

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

October, 2006

Who can we offend this month? The President and the Vice, as usual; the Pope and the Muslims, of course. A conservative Christian criticizes Christian Conservatives, a liberal gives liberals lumps, and everyone dumps on trivia-minded, conspiracy-benighted Americans of every political persuasion. Plus: politically-correct police and passport clerks overseas, and pompous politicians right here; Texas teachers and preachers; and too-liberal Sudanese. Oh, and welcome, Elaine Lynn. — *JR*

## **A CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN DEFINES – AND DEFIES – “CHRISTIANISM”**

**Andrew Sullivan**

*(Reprinted from “My Problem with Christianity: A believer spells out the difference between faith and a political agenda” in Time magazine, May 7, 2006)*

Are you a Christian who doesn't feel represented by the religious right? I know the feeling. When the discourse about faith is dominated by political fundamentalists and social conservatives, many others begin to feel as if their religion has been taken away from them.

The number of Christians misrepresented by the Christian right is many. There are evangelical Protestants who believe strongly that Christianity should not get too close to the corrupting allure of government power. There are lay Catholics who, while personally devout, are socially liberal on issues like contraception, gay rights, women's equality and a multi-faith society. There are very orthodox believers who nonetheless respect the freedom and conscience of others as part of their core understanding of what being a Christian is. They have no problem living next to an atheist or a gay couple or a single mother or people whose views on the meaning of life are utterly alien to them – and respecting their neighbors' choices. That doesn't threaten their faith. Sometimes the contrast helps them understand their own faith better.

And there are those who simply believe that, by definition, God is unknowable to our limited, fallible human minds and souls. If God is ultimately unknowable, then how can we be so certain of what God's real position is on, say, the fate of Terri Schiavo? Or the morality of contraception? Or the role of women? Or the love of a gay couple? Also, faith for many of us is interwoven with doubt, a doubt that can strengthen faith and give it perspective and shadow. That doubt means having great humility in the face of God and an enormous reluctance to impose one's beliefs, through civil law, on anyone else.

I would say a clear majority of Christians in the U.S. fall into one or many of those camps. Yet the term “people of faith” has been co-opted almost entirely in our discourse by those who see Christianity as compatible with only one political party, the Republicans, and believe that their religious doctrines should determine public policy for everyone. “Sides are being chosen,” Tom DeLay recently told his supporters, “and the future of man hangs in the balance! The enemies of virtue may be on the march, but they have not won, and if we put our trust in Christ, they never will.” So Christ is a conservative Republican?

Rush Limbaugh recently called the Democrats the “party of death” because of many Democrats’ view that some moral decisions, like the choice to have a first-trimester abortion, should be left to the individual, not the cops. Ann Coulter, with her usual subtlety, simply calls her political opponents “godless,” the title of her new book. And the largely nonreligious media have taken the bait. The “Christian” vote has become shorthand in journalism for the Republican base.

What to do about it? The worst response, I think, would be to construct something called the religious left. Many of us who are Christians and not supportive of the religious right are not on the left either. In fact, we are opposed to any politicization of the Gospels by any party, Democratic or Republican, by partisan black churches or partisan white ones. “My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus insisted. What part of that do we not understand?

So let me suggest that we take back the word Christian while giving the religious right a new adjective: Christianist. Christianity, in this view, is simply a faith. Christianity is an ideology, politics, an ism. The distinction between Christian and Christianist echoes the distinction we make between Muslim and Islamist. Muslims are those who follow Islam. Islamists are those who want to wield Islam as a political force and conflate state and mosque. Not all Islamists are violent. Only a tiny few are terrorists. And I should underline that the term Christianist is in no way designed to label people on the religious right as favoring any violence at all. I mean merely by the term Christianist the view that religious faith is so important that it must also have a precise political agenda. It is the belief that religion dictates politics and that politics should dictate the laws for everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike.

That’s what I dissent from, and I dissent from it as a Christian. I dissent from the political pollution of sincere, personal faith. I dissent most strongly from the attempt to argue that one party represents God and that the other doesn’t. I dissent from having my faith co-opted and wielded by people whose politics I do not share and whose intolerance I abhor. The word Christian belongs to no political party. It’s time the quiet majority of believers took it back.

## **HEAD-IN-THE-SAND LIBERALS**

**Sam Harris**

*(Excerpted from the Los Angeles Times, 9/18/06)*

Western civilization really is at risk from Muslim extremists. Two years ago I published a book highly critical of religion, *The End of Faith*. In it, I argued that the world’s major religions are genuinely incompatible, inevitably cause conflict and now prevent the emergence of a viable, global civilization. In response, I have received many thousands of letters and e-mails from priests, journalists, scientists, politicians, soldiers, rabbis, actors, aid workers, students — from people young and old who occupy every point on the spectrum of belief and nonbelief.

This has offered me a special opportunity to see how people of all creeds and political persuasions react when religion is criticized. I am here to report that liberals and conservatives respond very differently to the notion that religion can be a direct cause of human conflict.

This difference does not bode well for the future of liberalism.

Perhaps I should establish my liberal bona fides at the outset. I'd like to see taxes raised on the wealthy, drugs decriminalized and homosexuals free to marry. I also think that the Bush administration deserves most of the criticism it has received in the last six years — especially with respect to its waging of the war in Iraq, its scuttling of science and its fiscal irresponsibility.

But my correspondence with liberals has convinced me that liberalism has grown dangerously out of touch with the realities of our world — specifically with what devout Muslims actually believe about the West, about paradise and about the ultimate ascendance of their faith.

On questions of national security, I am now as wary of my fellow liberals as I am of the religious demagogues on the Christian right. This may seem like frank acquiescence to the charge that “liberals are soft on terrorism.” It is, and they are.

A cult of death is forming in the Muslim world — for reasons that are perfectly explicable in terms of the Islamic doctrines of martyrdom and jihad. The truth is that we are not fighting a “war on terror.” We are fighting a pestilential theology and a longing for paradise.

This is not to say that we are at war with all Muslims. But we are absolutely at war with those who believe that death in defense of the faith is the highest possible good, that cartoonists should be killed for caricaturing the prophet and that any Muslim who loses his faith should be butchered for apostasy.

Unfortunately, such religious extremism is not as fringe a phenomenon as we might hope. Numerous studies have found that the most radicalized Muslims tend to have better-than-average educations and economic opportunities.

Given the degree to which religious ideas are still sheltered from criticism in every society, it is actually possible for a person to have the economic and intellectual resources to build a nuclear bomb — and to believe that he will get 72 virgins in paradise. And yet, despite abundant evidence to the contrary, liberals continue to imagine that Muslim terrorism springs from economic despair, lack of education and American militarism.

At its most extreme, liberal denial has found expression in a growing subculture of conspiracy theorists who believe that the atrocities of 9/11 were orchestrated by our own government. A nationwide poll conducted by the Scripps Survey Research Center at Ohio University found that more than a third of Americans suspect that the federal government “assisted in the 9/11 terrorist attacks or took no action to stop them so the United States could go to war in the Middle East”; 16 percent believe that the twin towers collapsed not because fully-fueled passenger jets smashed into them but because agents of the Bush administration had secretly rigged them to explode.

Such an astonishing eruption of masochistic unreason could well mark the decline of liberalism, if not the decline of Western civilization. There are books, films and conferences organized around this phantasmagoria, and they offer an unusually clear view of the debilitating dogma that lurks at the heart of liberalism: Western power is utterly malevolent, while the powerless people of the Earth can be counted on to embrace reason and tolerance, if only given sufficient economic opportunities.

I don't know how many more engineers and architects need to blow themselves up, fly planes into buildings or saw the heads off of journalists before this fantasy will dissipate. The truth is that there is every reason to believe that a terrifying number of the world's Muslims now view all political and moral questions in terms of their affiliation

with Islam. This leads them to rally to the cause of other Muslims no matter how sociopathic their behavior. This benighted religious solidarity may be the greatest problem facing civilization and yet it is regularly misconstrued, ignored or obfuscated by liberals.

Given the mendacity and shocking incompetence of the Bush administration — especially its mishandling of the war in Iraq — liberals can find much to lament in the conservative approach to fighting the war on terror. Unfortunately, liberals hate the current administration with such fury that they regularly fail to acknowledge just how dangerous and depraved our enemies in the Muslim world are.

Recent condemnations of the Bush administration's use of the phrase "Islamic fascism" are a case in point. There is no question that the phrase is imprecise — Islamists are not technically fascists, and the term ignores a variety of schisms that exist even among Islamists — but it is by no means an example of wartime propaganda, as has been repeatedly alleged by liberals.

In their analyses of U.S. and Israeli foreign policy, liberals can be relied on to overlook the most basic moral distinctions. For instance, they ignore the fact that Muslims intentionally murder noncombatants, while we and the Israelis (as a rule) seek to avoid doing so. Muslims routinely use human shields, and this accounts for much of the collateral damage we and the Israelis cause; the political discourse throughout much of the Muslim world, especially with respect to Jews, is explicitly and unabashedly genocidal.

Given these distinctions, there is no question that the Israelis now hold the moral high ground in their conflict with Hamas and Hezbollah. And yet liberals in the United States and Europe often speak as though the truth were otherwise.

We are entering an age of unchecked nuclear proliferation and, it seems likely, nuclear terrorism. There is, therefore, no future in which aspiring martyrs will make good neighbors for us. Unless liberals realize that there are tens of millions of people in the Muslim world who are far scarier than Dick Cheney, they will be unable to protect civilization from its genuine enemies.

Increasingly, Americans will come to believe that the only people hard-headed enough to fight the religious lunatics of the Muslim world are the religious lunatics of the West. Indeed, it is telling that the people who speak with the greatest moral clarity about the current wars in the Middle East are members of the Christian right, whose infatuation with biblical prophecy is nearly as troubling as the ideology of our enemies. Religious dogmatism is now playing both sides of the board in a very dangerous game.

While liberals should be the ones pointing the way beyond this Iron Age madness, they are rendering themselves increasingly irrelevant. Being generally reasonable and tolerant of diversity, liberals should be especially sensitive to the dangers of religious literalism. But they aren't.

The same failure of liberalism is evident in Western Europe, where the dogma of multiculturalism has left a secular Europe very slow to address the looming problem of religious extremism among its immigrants. The people who speak most sensibly about the threat that Islam poses to Europe are actually fascists.

To say that this does not bode well for liberalism is an understatement: It does not bode well for the future of civilization.

## **POPE AND MUSLIMS, POTS AND KETTLES**

**John Rafferty**

Maybe the Pope meant well. Perhaps by reaching back to the 14th century for a quote on Islam as “evil and inhuman” he meant to show Islamist Muslims that he’s as far out of touch with reality as they are.

And thousands of Muslims around the world demonstrated that Islam is not evil and inhuman by rioting in the streets, burning several churches and killing a nun.

## **CHANGED YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS?**

If you didn’t receive an e-notice of the fall book club schedule or of the Michael Shermer evening, you’re one of the several on our SHSNY distribution list whose names are bouncing back. Update us on your new e-address (or join the list) by e-mailing [john@rafferty.net](mailto:john@rafferty.net).

Privacy note: SHSNY e-mailings go out as “blind cc’s” — we don’t share your address with the world.

## **WHO ARE WE?**

**Bob Herbert**

*(From “Stranger in the Mirror,” in the NYTimes, 9/14/06)*

Who are we? ... There was a time, I thought, when there was general agreement among Americans that torture was beyond the pale. But when people are frightened enough, nothing is beyond the pale. And we’re in an era in which the highest leaders in the land stoke – rather than attempt to allay – the fears of ordinary citizens. Islamic terrorists are equated with Nazi Germany. We’re told that we’re in a clash of civilizations.

If, as President Bush says, we’re engaged in “the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century,” why isn’t the entire nation mobilizing to meet this dire threat?

The president put us on this path away from the better angels of our nature, and he has shown no inclination to turn back. Lately he has touted legislation to try terror suspects in a way that would make a mockery of the American ideals of justice and fairness. To get a sense of just how far out the administration’s approach has been, consider Brig. Gen. James Walker, the top uniformed lawyer for the Marines. Speaking at a Congressional hearing last week, he said no civilized country denies defendants the right to see the evidence against them. The United States, he said, “should not be the first.”

And Senator Lindsey Graham, a conservative South Carolina Republican who is a former military judge, said, “It would be unacceptable, legally, in my opinion, to give someone the death penalty in a trial where they never heard the evidence against them.”

How weird is it that this possibility could even be considered? The character of the U.S. has changed. We’re in danger of being completely ruled by fear. Most Americans have not shared the burden of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Very few Americans are aware, as the Center for Constitutional Rights tells us, that of the hundreds of men held in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, many “have never been charged and will never be charged because there is no evidence justifying their detention.”

Even fewer care. We could benefit from looking in a mirror, and absorbing the shock of not recognizing what we’ve become.

**IF YOU LET THE “CULPRIT” SEE THE EVIDENCE,  
HE MIGHT FIND OUT WHAT HE DID**

Wagih H. Makky, an Egyptian-born *American citizen* who lives in Maryland and is an expert in aviation security, is suing the federal government, claiming he was wrongly suspended from his job as an electronics engineer with the Transportation Security Administration because of a classified F.B.I. file that the government will not let him see. — *from the NYTimes, 9/15/06*

**WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH US?  
John Rafferty**

***One***

On August 16, Colorado investigators and police in Bangkok, Thailand, announced the arrest of John Karr in the 1996 slaying of JonBenet Ramsey.

On August 17, in an historic ruling, a federal judge in Detroit opined that the Bush administration’s secret, warrantless surveillance program is unconstitutional, writing, “There are no hereditary kings in America and no powers not created by the Constitution.”

The facts that John Karr (we now know) didn’t do it, and that Judge Taylor’s ruling may be overturned, are both unimportant. What is important is that on August 17, all three major-network “news” shows opened with the JonBenet “case,” and allocated their time thusly:

NETWORK	JONBENET	JUDGE TAYLOR
ABC	4:03	2:00
CBS	3:23	0:25
NBC	7:39	0:27

***Two***

According to a Zogby International poll of 1,213 people in August, three quarters of Americans can correctly identify at least two of Snow White’s seven dwarfs while only one quarter can name two Supreme Court Justices. Twice as many (23 percent) are able to identify the most recent winner of the television talent show “American Idol,” Taylor Hicks, as are able to name Samuel Alito (11 percent), the Supreme Court Justice confirmed in January of this year. 74 percent were able to identify the Three Stooges—Larry, Curly and Moe—while only 42 percent can name the three branches of government – legislative, executive and judicial.

Over 60 percent were able to name Homer’s son Bart on the TV show “The Simpsons,” while only 20 percent can name one of the Greek poet Homer’s epic poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. 60 percent know fictional Krypton is Superman’s home planet, while only 37 percent know that Mercury is the real planet closest to the sun.

That’s what we don’t *know*. What do we *believe*?

According to a Scripps Howard/Ohio University poll done in July, 36 percent of Americans suspect U.S. officials helped in the 9/11 attacks or took no action to stop them, so that the United States could later go to war. Twelve percent believe a cruise missile hit the Pentagon.

And a growing number believe the Bush administration itself brought down the Twin Towers with thousands of tons of explosives secretly planted inside the buildings and timed to go off when the planes hit.

*This administration? ... the guys who can't turn the lights on in Baghdad or sweep the streets of New Orleans? Thousands—maybe millions—of us think those guys are capable of ... What the hell is wrong with us?*

### **WELCOME, ELAINE LYNN**

By unanimous agreement at the SHSNY Board meeting of September 13, Elaine Lynn was invited to join the Board. Happily for the Board and for SHSNY, she accepted. Her reasons:

“I have been a humanist for as long as I can remember and I'm eager to help, in whatever modest way I can, to make this a more enlightened society. I think people of all political and philosophical persuasions have a home among secular humanists. Though I am not eager to be unkind to anyone, we all need to face the fact that religion is an elaborately articulated form of superstition, and we can't afford to be in its thrall.

“As to my background, I have a Masters in International Relations from the University of Chicago, and have worked many years as a hotshot federal bureaucrat. (I can't resist pointing out that 'bureaucracy,' with its current negative connotations, is not peculiar to governments, but exists throughout the private sector as well.) I retired early to pursue my interests in the cognitive sciences and in international affairs.”

### **SECULAR SOCIALIZING? TRY RICHIE'S LIST**

Rich Sander is a one-man resource for secular, humanist, and rationalist events in the NYC metro area. An ex-serious-Catholic who crossed over, he says, “My new friends—freethinkers of all kinds—were telling me about this event and that meetup, so I started to send a list to them of each other's events.

“Richie's List posts events, lectures, happenings run by New York City Atheists, NYC Brights, CFI-New York, Meetup.com, and, of course, SHSNY (*Ed: far more than we do*). We list events at Columbia, NYU, and the American Museum of Natural History. We also sponsor “Drinking with Atheists” every Friday night from 8 to 11 p.m. at someone's apartment or a favorite bar. It's a light-hearted evening of conversation for a mostly-younger crowd, and some of us don't even drink.

“We can't choose our family and most of us are stuck with our coworkers, but in social situation we can pick the people we want to spend time with. I've met some of my own good friends at events I've listed. To get regular Richie's List Updates, email me at [rich\\_sander@yahoo.com](mailto:rich_sander@yahoo.com).”

### **CHUCK CORBETT, 1930 - 2006**

SHSNY bids a fond farewell to a devout atheist  
and a favorite member whose charm and wit  
delighted all who knew him.

### **RELIGIOUS CRITICISM IS NOT RELIGIOUS HATRED**

**Elaine Friedman**

*(Excerpted from HumanistNetworkNews.org, 7/12/06)*

At the first session of the new United Nations Human Rights Council on June 19, delegates from Bangladesh, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait,

Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates called for limits on freedom of speech regarding religion.

Considering the publishing of the Danish cartoons criticizing Islam “a blatant attempt to inflame religious hatred,” they called for mechanisms to curb criticism of religion by claiming that criticism of religion is the same as incitement to religious hatred.

In other words, they want most, if not all, criticism of religion to stop. ...

In response, Roy Brown, head of the International Humanist and Ethical Union delegation to the UN in Geneva, said, “The right to question religion and to freely express one’s views on religious matters is a human right. Human beings have human rights, religions do not. This Council has a solemn duty to protect people – not ideas, religions, customs, beliefs or traditional practices, especially when they are used as justification for the abuse of human rights. It is the believer, not the belief that must be protected.”

### **CANCEL THE GOOD NEWS FOR WOMEN IN PAKISTAN**

**Rebecca Traister**

*(Based on Ms. Traister’s column on Salon.com 9/12/06)*

Pakistan’s ruling party has bowed to conservative pressure and decided not to amend Islamic rape laws, including one which states that a rape victim must produce four male witnesses to escape a possible charge of adultery.

The bill that would have amended the old rape laws, called Hudood Ordinances, would have taken rape cases out of the religious courts and into the penal system. Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf had promised that he would support moves to repeal the laws. But leaders of an alliance of religious parties threatened to withdraw from national and provincial Parliaments if the government passed the amendments, which the opposition argued contradicted the Quran ... and the government suspended the current National Assembly session on September 18.

***Comment:** And rape victims who can’t produce four male witnesses to the crime (lots of luck!)—in the country that is “our partner in the war against terrorism”—can still be murdered with impunity by their male relatives in “honor killings” to punish their “adultery.” – JR*

### **A POLITICAL QUIZ WORTH TAKING**

*(Forwarded by Camille Padula)*

Go to <http://www.theadvocates.org/quiz.html> and take “The World’s Smallest Political Quiz,” a two-minute, 10-questions quiz that will show you where you stand (as a red dot) on a “political map.” The most interesting thing about the quiz is that it goes beyond Democrat, Republican, and Independent. *The Washington Post* says it has “gained respect as a valid measure of a person’s political leanings,” and The Fraser Institute says it’s “a fast, fun, and accurate assessment of a person’s overall political views.” Definitely fun.

### **A SECULAR CRIB SHEET FOR VOTING THIS NOVEMBER**

**John Rafferty**



The Secular Coalition for America has published a “secular scorecard” for every member of the 109th Congress, rating each Representative and each Senator on 10 different votes that they think matter most to secularists and humanists.

The 10 measured votes in the House include those on expanding stem cell research (we won) and on over-riding Bush’s veto of same (we lost); resolutions to continue supporting the Boy Scouts in spite of their discriminatory practices (it won, we lost); on ending discrimination in hiring by “faith-based” organizations and the removal of civil rights protections in “faith-based” Head Start programs (we lost both, and the bigots march on); on forcing the Secretary of Defense to do something about religious proselytizing at the Air Force Academy (we lost, Jesus is still our co-pilot), putting the Mt. Soledad crucifix under federal protection (lost); stripping the courts of the power to hear cases on the Pledge of Allegiance (Repeat after me, everyone: “under God”), and, of course, the constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, which we “won” only because “they” didn’t get a two-thirds majority. For details on all the bills and amendments, and on how your Representative voted, go to <http://www.secular.org/scorecard/2006/house.html>.

Eight of the ten votes in the Senate measured by the Coalition had to do with federal judicial appointments by President Bush, including two votes this January regarding the confirmation of Samuel Alito’s appointment to the Supreme Court. The good guy senators defeated a motion that would have invoked cloture (cutting off debate/filibuster) against the marriage amendment, and passed the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (which Bush vetoed). As to other issues taken up by the House, the Coalition says, “A number of issues were handled in the Senate without recorded votes, e.g.: Mt. Soledad was passed by “unanimous consent” procedure; religious discrimination in Head Start has been held up in committee; military proselytizing in the Defense Department bill was taken out prior to a Senate vote.” For details on your own Senators, go to [www.secular.org/scorecard/2006/senate\\_rc.html](http://www.secular.org/scorecard/2006/senate_rc.html).

Here’s the Secular Coalition’s summary scorecard for the six Senators and 36 Representatives in SHSNY’s tri-state neighborhood:

**NEW YORK**

*House*

1st Bishop (D)	80
2nd Israel (D)	90
3rd King (R)	0
4th McCarthy (D)	90
5th Ackerman (D)	90
6th Meeks (D)	60
7th Crowley (D)	90
8th Nadler (D)	90
9th Weiner (D)	80
10th Towns (D)	60
11th Owens (D)	80
12th Velazquez (D)	90
13th Fossella (R)	20
14th Maloney (D)	80
15th Rangel (D)	90
16th Serrano (D)	90
17th Engel (D)	80
18th Lowey (D)	90
19th Kelly (R)	30

*Senate:*

Clinton (D)	100
Schumer (D)	100

**NEW JERSEY**

*House*

6th Pallone (D)	90
7th Ferguson (R)	0
8th Pascrell (D)	80
9th Rothman (D)	90
10th Payne (D)	90
11th Frelinghuysen (R)	30
12th Holt (D)	90

*Senate:*

Lautenberg (D)	90
Menendez (D)	100

*Menendez joined the Senate on Jan. 18, 2006, and so didn’t vote on all issues.*

**CONNECTICUT**

*House*

3rd DeLauro (D)	90
4th Shays (R)	60
5th Johnson (R)	50

*Senate*

Dodd (D)	90
Lieberman (D/I)	60

How come there are no 100 percent scores among House members? Not a single one in our neighborhood, not even Congressman-for-Life Charley Rangel, could bring him/herself to vote against the Boy Scouts.

Remember: vote early and often.

### **UNINTENDED IRONY OF THE MONTH**

*(Excerpted verbatim from a September 16 NYTimes page 1 story on the digging of trenches around Baghdad.)*

There has been a surge in the number of Iraqis killed execution-style in the last few days, with scores of bodies found across the city despite an aggressive security plan begun last month. The Baghdad morgue has reported that at least 1,535 Iraqi civilians died violently in the capital in August, a 17 percent drop from July but still much higher than virtually all other months.

American military officials have disputed the morgue's numbers, saying military data shows that what they refer to as the murder rate dropped by 52 percent from July to August. But American officials have acknowledged that that count does not include deaths from bombings and rocket or mortar attacks.

### **PIG-HEADED "LEADERSHIP"**

**Maureen Dowd**

*(Excerpted from "Vice Must Wash Hands Before Returning to Work" in The NYTimes, 9/13/06)*

On "Meet the Press," [Vice President] Cheney warned that America cannot let its adversaries "break our will," and show we "don't have the stomach for the fight." "It was the right thing to do," Vice insisted of the war in Iraq, "and if we had to do it over again we would do exactly the same thing."

After all the miscalculations and billions wasted, projects screwed up, lives and limbs lost, foreign enemies made, American stature squandered, Taliban strength regained, North Korean bombs and Iran-Iraq alliances built ... Dick Cheney wouldn't do anything differently?

*If nothing else works, a total pig-headed unwillingness to look facts in the face will see us through. – General Lord Melchett, of the British TV comedy Blackadder*

### **SMALL APPLIANCES RELIGION**

**Sam Harris**

*(From his new book, Letter to a Christian Nation)*

The President of the United States has claimed, on more than one occasion, to be in dialogue with God. If he said that he was talking to God through his hairdryer, this would precipitate a national emergency. I fail to see how the addition of a hairdryer makes the claim more ludicrous or offensive.

### **SUDAN, IT SEEMS, IS MORE "LIBERAL" THAN WE ARE**

**John Rafferty**

*(Based on a 2/24 BBC item forwarded by Flash Light)*

When the issue of same-sex marriage arose a couple of years ago, stalwarts of the religious right, including Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia and Senator Rick Santorum, howled that if we allowed human beings to marry any other human beings they wanted, what would be next, humans and farm animals?

Well, it seems that that national model of liberalism, Sudan, has skipped right over the same-sex part and progressed straight to inter-species matrimony.

A Sudanese man has been forced to take a goat as his “wife” after he was caught having sex with the animal. The goat’s owner, a Mr. Alifi, said he surprised the man with his goat and took him to a council of elders. They ordered the bridegroom, one Mr. Tombe, to pay a dowry of \$50 to Mr Alifi and to make an honest woman of the goat.

“We have given him the goat,” Mr. Alifi said, “and as far as we know they are still together.”

See, Nino? See, Rick? These things can work out.

### **RELIGIOUS-POLITICAL CORRECTNESS RUNS AMOK IN THE U.K.**

*(Excerpted from ThisIsTrue.com, 8/28)*

Artur Boruc, a Polish Catholic goalkeeper for the Celtics Football Club, crossed himself at the start of the second half of a soccer match in hugely Protestant Glasgow, Scotland. The Strathclyde police were called in, the Crown Office ruled that in the “charged atmosphere” of a football match, the act of crossing oneself “provoked alarm and crowd trouble and as such constituted a breach of the peace.” Boruc now has a criminal record.

And Jane Edwards, a doctor in Sheffield, England, stopped at the Post Office to renew her daughter’s passport since the family was planning a trip to France. Nothing doing, a clerk said: 5-year-old Heather was wearing a sleeveless dress, and her resulting exposed skin “might prove unacceptable” if the girl went to a Muslim country. The U.K. passport office later said there was no rule against sleeveless dresses.

*Political Correctness*: a system wherein it’s OK to offend someone right in front of you by enforcing a made-up rule to stop a theoretical offense against an unknown person at some time in the future when you aren’t even going to be there.

### **AND ETHNICITY PC (TV SUBDIVISION) GALLOPS ALONG RIGHT HERE IN NEW YORK**

**Clyde Haberman**

*(Excerpted from his column in the NYTimes, 9/1/06)*

Few sights are more endearing than that of elected officials holding forth on matters thoroughly beyond their control.

An example of the phenomenon was on display the other day. Members of the City Council, including one or two who practically break out in hives if they go too long without facing a camera, summoned reporters to denounce the CBS series “Survivor.”

For the fall season the show’s producers announced plans to divide teams along racial and ethnic lines. Groups of blacks, whites, Latinos and Asian-Americans will compete for prizes against one another — not exactly a Stevie Wonder-Paul McCartney moment. Indeed, many New Yorkers, perhaps most, will find the concept offensive in the extreme.

It didn't take long before members of the Council hurried to the steps of City Hall to express predictable outrage in more or less predictable terms. ...

Did we mention that the dominant force in assailing "Survivor" was the Council's Black, Latino and Asian Caucus? So, leading the condemnation of CBS for creating teams defined by race and ethnicity was a team that created itself using race and ethnicity as the definition.

### **THE RUDE PUNDIT VISITS TEXAS' PUBLIC SCHOOL BIBLE CLASSES**

*(Excerpted—and bowdlerized—from "Christ Weary of Texas Public School Bible Classes" on rudepundit.blogspot.com, 9/14/06, and forwarded by David Rafferty)*

In public schools in Texas, do classes about the Bible that are supposed to remain secular actually deviate from the historical and social significance of the Good Book and get into preaching? ...

According to a just-released study by the Texas Freedom Network, a progressive religious group, "With a few notable exceptions, the public school courses currently taught in Texas often fail to meet minimal academic standards for teacher qualifications; curriculum, and academic rigor; promote one faith perspective over all others; and push an ideological agenda that is hostile to religious freedom, science and public education." Yep, in Texas untrained teachers use tax dollars to "teach" Christian belief and nutzoid fundamentalism.

The classes are electives and are offered in 825 districts ... and what fun the students are having, what with being taught by their local clergy ... and learning that the Bible is historically accurate and has never been changed. It's like taking a class on magic tricks.

In one school district, a lecture on the Book of Acts was titled "God's Road to Life." It pointed out, among other things, that "Jesus Christ is the one and only way" (to where? Denny's?) ... [and that] "As followers of Christ we are commanded to tell the good news." ...

In Corpus Christi, a class was asked, "Why did Jesus tell the Jewish leaders: 'Surely evil men and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom before you do'?" Yep, between learning that Christian belief supplants Jewish belief and that America is a Christian nation, the students should be ready to vote in Texas when they hit eighteen.

[Tests in these courses ask questions such as] "How is the Bible's honesty a good reason to believe what it says?" and "Explain how the survival of the Bible makes it believable."

In one school, students spent two days watching the video "Dinosaurs and the Bible," produced by Creation Science Evangelism (motto: "Fred Flintstone is our hero"). They pondered questions like how it might have been scientifically possible for humans to live for hundreds of years. In Mesquite, a local minister teaching one course presented the idea that "Europeans, Africans and Semitic peoples all descended from the three sons of Noah after the flood, and that each group had its own racial characteristics, such as philosophical thought for Europeans and skill at hunting for Africans." The Semites presumably had mad money lending skills.

Yes, the TFN says, a "few" districts actually taught the Bible as literature or as a cultural artifact. Now that's a leap of faith — to say that high school students could learn

something about themselves and the world by being willing to save Sunday school for, say, Sundays.