaurs survived on Noah's Ark. One poster explains that Noah would have chosen juvenile dinosaurs to save space. ... The final exhibit depicts the Ice Age, where the last dinosaurs existed with woolly mammoths until the cold and hunting by cavemen caused them to die out.

Scientists dismiss such claims as on a par with believing in Atlantis.

Comment: What? Wait a minute ... Atlantis isn't real?

THE WAR ON RATIONALITY

**How really, really stupid ideas
infect the political mainstream.**

Tom Tomorrow

Step 1: A conservative school board objects to the teaching of a commonly accepted scientific principle.

Woman: "Human Sexual Reproduction" is an interesting *theory* ...

Man: ... but must our culture always be so obsessed with *sex*?

Step 2: An ancient myth is spruced up slightly and presented as a credible scientific alternative.

Man: We proponents of "Intelligent Delivery" believe that babies are delivered by a stork in a messenger cap.

[cartoon of stork delivering a baby]

Woman: Don't our children deserve to hear *both sides* of the controversy?

Step 3: Self-styled experts strive to instill doubt where none should plausibly exist.

TV Announcer: What the secular reproductionists believe is absurd, boys and girls! It would be like squeezing a canteloupe out of your nose! Ha, ha!

Audience: Ha, ha!

Step 4: The scientific community is challenged to debate the issue. If they refuse, so much the better!

Young Woman: They're afraid to face us!

Young Man: They know they don't stand a chance against our relentless *storkist logic*!

Step 5: The line between education and ignorance grows ever more indistinct.

Boy: I used to think I understood where babies came from — until I learned about the lies and distortions of the Secular Reproductionists.

Girl: Why do they *hate* the stork so much?