

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

June, 2013

Sumer is icumen in / Lhude sing cuccu! So let's plan a Solstice Picnic (page 7) as we count our atheist blessings. Also herein, we celebrate Michigan and Iceland, forswear eating bugs, ponder Dawkins on the unnecessary and Feynman on the unknowable, promote church (*us?*), but not prayer (*okay, better*), find a new use for Bible verses, welcome back a Grand Old Dumbth and nominate an historically-oblivious new one. But first, let's talk about capital-R Reason and its particular Day. – JR

APPROPRIATELY, WE LEARNED SOMETHING AT OUR DAY OF REASON BRUNCH

John Rafferty

When my first wife was six or seven months pregnant with our first child in 1961, the thought hit me that if she were in a serious accident when I wasn't around she might be taken to a Catholic hospital. There, with a last name like Rafferty (and with freckles, no less), my Jewish atheist wife, who wore no *Magen David* or *chai* necklace, might be taken for Irish-Catholic and be at the fatal mercy of some hospital functionary in full "Save the baby" mode.

I worried, Lanie calmed me down, and David, like his brothers, was born in a private secular hospital. But the experience came back to me in full as, half a century later, I watched and listened to Sheila Reynertson's MergerWatch presentation at SHSNY's 5th Annual Day of Reason Brunch at Pete's Tavern.

What's MergerWatch? An organization "created in 1997 to help communities save access to reproductive health services threatened by religious/secular hospital mergers".

Hospital mergers – a big issue? Yes. Due to increasing costs, tight credit, and even incentives offered by health care reform, hospitals and HMOs are merging at accelerating rates all across the country.

And when secular and Catholic hospitals merge, "*Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*" – issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, enforced by the bishops and the Vatican, and applied to more than 600 Catholic health facilities and 50 HMOs in the U.S. – are imposed on secular hospitals that merge with Catholic facilities!

So, as you'd expect, no abortions—for any reason—even in otherwise secular hospitals. But that's just for starters. No contraceptive services (or contraception

coverage for employees) either, no emergency contraception for rape victims, no tubal ligations or vasectomies, no "safer sex" counseling, no infertility treatments, and no honoring of patients' end-of-life wishes.



Sheila Reynertson

All of which was news to the packed-room audience at Pete's on May 5, as MergerWatch Advocacy Coordinator Reynertson explained how her group works and what its principles are: the patient at the center of medical decision-making;

non-interference in a patient's access to care by religious doctrine or the beliefs of a caregiver; and the patient's right to make treatment decisions based on accurate medical information and their own ethical or religious beliefs.

MergerWatch has organized communities to defeat 32 religious/secular mergers, undo 13 others, and effect liberalizing compromises in 23 more cases ... and is currently dealing with twelve more cases, from Washington State to New Jersey, and from Texas to Maine.

The applause that followed the presentation and a lively Q&A session was genuine and prolonged, and I heard several "Great presentation" remarks, including at least one "best speaker ever!"

Thank you, Sheila.

P.S.: The presentation was outstanding, conversations around the tables were stimulating, the feeling in the room was warm and fraternal, and the food was cold.

Apologies, and we'll fix that. – JR

I think that nowadays the Catholic Church is not an institution for respectable people.

– Hilary Mantel, two-time Booker prize-winning author

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Rafferty, *President/Editor*; Robert A. Murtha, Jr., *Vice President*; Donna Marxer, *Treasurer*; Lee Loshak, *Secretary*; Remo Cosentino; Arthur Harris; Brian Lemaire; Elaine Lynn; Carl Marxer; Irv Millman; Carlos Mora; John Wagner; Mike Weiss
SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 / 212-308-2165 / www.shsny.org

Individual membership \$40 per year; Family membership \$65; Subscription only \$30.

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in www.shsny.org. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters.

SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism,
and a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

HERE'S A FIRST: WE WON A DISCRIMINATION CASE

(Excerpted from *Secular Humanist Bulletin*, Spring, 2013)

This is perhaps the first time federal and state civil rights statutes have been successfully invoked by nonbelievers in a public accommodations lawsuit, announced Ron Lindsay, President and CEO of the Center for Inquiry, after reaching a settlement “satisfactory to CFI” with the Wyndgate Country Club of Rochester Hills, Michigan.

The case? The club cancelled an October, 2011 CFI-Michigan event featuring Richard Dawkins because of the speaker’s and attendees’ atheism. The club tried to justify breaking its contract by stating that “the owner does not wish to associate with certain individuals and philosophies”. A club representative specifically cited Dawkins’s appearance on *The O’Reilly Factor* a few days before, in which Dawkins’s atheism was the chief topic.

CFI sued, alleging a violation of both federal and state civil rights laws, as well as breach of contract, and the club caved. “Of course, the majority of businesses welcome the patronage of nonbelievers as much as anyone else”, Lindsay added, “but if one should choose to prejudicially exclude us because of our lack of religious belief, we have shown that there will be consequences.”

Comment: Congratulations, CFI, damn well about time. – JR

BUT WE LOSE AN EVEN BIGGER ONE Stephen C. Webster

(Excerpted from *Rawstory.com*, 4/18/2013)

The Harvard Humanist Community was shocked (in April) when their members were, in the carefully-chosen words of *New York Times* best-selling author Greg M. Epstein, “blown off” and excluded from an inter-faith memorial ceremony for the victims of the Boston Marathon bombing.

“We have friends and family who are in the hospital in critical condition, who nearly died”, he told Raw Story. “It wouldn’t have been so difficult for those who organized the vigil to make some kind of nod to us, and that’s all we would have wanted.”

The Harvard humanist chaplain and author of *Good Without God* explained that the exclusion of non-religious Bostonians was particularly shocking because someone dear to the Harvard Humanist Community was gravely wounded in the bombings. Celeste Corcoran, who was caught in the blast with her daughter and subsequently lost both of her legs to amputation, was a volunteer for the Harvard Humanist Community.

President Barack Obama personally addressed attendees at the service, which was held at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston. He was joined by Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino.

“We gave the White House an opportunity to exert a little more influence to help include us, and I’m disappointed that didn’t happen”, Epstein said. “We spoke to high ranking

members of the governor’s staff multiple times – people we know for a fact were involved in organizing the vigil – in fact we called them every hour on the hour. And when I say we, I don’t mean me: I mean our lobbying office, the Secular Coalition for America.”

“The point of today was inclusion”, Epstein lamented. “All they had to do was say one word, or allow one official guest, and they didn’t. I can’t speak to their motivation. I hope that it was a matter of ignorance.”

Comment: Or, perhaps, gutless pandering. Shame on Menino. Shame on Patrick. Shame on Obama. – JR

THE BLESSINGS OF ATHEISM Susan Jacoby

(Reprinted from *The New York Times OpEd page*, 1/5/2013)

In a recent conversation with a fellow journalist, I voiced my exasperation at the endless talk about faith in God. As the only consolation for those devastated by the unfathomable murders in Newtown, Conn. Some of those grieving parents surely believe, as I do, that this is our one and only life. Atheists cannot find solace in the idea that dead children are now angels in heaven. “That only shows the limits of atheism”, my colleague replied. “It’s all about nonbelief and has nothing to offer when people are suffering.”

This widespread misapprehension that atheists believe in nothing positive is one of the main reasons secularly inclined Americans – roughly 20 percent of the population – do not wield public influence commensurate with their numbers. One major problem is the dearth of secular community institutions. But the most powerful force holding us back is our own reluctance to speak, particularly at moments of high national drama and emotion, with the combination of reason and passion needed to erase the image of the atheist as a bloodless intellectual robot.

The secular community is fearful of seeming to proselytize. When giving talks on college campuses, I used to avoid personal discussions of my atheism. But over the years, I have changed my mind because such diffidence contributes to the false image of the atheist as someone whose convictions are removed from ordinary experience. It is vital to show that there are indeed atheists in foxholes, and wherever else human beings suffer and die.

Now when students ask how I came to believe what I believe, I tell them that I trace my atheism to my first encounter, at age 7, with the scourge of polio. In 1952, a 9-year-old friend was stricken by the disease and clinging to life in an iron lung. After visiting him in the hospital, I asked my mother, “Why would God do that to a little boy?”

She sighed in a way that telegraphed her lack of conviction and said: “I don’t know. The priest would say God must have his reasons, but I don’t know what they could be.”

Just two years later, in 1954, Jonas Salk’s vaccine began the process of eradicating polio, and my mother took the opportunity to suggest that God may have guided his research. I remember replying, “Well, God should have

guided the doctors a long time ago so that Al wouldn't be in an iron lung." (He was to die only eight years later, by which time I was a committed atheist.)

The first time I told this story to a class, I was deeply gratified when one student confided that his religious doubts arose from the struggles of a severely disabled sibling, and that he had never been able to discuss the subject candidly with his fundamentalist parents. One of the most positive things any atheist can do is provide a willing ear for a doubter — even if the doubter remains a religious believer.

It is primarily in the face of suffering, whether the tragedy is individual or collective, that I am forcefully reminded of what atheism has to offer. When I try to help a loved one losing his mind to Alzheimer's, when I see homeless people shivering in the wake of a deadly storm, when the news media bring me almost obscenely close to the raw grief of bereft parents, I do not have to ask, as all people of faith must, why an all-powerful, all-good God allows such things to happen.

It is a positive blessing, not a negation of belief, to be free of what is known as the theodicy problem. Human "free will" is Western monotheism's answer to the question of why God does not use his power to prevent the slaughter of innocents, and many people throughout history (some murdered as heretics) have not been able to let God off the hook in that fashion.

The atheist is free to concentrate on the fate of this world — whether that means visiting a friend in a hospital or advocating for tougher gun control laws — without trying to square things with an unseen overlord in the next. Atheists do not want to deny religious believers the comfort of their faith. We do want our fellow citizens to respect our deeply held conviction that the absence of an afterlife lends a greater, not a lesser, moral importance to our actions on earth.

Today's atheists would do well to emulate some of the great 19th-century American freethinkers, who insisted that reason and emotion were not opposed but complementary. Robert Green Ingersoll, who died in 1899 and was one of the most famous orators of his generation, personified this combination of passion and rationality. Called "The Great Agnostic", Ingersoll insisted that there was no difference between atheism and agnosticism because it was impossible for anyone to "know" whether God existed or not. He used his secular pulpit to advocate for social causes like justice for African-Americans, women's rights, prison reform and the elimination of cruelty to animals.

He also frequently delivered secular eulogies at funerals and offered consolation that he clearly considered an important part of his mission. In 1882, at the graveside of a friend's child, he declared: "They who stand with breaking hearts around this little grave, need have no fear.

"The larger and the nobler faith in all that is, and is to be, tells us that death, even at its worst, is only perfect rest ... The dead do not suffer."

Today's secularists must do more than mount defensive campaigns proclaiming that we can be "good

without God". Atheists must stand up instead of calling themselves freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists or "spiritual, but not religious". The last phrase, translated from the psychobabble, can mean just about anything — that the speaker is an atheist who fears social disapproval or a fence-sitter who wants the theoretical benefits of faith, including hope of eternal life, without the obligations of actually practicing a religion. Atheists may also be secular humanists and freethinkers—I answer to all three—but avoidance of identification with atheism confines us to a closet that encourages us to fade or be pushed into the background when tragedy strikes.

We must speak up as atheists in order to take responsibility for whatever it is humans are responsible for — including violence in our streets and schools. We need to demonstrate that atheism is rooted in empathy as well as intellect. And although atheism is not a religion, we need community-based outreach programs so that our activists will be as recognizable to their neighbors as the clergy.

Finally, we need to show up at gravesides, as Ingersoll did, to offer whatever consolation we can.

In his speech at an interfaith prayer vigil in Newtown on December 16, President Obama observed that "the world's religions — so many of them represented here today — start with a simple question: Why are we here? What gives our life meaning?" He could easily have amended that to "the world's religions and secular philosophies". He could have said something like, "Whether you are religious or nonreligious, may you find solace in the knowledge that the suffering is ours, but that those we love suffer no more."

Somewhere in that audience, and in the larger national audience, there were mourners who would have been comforted by the acknowledgment that their lives have meaning even if they do not regard death as the door to another life, but "only perfect rest".

DAWKINS ON THE UNNECESSARY

Not only do we need no God to explain the universe and life, God stands out in the universe as the most glaring of all superfluous sore thumbs. We cannot, of course, disprove God, just as we can't disprove Thor, fairies, leprechauns and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. But, like those other fantasies that we can't disprove, we can say that God is very, very improbable.

JESUS AND MO GO DEEP

(Transcribed from jesusandmo.net/2013/04/24/deep2/)

Jesus: Barmaid, your life must be so empty without religion.

Mohammed: How can you have purpose or direction without God to guide you?

Jesus: Your lack of belief in a higher spiritual power has condemned you to a life of shallow materialism.

Barmaid: Boys, I don't know how to break this to you gently, but believing in things that aren't true doesn't make you deep, it just makes you wrong.

Mo: At least we're deeply wrong.

NOT-QUITE-HUMANISTIC MORMONISM

Jason Torpy

(*Note: Jason, who is President of the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers, a member of the Board of the American Humanist Association, and a friend of SHSNY, offers the following as an individual humanist.*)

I have been very interested in the rise of Humanistic Mormonism (PIQUE, April, "Humanistic Mormons' - You're Kidding Me, Right?"). I have talked with their leaders several times in the hopes that this new group of Mormons can live up to their adopted category of "humanistic", and will start by saying that the concept of co-opting religious culture for use in a humanist life stance, as with secular Jews and Ethical Culture, is perfectly reasonable. I think these new "Humanistic" Mormons have improved on Mormon ideology, but the organization warrants some skepticism from us and apparently suffers from disdain by its leaders for skepticism.

The problematic non-humanist quality of the Society for Humanistic Mormonism (SFHM) is that it is not nontheistic as an organization. Consider this representative statement, posted April 7th by SFHM:

Reason and science we protect and advance in the Society for Humanistic Mormonism and in the wider world of Mormonism. We believe that humanity must accept the results of science or face terrible consequences for the future of our planet. We meditate daily that all people will accept reason and science into their hearts and minds. To be without reason or science is to be without that which is most important in life. We say these things in the name of Science, Reason, and Philosophy, Amen.

I expect readers to need just a moment to recover from a certain mind-numbing shock at seeing "accept science" followed by "Amen". Take all the time you need.

SFHM seems to have the right ideas in many cases. They claim affiliations with the American Humanist Association and other humanist organizations. They also endorse every humanist statement they can find. In addition, their own statements of their new values revere science, reason, and humanistic ethics. So far so good, but there seems to be some lack of education in how they carry out their endorsements.

First, their endorsement of humanist values includes literally every humanist statement they can find. The issue is that many of those statements contradict or supersede each other. For example, *Humanist Manifestos I and III* say contradictory things. This eagerness to associate with humanism should be tempered with more care in understanding humanism; endorsing contradictory statements is not a good sign.

In addition, they have adopted Transhumanism in full. Humanism and Transhumanism, though they share a word-part, are not paired movements. One is a comprehensive naturalistic life stance promoting human flourishing, while the other is a bioethics philosophy that prioritizes human enhancement (or words to that effect). That SFHM

has adopted Transhumanism as a core foundation of their philosophy is perfectly acceptable, but it does distinguish SFHM humanism from other expressions of humanism.

More recently, SFHM has published its "13 Articles of Reason". Article 11 is the problematic one, adopting an unskeptical view of god belief, quoting John Stuart Mill saying, "We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavoring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still." They seem to be able to take an ideological stand on many issues, but on the issue of god belief, they have provided a 400-word excuse defending their indecision. They have characterized the normal humanistic nontheism, a simple science-based and humanistic burden-of-proof standard for god belief, as some sort of ideological tyranny.

Furthermore, they have started recently to rewrite the Book of Mormon, replacing references to "God" with "Science and Reason". This initial-caps anthropomorphized proxy of "Science and Reason" for their prior god concept may be the most problematic habit of the growing Society for Humanistic Mormonism. They have departed from humanism in their desire to: 1) put forth "Science and Reason" as a quasi-magical, quasi-personal replacement for "God" while also, 2) refusing to stand firmly by the scientific and rational conclusion that gods and other supernatural powers simply don't exist.

While I am not concerned about their co-opting of Mormon terms and Mormon hierarchy (they have Apostles), I am greatly concerned about their tenuous understanding of humanism, their concept of "Science and Reason", and their association of god belief with humanism.

This essay is not intended to reject "Humanistic Mormons" outright. They espouse progressive values, have, to their credit, rejected Mormon doctrine, and have embraced to some extent scientific, rational, and humanistic ideas. While I hold out hope for the organization, SFHM in its current expression should not be considered a "humanist" organization because it is not nontheistic. We should work with them as we would Unitarian Universalists, Wiccans, United Church of Christ, and other ethical but nonetheless supernatural religious organizations.

A GIANT STEP FORWARD FOR HUMANISM IN ICELAND

Hope Knutsson, President of Sidmennt

(*Excerpted from "Icelandic Parliament passes life stance equality law", posted by Ms. Knutsson 1/31/2013*)

The Icelandic Parliament (Althing) this week passed a law which gives secular life stance organizations the right to apply for equal legal status with religions. The new law amends the current law about registered religious organizations. Thus, for the first time in Icelandic history, the government recognizes and guarantees equality between secular and religious life stances.

Sidmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, has been lobbying for such a change for more than ten years

and celebrates this historic turning point. As soon as the law takes effect, Sidmennt will apply to the Ministry of the Interior for registration which will guarantee equal rights and freedom of conscience to its 300 members. ...

An additional improvement provided by this law is that newborn babies will no longer automatically be registered into the religion of the mother, but rather according to the religious or life stance registration of both parents, and only if the registrations match. Sidmennt members and many other people in Iceland, including many legislators, feel that this does not go far enough and that it is a human rights violation for government to be involved at all in registering people's religious affiliation, and is especially abnormal to register newborn babies in a religion. The sponsors of the new law say they want to work towards abolishing this anachronism but think it can only be done in stages.

Although this law is an important step towards equality, the government is not changing the privileged status of the Evangelical Lutheran State Church, which enjoys both legal and financial privileges over all other life stance organizations.

Comment: Congratulations, Iceland and Sidmennt, and keep on fighting the good fight. – JR

Our Own Religions-of-the-Book Roundup for June:

THE MUSLIM SCIENCE OF PLATE TECTONICS

A 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck southeastern Iran, killing at least 35 people in neighboring Pakistan. Senior Iranian cleric Hojatoleslam Kazem Sedighi pronounced:

"Many women who do not dress modestly lead young men astray, which increases earthquakes."

SO, BUG BLOOD IS TREF? WHO KNEW?

(Excerpted from yourjewishnews.com/2013/04/26658.html)

An Israeli rabbi has ruled that an Orthodox Jewish man may not take the blood of a woman in a transfusion, and should not receive blood of a non-Orthodox Jew or a non-Jew.

"Non-Orthodox Jews eat bugs, therefore their blood is tainted. Also, as we all know, men and women need to stay segregated, therefore a Jewish man should not take blood even from a Jewish woman", the rabbi wrote in his new book called, *With Blood You Shall Live*.

"Those people eating bugs and meat from dead animals lose their mind, therefore getting blood from such a person will cause the Orthodox Jew to lose his mind too."

FAITH CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS, BUT APPARENTLY NOT UNDERCOVER COPS

"I can only really write about what I'm passionate about in life, so naturally my faith, my belief in the teachings of Jesus and His resurrection come across in our lyrics."

Christian Rocker Tim Lambesis, lead singer and founder of the group As I Lay Dying, who has been arrested for trying to hire an undercover cop to murder his wife.

MEET OUR NEWEST DUMBTH NOMINEE: CWA CEO PENNY NANCE

John Rafferty

(Thanks to Flash Light for the heads-up on this.)

On May 3, Fox News's Steve Doocy tsk-tsked that on that National Day of Prayer, Anthony Fox, Mayor of Charlotte, NC (and President Obama's new nominee for Transportation Secretary), proclaimed a Day of Reason in his city. What do you think? Doocy asked Penny Nance, the new President and CEO of Concerned Women for America.



Since CWA is a 32-year-old creationist, anti-choice, anti-sex education, anti-stem-cell research, and anti-gay organization that claims hundreds of thousands of "members" (but has never shown anyone the numbers), Nance's answer was predictable: "Clearly, we need faith as a component, and it's just silly to say otherwise."

And then came the whopper:

"The Age of Enlightenment and Reason gave way to moral relativism, and moral relativism is what led us all the way down the dark path to the Holocaust."

Really.

Unblinking at this idiotic indictment of the last 400 years of scientific, technological, medical, moral, and social progress, the as-usual clueless Doocy pressed the questions of faith and reason, and Nance offered her bona fides in the Liars for Jesus club.

"John Adams said that our Constitution depended on a moral and religious people. By contrast, Mao said that morality arrives at the muzzle of a gun."

Okay, the Mao misquote first. What he actually said was "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" – power, not morality. But what's a little distortion in the service of a fake analogy?

And what John Adams actually said was:

"We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution is designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other."

Which is subtly, but importantly, different from our Dumbth nominee's misquote. Moreover, Ms Nance (I'm sure she hates that "Ms") ignores some of our second President's other remarks about religion. For instance:

"God is an essence that we know nothing of. Until this awful blasphemy is got rid of, there never will be any liberal science in the world."

And best of all:

"This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it."

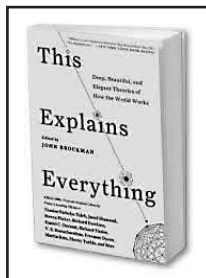
SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE - AUGUST 2013

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 6:30 pm
in the front room of
**THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK**
28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
(3 doors West of the church - red door)

We'll discuss
**THIS EXPLAINS
EVERYTHING**
*Deep, Beautiful, and Elegant
Theories of How the World Works*
Ed: John Brockman

Why do we recognize patterns? Is there such a thing as positive stress? Are we genetically programmed to be in conflict with each other?



These are just some of the 150 questions that the world's best minds, including Jared Diamond, Richard Dawkins, Nassim Taleb, Brian Eno, and Steven Pinker answer with elegant simplicity. Complex concepts discussed in fun, uncomplicated terms.

— *Paperback and Kindle available.*

Join us even if you haven't finished reading.
The SHSNY Book Club
is open to all ... and free!

PLANNING AHEAD

Book Club: First Thursday
at the Community Church of NY
Movie Night: Second Monday
at Stone Creek Lounge.
Brunch: Third Sunday
at Brabant Belgian Bistrot.
Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday
at Stone Creek Lounge.
Humanism 101: Last Monday
at the Community Church of NY
More info: www.shsny.org,
at.humanism.meetup.com/515,
and 212-308-2165

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURSDAY, JULY 11, 6:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
**THE SOCIAL CONQUEST
OF EARTH**

Edward O. Wilson

Where did we come from? What are we? Where are we going? One of our greatest living scientists directly addresses these three fundamental questions of religion, philosophy, and science while "overturning the theory that evolution naturally encourages creatures to put family first".

Wilson draws on his remarkable knowledge of biology and social behavior to reimagine evolutionary history, showing that group selection, not kin selection, is the driving force of human evolution. — *Paperback & Kindle*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURSDAY, AUG 1, 6:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
**RELIGION IN
AMERICAN POLITICS:**

A Short History
Frank Lambert

The delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention blocked the establishment of Christianity as a national religion. But they could not keep religion out of American politics. From 1800, when Federalist clergymen charged that deist Thomas Jefferson was unfit to lead a "Christian nation", to today, when some Democrats want to embrace the Religious Left to compete with the Republicans and the Religious Right, Lambert tells the fascinating story of the uneasy relations between religion and politics in America. — *Paperback and Kindle*

June 16 (3d Sunday) is Father's Day, so ...

**BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 12 NOON**
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH
Brabant Belgian Brasserie
316 East 53 Street

We'll meet at Noon just east of 2nd Avenue at our new brunch venue for outstanding Belgian fare, from salads to shrimp rolls, Grand Fromage Onion Soup, waffles and burgers, pots of lots of mussels, \$6 to \$18, plus a prix-fixe brunch (10 choices, plus 5 omelettes, including a drink) for \$17.

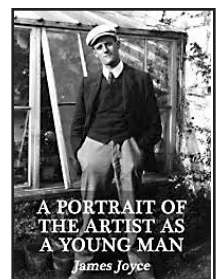
Bloomsday was June 16! Let's talk about James Joyce, "Ulysses", and Molly ("... yes, I will Yes") Bloom

Everyone interested in getting together with 15-20 or more like-minded humanists and rationalists for good grub (huge selection of beers!) and lively talk is welcome.

Bring friends!

MONDAY, JUNE 10, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
**A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST
AS A YOUNG MAN**

A "beautiful" adaptation of James Joyce's autobiographical first novel, portraying his youth and coming of age through his character, Stephen



Dedalus, questioning the tyranny of family, state, and the religion of Irish Catholic Ireland. Filmed (beautifully) in Ireland in 1973, with John Gielgud as The Preacher in the famous Hellfire Sermon.

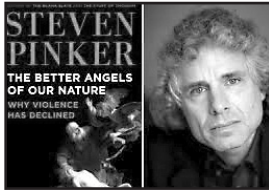
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
Check out the menu and prices at
www.stonecreeknyc.com

SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE - AUGUST 2013

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD WED, JUNE 26, 7:00 pm Stone Creek Bar & Lounge 140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves) **THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE**

Dr. Steven Pinker

Faced with the ceaseless stream of news about war, crime, and terrorism, one could conclude that we live in the most violent age ever seen. Professor Pinker shows in his startling new work that the opposite is true: violence has been diminishing for millennia and we may be living in the most peaceful time in our species' existence.



Professor Pinker shows that all these forms of violence have dwindled and are widely condemned. How has this happened? Pinker's groundbreaking work explores the very essence of human nature. Mixing psychology and history he provides a remarkable picture of and increasingly nonviolent world.

The key, he explains, is to understand our intrinsic motives – the inner demons and the better angels – and how changing circumstances have allowed our better angels to prevail.

Great Lectures Night is FREE

LIKE SHSNY ON FACEBOOK

Join the conversation, and keep up with the facts, fascinations, and links John Wagner posts every day:

www.facebook.com/pages/The-Secular-Humanist-Society-of-New-York/168704396485734

AND MEET US ON MEETUP

Check out our busy calendar of events and get-togethers:

www.meetup.com/shsny-org/

Note: June 3 is a re-schedule because the Church was closed May 27.

HUMANISM 101 MONDAY, JUNE 3, 6:30-8:30 Community Church of New York 28 East 35 Street (red door)

Meeting/Discussion #6:

*Peace and War in
21st Century America*
Online

Google: 1961 President Eisenhower Military-Industrial Complex Speech.
Aaron B. O'Connell: *The Permanent Militarization of America*, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/05/opinion/the-permanent-militarization-of-america.html?pagewanted=all>

Book(s)

Rachel Maddow: *Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power* and/or Chris Hedges: *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*

HUMANISM 101 MONDAY, JUNE 24, 6:30-8:30 Community Church of New York Meeting/Discussion #7

Why is there Religion?

Online

Pascal Boyer: *Why is Religion Natural?* at http://www.csicop.org/si/show/why_is_religion_natural.
Ask.com/Wikipedia: *Evolutionary Origin of Religions* at http://www.ask.com/wiki/Evolutionary_origin_of_religions?o=2800&qsrc=999

Book(s)

Peter Berger: *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, and/or Daniel Dennett: *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*
Note: You can do the online reading for each Meeting in an hour or so, and choose just one of the books. And, if you haven't done the reading, you may still audit the discussion – all are welcome!

REASONABLE NEW YORK SUMMER SOLSTICE PICNIC Sun, June 23, Noon-4:00 pm Hudson Beach Cafe in Riverside Park at 105 St.

Come celebrate the Solstice with dozens of other reasonable New Yorkers in a lovely park setting overlooking the Hudson, with full-service outdoor bar & grill and lots of recreational amenities. Info: www.reasonablenewyork.org

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

NY Society for Ethical Culture:

Fridays, 7 pm - Ethics in Film: Feature films. Snacks & Bevs, \$5.

June 3, 1 pm - Ethics in Literature, "The Pleasure of Finding Things Out", by Richard Feynman; \$5.

Tuesdays, 6:30 - Socrates Cafe.

CFI-NYC. Mon., June 10, 10 pm.

Google's Lounge (Upstairs at the Living Room), 154 Ludlow St.

"Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke".

New York Philosophy. Wed, June 26, 6-10 pm, Chelsea Manor, 138 West 25 St.: Cocktails & Conversation: "The Mind, Intelligence, and Reason". RSVP: nyphilosophy.com

Drinking With Atheists: Every Friday, fun and conversation. Details: www.meetup.com/RichiesList/

PLUS

Agnostic A.A.: Nine weekly AA-endorsed meetings. Schedules: agnosticAAnyc.org/meetings.html

Manhattan History Buffs: Every 3d Tues, 6:30, dinner/talk at Lili's (Chinese) rest, 83-84th/3rd. June 18: "1904 St. Louis World's Fair". Info: 212-802-7427

Atheism History Week – With SHSNY's John Rafferty, 5:30 p.m. Wednesdays, MNN Ch. 57 and RNN Ch. 84 in Manhattan, and live streaming at www.mnn.org.

THE BENEFITS OF CHURCH ...

T. M. Luhrmann

(Reprinted from *The NYTimes Opinionator blog*, 4/20/2013)

Note: Prof. Luhrmann is a professor of anthropology at Stanford and the author of "When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship With God".

One of the most striking scientific discoveries about religion in recent years is that going to church weekly is good for you. Religious attendance — at least, religiosity — boosts the immune system and decreases blood pressure. It may add as much as two to three years to your life. The reason for this is not entirely clear.

Social support is no doubt part of the story. At the evangelical churches I've studied as an anthropologist, people really did seem to look out for one another. They showed up with dinner when friends were sick and sat to talk with them when they were unhappy. The help was sometimes surprisingly concrete. Perhaps a third of the church members belonged to small groups that met weekly to talk about the Bible and their lives. One evening, a young woman in a group I joined began to cry. Her dentist had told her that she needed a \$1,500 procedure, and she didn't have the money. To my amazement, our small group — most of them students — simply covered the cost, by anonymous donation. A study conducted in North Carolina found that frequent churchgoers had larger social networks, with more contact with, more affection for, and more kinds of social support from those people than their unchurched counterparts. And we know that social support is directly tied to better health.

Healthy behavior is no doubt another part. Certainly many churchgoers struggle with behaviors they would like to change, but on average, regular church attendees drink less, smoke less, use fewer recreational drugs and are less sexually promiscuous than others.

That tallies with my own observations. At a church I studied in Southern California, the standard conversion story seemed to tell of finding God and never taking methamphetamine again. (One woman told me that while cooking her dose, she set off an explosion in her father's apartment and blew out his sliding glass doors. She said to me, "I knew that God was trying to tell me I was going the wrong way.") In my next church, I remember sitting in a house group listening to a woman talk about an addiction she could not break. I assumed that she was talking about her own struggle with methamphetamine. It turned out that she thought she read too many novels.

Yet I think there may be another factor. Any faith demands that you experience the world as more than just what is material and observable. This does not mean that God is imaginary, but that because God is immaterial, those of faith must use their imaginations to represent God. To know God in an evangelical church, you must experience what can only be imagined as real, and you must also experience it as good.*

I want to suggest that this is a skill and that it can be learned. We can call it absorption: the capacity to be caught

up in your imagination, in a way you enjoy. What I saw in church as an anthropological observer was that people were encouraged to listen to God in their minds, but only to pay attention to mental experiences that were in accord with what they took to be God's character, which they took to be good. I saw that people were able to learn to experience God in this way, and that those who were able to experience a loving God vividly were healthier — at least, as judged by a standardized psychiatric scale. Increasingly, other studies bear out this observation that the capacity to imagine a loving God vividly leads to better health.

For example, in one study, when God was experienced as remote or not loving, the more someone prayed, the more psychiatric distress she seemed to have; when God was experienced as close and intimate, the more someone prayed, the less ill he was. In another study, at a private Christian college in Southern California, the positive quality of an attachment to God significantly decreased stress and did so more effectively than the quality of the person's relationships with other people.

Eventually, this may teach us how to harness the "placebo" effect — a terrible word, because it suggests an absence of intervention rather than the presence of a healing mechanism that depends neither on pharmaceuticals nor on surgery. We do not understand the placebo effect, but we know it is real. That is, we have increasingly better evidence that what anthropologists would call "symbolic healing" has real physical effects on the body. At the heart of some of these mysterious effects may be the capacity to trust that what can only be imagined may be real, and be good.

But not everyone benefits from symbolic healing. Earlier this month, the youngest son of the famed pastor Rick Warren took his own life. We know few details, but the loss reminds us that to feel despair when you want to feel God's love can worsen the sense of alienation. We urgently need more research on the relationship between mental illness and religion, not only so that we understand that relationship more intimately — the ways in which they are linked and different — but to lower the shame for those who are religious and nonetheless need to reach out for other care.

**Comment: Beneficial and "good", okay, but it's all still imaginary, and a "skill" no freethinker wants to develop. — JR*

... AND THE FAILURE OF PRAYER

Ex Preacher

(Excerpted from *Ex Preacher's Obsessed With Prayer: The Crazy Things Christians Believe*, Book 2, *forwarded by Gretchen Robinson*)

The crazy thing is not that Christians pray, but that they *keep praying* in spite of the failing results. At some point surely they will wake up and say, *Well, I gave that my best shot*, and then start asking questions about their errant beliefs, listening to reason. Sadly, however, the majority never will.

It is easier for them to stay ignorant, believing that the god they love and serve has some higher purpose for their

lives, a plan that will one day be revealed to them, showing a reason for the apparent failed prayers. It won't. Such a plan or purpose does not exist. Simply *believing* that such a plan does exist is nothing short of wishful thinking. Yet week after week, month after month, Christians continue to believe that god has a master plan for their lives; where they should live, what career they should choose, who they should marry, and which church to go to.

It is through times of prayer that all these things are discovered. Christians often use the phrase *God led me to do this* or *I felt the direction of the Holy Spirit to do such and such*. These phrases are "Christianese" for *I hear voices in my head*.

AN ALL-PURPOSE PRAYER Chic Schissel

I recently attended a bat mitzvah and, for the first time in a long time, sat through an extended religious service. The prayer book contained both the Hebrew prayers and their translations. To escape boredom I read carefully through the translations of every prayer and, in a moment of divine revelation, unearthed a method to capture the essence of the entire ritual at a considerable saving of time and effort.

As a public service I am happy to offer my discovery to the ecclesiastic community. Essentially it consists of substituting for the entire prayer book just one fundamental prayer that exactly encapsulates the meaning of every prayer in the book. I offer my prayer below:

Dear God: You are marvelous, magnified, sanctified, all-powerful, all-knowing, most beautiful, loving (except when you are vengeful), utterly fantastic in every respect. Hey, do me a favor, will You?

Whatever a person may pray for, that person prays for a miracle. Every prayer comes down to this: Almighty God, grant that two times two not equal four. – *Ivan Turgenev*

IS THAT VOICE IN YOUR HEAD GOD? T.M. Luhrmann

(Excerpted from "Is That God Talking?" in the *NYTimes Opinionator* blog, 5/1/2013)

I still remember how startled I was when a young woman I was interviewing told me God had spoken to her, audibly. I was doing ethnographic field work in a quietly charismatic evangelical church in Chicago. This was the kind of church in which people sought an intimate, conversational relationship with God. It was not at all uncommon for people to talk about hearing God.

This woman, however, said that she had been to a job interview and that later, while tidying up at home, she had heard God say, "That's not the one" – and that she had looked around to see where the voice had come from. She told me that she heard from God like that many times. The first time as an adult was when she was driving alone in an unfamiliar part of the city – and God spoke up audibly out of the back seat and told her he would always be with her.

After that, I started to ask people in the church more systematically about whether they had ever heard God speak audibly. About a third said yes. They reported odd auditory events in which God said "Sit and listen" or "Read James" or "I will always love you".

This woman's account is a good example: "The Lord spoke to me clearly in April, like May or April. To start a school." You heard this audibly, I asked? "Yeah." Were you alone? "Yeah, I was just praying. I wasn't praying anything, really, just thinking about God, and I heard a voice say, 'Start a school', I immediately got up and it was like, 'O.K., Lord, where?'"

What do we make of this? I don't think that anthropologists can pronounce on whether God exists or not, but I am averse to the idea that God is the full explanation here. For one thing, many of these voices are mundane. A woman told me that she heard God tell her to get off the bus when she was immersed in a book and about to miss her stop. Moreover, odd auditory experiences are quite common. A questionnaire posed to 375 college students found that 71 percent reported vocal hallucinations of some kind, according to a study published in 1984 (a finding consistent with my own research). A 2000 study found that 38.7 percent of the population reported visual, auditory or other hallucinations, including out-of-body experiences.

Schizophrenia, or the radical break with reality we identify as serious mental illness, is also not an explanation. The people who reported these events simply weren't ill in that way, and schizophrenia is not common (the prevalence among American adults is 1.1 percent in any year).

Moreover, the patterns of their voice-hearing are quite unlike the patterns we associate with schizophrenia. The voices heard by people with schizophrenia are often harsh and commanding. They go on and on – sentences, paragraphs, sometimes crowds of people screaming and yelling insults at the poor voice-hearing person throughout the day. The unusual auditory experiences reported by congregants just weren't like that. They were rare. Most people said they'd had one or two in their lifetime. They were brief – just a few words. They were pleasant. And they did not have that sense of command. The woman who said God instructed her to start a school – well, she hasn't done it.

I eventually discovered that these experiences were associated with intense prayer practice. They felt spontaneous, but people who liked to get absorbed in their imaginations were more likely to experience them. Those were the people who were more likely to love to pray, and the "prayer warriors" who prayed for long periods were likely to report even more of them.

The prayer warriors said that as they became immersed in prayer, their senses became more acute. Smells seemed richer, colors more vibrant. Their inner sensory worlds grew more vivid and more detailed, and their thoughts and images sometimes seemed as if they were external to the mind. Later, I was able to demonstrate experimentally that prayer practice did lead to more vivid inner images and

more hallucination-like events.

There's plenty here to alarm secular liberals. A subject in the prayer experiment recalled that she was watching TV when "God told me, 'Vote for Bush'. I said — I was having this argument with God. I said out loud, I said, 'But I don't like him.' You know. And God said, 'I didn't ask you to like him.'" She thought she had heard this exchange with her ears. She voted, in 1988, for George Bush.

The more interesting lesson is what it tells us about the mind and prayer. If hearing a voice is associated with focused attention to the inner senses — hearing with the mind's ear, seeing with the mind's eye — it suggests that prayer (which today, the National Day of Prayer, celebrates) is a pretty powerful instrument. We often imagine prayer as a practice that affects the content of what we think about — our moral aspirations, or our contrition. It's probably more accurate to understand prayer as a skill that changes how we use our minds.

READERS RESPOND TO PIQUE

To the Editor: Another great issue (May)! Some thoughts:

1. Loved the article about the 37 percent ("Who's More Naïve, The Ignorant Them, or the Liberal and Educated Us?"). The article is a riot. I think I'll use it in our next issue.
2. Interesting article about the soul ("What Science Says About the Soul"), but a little long.
3. The Mormons ("On Humanistic Mormons") didn't "adopt" polygamy — it was "revealed" to them.
4. As to your "Who's Your Favorite President?" question, I'd add, about Truman, that he vowed with a friend when as youngsters to read every book in the Independence library, and almost succeeded. I'd guess that Truman and Jefferson, maybe Madison, were the major readers among the presidents.
5. I agree with reader Harvey Offenhartz that "supreme" should be replaced in your mission statement ("Who Do You Think We Are?") by his second option.

— Ray Stone, Santa Barbara Secular Humanists

The Editor responds: Agree with both you and Harvey. Therefore, our SHSNY Mission Statement now reads:

"The Secular Humanist Society of New York is the leading freethought organization in the NYC area, promoting the principles of reason and science, and an ethical lifestance centered upon the individual freedom and well-being of all humankind." — JR

To the Editor: Another great issue. PIQUE took us "around the world" and then some. From the atrocious practice of a thoughtless *mohel* (as life begins) to the interesting article, "What Science Says About the Soul" (at death), and plenty in between, PIQUE was its usual varied and interesting issue. Mark Morford's brilliant article on the unbelievable ignorance of the American people was so "Jon Stewart" that I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. So, I did both.

Many thanks for outstanding editorial. I can never take excellence for granted, so forgive me for the frequency of my praise. It shall happen again. — Stan Friedland

To the Editor: I'm a registered Green, but out of a sense of fairness, I have to object to the categorization of conservatives in Mark Morford's essay in May PIQUE. I'd call his essay "partyism", meaning it's like racism, but instead of declaring that stereotypes apply to all people of a certain race, he declares they apply to all members of conservative parties.

When people who are obscenely rich, let's call them the 1 percent, favor policies that spare the rich high taxes, while they oppose using tax revenue for social programs that help the poor, they are not doing so because they are "quite shockingly dumb", nor because they, "forget ... clamp down ... seize up, fossilize". It's blatant self interest. Call them greedy, selfish, heartless, etc., but "dumb" is a stereotype that does not apply. Because they are not dumb, they realize that a party which only appeals to 1 percent of voters will not win, so they are willing to support a "stupid party", if that's what it takes to win votes and keep their taxes low.

Similarly, the "not-very-bright hordes" who believe the Sun revolves around the Earth, etc., are ignorant and uneducated, but not necessarily dumb. Had an education system been able to reach them before the belief that "reason is dangerous because it can make you doubt your faith", became ingrained, they might have been spared having their minds closed, dooming them to a life of ignorance.

Yes, "failing education" is to blame for their plight, and improving early education is the only solution to ignorance, and the only hope for our country. — Flash Light

To the Editor: Every issue of PIQUE is good, but the most recent one (May) was outstanding! Also, my wife and I found the recent Sunday Brunch talk about the religious threat to the nation's hospitals (page 1) very enlightening.

I want to clue PIQUE readers to a great Website I recently discovered. It's nautilus.us and it's an e-zine that emphasizes science and reason. The articles are fairly brief and written untechnically, with outstanding illustrations.

You haven't seen any contributions from me lately because I'm at work putting together a book of my writing that I intend to publish. — Walter Balcerak

The Editor responds: Me, too, Walter. My own collection, *A Fit of Pique: A Dozen (or so) Years in the Culture War Trenches*, is finally assembled, formatted, and proofed (when I started, the subhead read, *A Decade in the ...*) ... and as soon as I have this issue of PIQUE in the mail, I'll choose a self-publishing program/system.

Reader suggestions are solicited. — JR

ON "INCOME INEQUALITY"

Bill Chapman

I feel Paul Buchhelt's article, "What Does 'Income Inequality' Really Mean?" (PIQUE, May) has a lot of statistics that are slanted and sometimes outright wrong. Let me clarify: I am in favor of increasing the taxes on the rich, including myself, but not because wealth is a bad thing, but rather because the government really needs the money and the rich can afford it. The whole article is permeated by a very unhealthy assumption that wealth in itself is evil.

Of Buchelt's several points, Point 2 describes capital gains as "non-job-creating". Hello? It takes capital to employ people, and people aren't going to forgo consumption in order to invest and employ people unless they get a return on their investment. Capital gains create jobs. I wouldn't be opposed to taxing them more, but calling them "non-job-creating" just demonstrates a very poor understanding of economics.

Point 3 says "the poorest 47 percent of Americans have no wealth" (he means net savings). That may be true (I didn't check it) but they pay insignificant income tax, too. Many pay negative income tax through the EIC (Earned Income Credit). Our federal income tax is already very progressive, with the top 1 percent paying nearly 37 percent of the total, the top 10 percent paying over 70 percent, and the bottom 50 percent paying less than 3 percent.

Point 4 says that the U.S., out of 141 countries, is the 4th most unequal. I don't know how they picked those 141 countries, but looking at Wikipedia's "List of Countries by Income Inequality", I counted 39 countries with a higher "Gini Coefficient" (how economists measure inequality) than the U.S. One of them was China. Six months ago, when I was in China, the tour guide told us that when he was a little kid under Mao, there was very little inequality — his mother, a factory worker, was paid \$6.60 a month, and the head of the factory was paid \$8.00 a month. The tour guide also told us how, under Mao, he ate boiled cabbage and corn meal, three meals a day, seven days a week. He constantly craved fruit, but only got any when he was sick in the hospital. Most modern Chinese are hardly nostalgic for those more equal times.

Point 5 says that "Wall Street caused the housing crash", but that's a popular misconception. All of society — politicians, homeowners, and Wall Street — caused the housing bubble (and crash) together. The primary cause was that at least 95 percent of Americans in all walks of life were convinced that it was a fundamental law of physics that real estate prices would always rise, and that it was a great idea for every schmuck, credit worthy or not, to own the house they lived in, by hook or by crook. Any time everybody thinks that way, there will be a bubble.

I remember that before 2007 I believed very strongly that there was a risk real estate could tank, and it was impossible to reason with most other people about why I felt it was a bad idea to own the dwelling they lived in. Everybody told me I was crazy. All of American society, not just Wall Street, went financially insane.

Point 5 describes a "currently untaxed subsidy on stock purchases". Subsidy? There is no sales tax on stock purchases, but no subsidy either. I buy and sell equities all the time, and the government doesn't give me any money when I do it. Point 5 also speculates about a "Financial Speculation Tax". I had to Google around to find out what the heck this is, and it sounds like a very small sales tax on financial transactions. This would punish people who held stocks for short times, but be negligible (and raise little revenue) from people like Warren Buffet who buy and hold

for a long time. It's not a good idea — increasing income and/or capital gains taxes would be a better one.

The summation shows what planet the author is coming from: "Perhaps above all, we progressives have to choose one strategy and pursue it in a cohesive, unrelenting attack on greed."

Ah, "greed". Leftists talking about "greed" sound a lot like celibate nuns talking about "lust". Of the seven deadly sins, I wish these people would quit obsessing about "greed" and think, for the first time in their lives, about "sloth" and "envy" for a few minutes.

Greed and lust are perfectly healthy drives, if pursued ethically. If it weren't for greed, I'd never have bothered acquiring marketable skills, and I'd spend all my time stoned on the couch watching TV and playing video games, rather than working 40 hours a week, paying taxes, and buying treasuries that keep the government afloat until we can find our way out of the deficit debacle.

FUNDAMENTALIST LOGIC 101

(Forwarded from Political Loudmouth by Deeya Roberts)

Teenagers are old enough and mature enough to learn about guns and practicing gun safety. Learning to be safe promotes responsibility.

Teenagers are far too young and immature to be learning about sex education and practicing safe sex. Learning to be safe promotes irresponsibility.

BUM RAP FOR TOILET PAPER MAKER: FLUSH THE BIBLE QUOTES

(Reprinted from The Humanist Monthly, newsletter of the Capital District (Albany) Humanist Society, April, 2013)

A Finnish toilet-paper maker has been using Facebook to crowdsource for inspirational quotes to print on rolls sold in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Christina von Trampe, spokeswoman for Metsä Tissue, which produces the Lambi brand, told Reuters, "People like to read small, happy messages while sitting on the toilet."

But the plan hit the fan when it accidentally printed lines from the Gospel of Matthew and First Corinthians on a batch of TP. Norwegian church leaders were not amused.

"This is bad taste and shows lack of respect", Laila Riksaasen DASHL, the Bishop of Tunsberg told *Vaart Land* (yes, really), a publication that focuses on religion issues. "Bible verses do not belong on a roll of toilet paper." One of the texts quoted Jesus: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

The company backed off, and said it would vet its WC messages more carefully in the future.

**THM Editor Richard McMahan: Other quotes that might have been used: "See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24); or "Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit" (Corinthians 5:4-6).*

SHSNY Editor: Your paper-ready Bible quotes are solicited. Send them to editor@shsnny.org

**LIFETIME-DUMBTH-WINNER PAT ROBERTSON
REVERTS TO TYPE: DUMB**

David Edwards

(Excerpted from rawstory.com, 4/1/2013, and forwarded by Anton Spivak)

(Editor's Note: After actually saying something intelligent – the Earth is billions of years old (PIQUE, March) – our Lifetime Achievement in Dumbth winner has reverted to type.)

Teleevangelist Pat Robertson explained to his viewers that “sophisticated” Americans experienced fewer miracles because they had learned “things that says God isn’t real”, like evolution. On an episode of CBN’s The 700 Club, Robertson responded to a viewer who wanted to know why “amazing miracles (people raised from the dead, blind eyes opened, lame people walking) happen with great frequency in places like Africa, and not here in the USA?”

“People overseas didn’t go to Ivy League schools”, the TV preacher laughed. “We’re so sophisticated, we think we’ve got everything figured out. We know about evolution, we know about Darwin, we know about all these things that says God isn’t real.

“We have been inundated with skepticism and secularism”, he continued. “And overseas, they’re simple, humble. You tell ‘em God loves ‘em and they say, ‘Okay, he loves me.’ You say God will do miracles and they say, ‘Okay, we believe him.’

“And that’s what God’s looking for. That’s why they have miracles.”

RICHARD FEYNMAN ON UNCERTAINTY ...

Once you start doubting, which I think is a very fundamental part of my “soul” – to doubt, to ask – once you start to doubt and ask, it gets a little harder to believe.

You see, I can live with doubt, and uncertainty, and not knowing. I think it’s much more interesting to live not knowing, than to have answers that might be wrong.

I have approximate answers and approximate beliefs and different degrees of certainty about different things. But I’m not absolutely sure of anything, and there are many things I don’t know anything about, such as whether it means anything to ask why we’re here, and what that question might mean. I might think about it a little bit, and if I can’t figure it out then I go to something else. But I don’t *have* to know an answer.

I don’t feel frightened by not knowing things, by “being lost in a mysterious universe without having any purpose” – which is how it really is, as far as I can tell. It doesn’t frighten me.

... AND CERTAINTY

If it disagrees with experiment it’s wrong. In that simple statement is the key to science. It doesn’t make a difference how beautiful your guess is. It doesn’t matter how smart you are, or who made the guess, or what his name is. If it disagrees with experiment it’s wrong.

**RNY Summer Solstice
Picnic, Sunday, June 23
Page 7**

**Church Good, Prayer Bad?
Page 8**

**The Blessings of Atheism
Page 2**

**Our Day of Reason
was a celebration
and an education!
Page 1**

Secular Humanist
Society of New York
FDR Station
PO Box 7661
New York, NY
10150-7661

