

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

March, 2004

Perhaps it's fitting, as PIQUE goes to press during the week Mel Gibson's much-hyped "snuff flick" *The Passion of the Christ* opens, that this issue should focus on the historicity (or not) of Jesus: Yes, No, and Maybe are all propounded herein. We include silliness from *Hasids* in Williamsburg and Republicans in Washington, reports of the first-ever SHSNY Book Club meeting, of a delightful "musical Charles Darwin" evening enjoyed by all, and of our 2004 membership meeting, not at all enjoyed by at least one. But first, advance notice of another fascinating evening upcoming.

Save the Date:

**Secular Humanist Society of New York**

presents

**Ezra Kulko**

Explainer, American Museum of Natural History

## **How Life Started on Earth**

Was life on Earth seeded from space, and what effect did the moon have on life's beginnings here? Did that life begin on Earth's surface or in the hydrothermal vents of the ocean deep? And how did we hairless apes become Earth's dominant life form? Was our success built into the physical laws of the universe, an anthropic principle?

**Thursday, March 18, 7:00 p.m.**

**SLC Conference Center**

**352 Seventh Av. (29-30th Sts.) - 16th floor**

**Free admission**

Directions: Any 6th, 7th, 8th Ave., or Broadway train to 34th or 28th St. A parking garage is at 6th Ave. and 29th-30th Sts.

### **THE 2004 MEMBERSHIP MEETING: A REPORT**

At about 6:45 p.m. on February 12, at the midtown SLC Conference Center, the 2004 general membership meeting of the Secular Humanist Society of New York was called to order by meeting chairman Conrad Claborne.

#### **Finances**

In the first order of business, John Arents gave a Treasurer's report. In summary, receipts for the calendar year ending December 31, 2003, were \$4,860.00, and expenses totaled \$5,657.29, resulting in a net loss for the year of \$797.29. However, a carryover of funds left us with a year-end balance of \$5,550.02, compared to a balance of \$6,347.31 on 12/31/02. John explained the difference as caused primarily by the changeover in the production of PIQUE, now edited and printed in Manhattan rather than Westchester, resulting in an additional \$1,000 in printing costs, and a decrease in income of about another \$1,000. A detailed report is available on the website: [www.nyhumanist.org](http://www.nyhumanist.org)

### **Board Reorganization**

John Rafferty gave a report on a reorganization of the SHSNY Board of Directors approved at the last Board meeting. President Hugh Rance, whose increased teaching schedule makes his attendance at meetings more difficult, has, with regrets, stepped down. John Arents and George Rowell, both for health reasons, have relinquished their positions as Secretary/Treasurer and Membership Coordinator, respectively. All three are sincerely thanked by the entire membership for their service, and remain on the Board, along with Conrad Claborne, Arthur Harris, and John Rafferty. All six members named new officers to serve for the balance of the 2002-2005 term of the Board:

President: Conrad Claborne

Treasurer: Hugh Rance

Secretary: John Rafferty.

[picture of Conrad Claborne]

Conrad Claborne and John Rafferty (with help from John Arents) will continue to function as an ad-hoc Events & Meetings Committee (Conrad started the SHSNY Book Club this month in his own apartment — see page 7) until volunteer help is found (*Help!*). John will continue as Editor of PIQUE, and will assume the Membership Coordinator duties until someone with better direct-mail experience is found (*Help!*).

### **Membership**

Questions were raised from the floor about efforts to generate new membership (current paid membership is about 170). John Arents described the outrageous advertising costs and the difficulty of being noticed in New York media. We are currently running one-column ads in *Mphasis*, the newsletter of New York Mensa, generating some response, but no memberships yet. John Rafferty exhorted the members that the best and most cost-efficient recruitment program is “each one reach one” (see page 5). An excellent suggestion was made that online avenues, such as meetup.com, be more thoroughly explored. They will be.

### **New Business**

John Rafferty (him again) reported on the success of the New Orleans Secular Humanists in getting their city council to proclaim a Day of Reason, and suggested that a SHSNY committee be formed to accomplish the same thing in New York.

Meeting chairman (and new President) Conrad Claborne closed the membership meeting, and turned the podium over to the evening’s two speakers, about whose talks a report by John Arents follows.

*Respectfully submitted,  
John Rafferty, Secretary*

## **THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS**

### **Reported by John Arents**

On February 12, SHSNY had the pleasant and enlightening experience of hearing two speakers discuss the perennial question of whether the Jesus of legend was a real person, and if he was, how much of the legend describes reality. This report is an attempt to convey the essence of their talks. It was not a debate; they had very little disagreement, and did not challenge or question each other.

**JOSHUA OF NAZARETH,  
AS SEEN THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF IMAGINATIVE TIME TRAVEL**

**Rob Takaroff**

George Orwell described the distortion of history as a process whereby “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.” And Orwell’s work, it has been said, “bore out his conviction that modern man is inadequate to cope with the demands of his history.”

I contend that this inadequacy has resulted, at least in part, from the distortions of history that have been passed down to us.

The Jesus Seminar has been working for decades to extract from the legends what Jesus actually said and did. Scholars believe that if he lived he died about 30 C.E. (Common Era). By 50, collections of “his” sayings (Gospel Q) were in circulation; archeologists have found fifty-four of them in Corinth. In 54 Saul/Paul wrote his letters to the Corinthians. The gospel of Mark dates from about 70 C.E., Matthew, Luke, and John from about 90. The pagan philosopher Celsus, who refers to Jesus as an historical figure, wrote about 170, and the Talmud, with references to Jesus, was written about 200 C.E.

The gospels portray Jesus as a flawed human being who some people said was mad and an agent of the devil, someone who lost his temper, threatened his opponents with eternal torment, and cursed an innocent fig tree when he was hungry - not the behavior expected of an ideal Son of God.

One tradition about Jesus was that his father was a Roman soldier named Panthera, “leopard.” It is possible that this name was confused with the Greek parthenos, “virgin.” If Jesus was half Jewish, half Roman, and raised in Egypt, his alienation, non-conformity and unconventional views seem less remarkable.

He seems to have been arrested and executed as a public nuisance, with the overturning of the moneychangers’ tables as an egregious example. It seems probable that he was hanged; the “cross” may have been a stake where his body was displayed. Both Acts and Paul’s epistles suggest hanging.

Jesus received almost no attention from contemporary historians, indicating that he did not have a large following in his lifetime. Slightly later historians described what the Christians believed, not necessarily what the historians perceived as truth. The main evidence for the Resurrection seems to have been an empty tomb. Various witnesses reported encounters with the risen Christ, but those reports are hard to distinguish from dreams and illusions stimulated by a passionate desire to see him again. Convincing visions of departed loved ones are not unknown to many of us.

It is one of history’s great ironies that while Jesus’ message targeted his fellow Jews, Saul/Paul, guilty about his persecution of Christians, made the new religion appealing to Gentiles, for whom it was not intended. Paul’s Christianity has distorted history, making it difficult for today’s humans to accept both the finality of death and the naturalness of sex.

If we were more accepting of death, we would lead more practical and productive lives. We would heed the late Stephen Jay Gould’s advice to do as well as we are able for as long as we are able. If we were less afraid of and judgmental about sexuality, contraception and family planning would be more widespread; the AIDS crisis, the

population explosion and resulting global warming would be less threatening. We could and would cope with the demands of our history.

## THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND HIS MYTHS

### Roger Sorrentino

Jesus received remarkably little attention from contemporary historians. Josephus and Tacitus referred to Jesus, but the only passage from Josephus that seems to be authentic is a brief neutral description, while Tacitus reports the stories that were circulating. The Gospels were written at least 40 years after the events they describe. How are we to distinguish between myth and history? Some features of a story make it more plausible.

1. Multiple attributions. If several writers tell the same story, it becomes more plausible. However, they may have merely copied from each other.

2. Embarrassment. The author tells what you might expect him to hush up. Many Jesus stories are not what you expect from a perfect divine being. His submitting to baptism by John—a symbolic washing away of sin—is an example from the beginning of his career.

3. Discrepancies between the story and the prevailing tradition.

Jesus clearly had a reputation as a miracle worker and exorcist, common talents at the time. The placebo effect is powerful against psychosomatic illnesses, including blindness and paralysis. We are given no description of his resurrection, but there are various stories of his subsequent appearances.

Why did Christianity spread so fast? There seem to have been a number of reasons: 1) The zealotry of Jesus' relatives James and Mary, and then the convert Paul. 2) Blissful immortality is very persuasive. 3) Miracles by the laying on of hands are appealing. 4) Christians acquired a reputation for austere morals and fortitude in the face of persecution. 5) There was a network of churches led by capable bishops.

Some of the same features account for the continued popularity of Christianity today: 1) The need for a father figure, fulfilled by God, Christ, the pastor, or the Pope, depending on the denomination. 2) A sense of community, with shared values reinforced by rites of passage. 3) People cannot accept the randomness of existence; there has to be a purpose to everything.

Mr. Sorrentino recalled the beginning of his own progress away from Catholicism. *The Zetetic* (predecessor of *Skeptical Inquirer*) investigated paranormal claims and found them wanting. Why could the same skeptical approach not be applied to claims of the supernatural? He found the experience of challenging religious dogmas triumphant and liberating. He concluded with a quotation from George Santayana: "Skepticism is the chastity of the intellect."

## THE ARGUMENT FOR JESUS

### Will Durant

*(Excerpted from Caesar and Christ, 1944)*

What evidence is there for Christ's existence? The earliest non-Christian reference occurs in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (A.D. 93?):

*At that time lived Jesus, a holy man, if man he may be called, for he performed wonderful works, and taught men, and joyfully received the truth. And he was followed by many Jews and many Greeks. He was the Messiah.*

There may be a genuine core in these strange lines; but the high praise given to Christ by a Jew uniformly anxious to please either the Romans or the Jews—both at the same time in conflict with Christianity—renders the passage suspect, and Christian scholars reject it as almost certainly an interpolation. There are references to “Yeshu’a of Nazareth” in the Talmud, but they are too late in date to be certainly more than counterechoes of Christian thought. The oldest known mention of Christ in pagan literature is in a letter of the younger Pliny (*ca.* 110), asking the advice of Trajan on the treatment of Christians. Five years later Tacitus described Nero’s persecution of the *Chrestiani* in Rome, and pictured them as already (A.D. 64) numbering adherents throughout the Empire ... Suetonius (*ca.* 125) mentions the same persecution, and reports Claudius’ banishment (*ca.* 52) of “Jews who, stirred up by Christ [*impulsore Chresto*], were causing public disturbances.” The passage accords well with the Acts of the Apostles, which mentions a decree of Claudius that “the Jews should leave Rome.” These references prove the existence of Christians rather than of Christ; but unless we assume the latter we are driven to the improbable hypothesis that Jesus was invented in one generation; moreover, we must suppose that the Christian community in Rome had been established some years before 52, to merit the attention of an imperial decree. About the middle of this first century a pagan named Thallos, in a fragment preserved by Julius Africanus, argued that the abnormal darkness alleged to have accompanied the death of Christ was a purely natural phenomenon and coincidence; the argument took the existence of Christ for granted. The denial of that existence seems never to have occurred even to the bitterest gentile or Jewish opponents of nascent Christianity.

The Christian evidence for Christ begins with the letters ascribed to Saint Paul. Some of these are of uncertain authorship; several, antedating A.D. 64, are almost universally accounted as substantially genuine. No one has questioned the existence of Paul, or his repeated meetings with Peter, James, and John; and Paul enviously admits that these men had known Christ in the flesh.

Matters are not so simple as regards the Gospels. [But that ...] a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels.

## **A DISSENTING VIEW**

**Barbara Lifton**

Regretfully, and with deep respect for the SHSNY Board’s efforts to provide interesting programs for members, and to the earnest and devoted speakers of February 12, their presentations were full of erroneous statements, and most importantly, failed to place the myth of the “Christ” in its historical context.

To say that Jesus or Jeshua of “Nazareth” existed is to make two fundamental errors. First, if there was a person who aspired to the political/religious kingship of Israel in the 1st century (C.E.), he was one of what were probably hundreds of such aspirants, many of whom were leaders of the hundreds of Jewish cults and revolutionary movements of the time. Second, there was no “Jesus of Nazareth.” Most fundamentally, there is no verifiable evidence that a town called “Nazareth” existed anywhere in Israel or Judea in the 1st century. (The first instance of such a town found on a map of Palestine is dated in the 3rd century.)

Further, the person described in the four gospels was clearly the son of a wealthy family, probably a direct descendant of the Davidic line and therefore a challenge to the false monarchy of Herod, and, most importantly, trained to be a rabbi. He was a Jew, and although violently opposed to some of the corrupt practices of the priests in league with Herod, preached the traditional philosophy and theology of the Old Testament and the Talmud. Further, his followers were Jews, and he lived in a time of great turmoil in the history of the Jewish people, who psychologically were primed for the appearance of a King/Messiah. The history of the times shows that the Nazarean cult of Jesus outlived the creation of Pauline “Christianity” for dozens, if not hundreds of years, and survived in the Eastern and Coptic Churches, among others. All of these facts, and dozens of others, are as essential, if not more essential to understanding why the Roman-designed Christianity of Paul so viciously suppressed the Judaic early “church,” and why the most important question for us as humanists is not whether or not the “Jesus” of the Gospels “existed,” which is irrelevant, but what we can do to promote the brotherhood of humanity, our connections with each other across religious, national and ethnic differences.

I think the SHSNY membership would best be served if we had meetings to discuss what humanism means to us, what questions we have about our role as humanists in our society, what we can do to educate the public in its benefits, and why religious fanaticism is so dangerous (vide our President, awaiting the “rapture”!).

Are there not humanist scholars whom we can ask to speak at such meetings?

**P.S.:** For those members who wish to inform themselves about the factual, historical research done by professionals in the fields of history, archeology and biblical scholarship, here is a very incomplete bibliography: J. M. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2nd Ed. (Harmondsworth 1975); S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester, 1967), and *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, 2nd Ed. (London, 1974); Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith*, (London 1984); R. H. Eisenman, *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran*, (Leiden, 1983), and *James the Just in the Habakkuk Peshet*, (London, 1986); Dr. Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, (London, 1977), *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London, 1983), and *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, 1977). For an excellent compilation of the (then) current research on the history of the Nazarean and Zadokian (and other cults and revolutionary) movements in the 1st century, and their relationship to the political and spiritual anticipation of the advent of a “King-Messiah” by the oppressed Jews of Roman-dominated Israel, see Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln, *The Messianic Legacy* (Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1986, paper).

### **AN EVEN STRONGER DISSENT: “THE SOPORIFIC SOCIETY”**

**Aaron Alexander**

My first visit to a membership meeting of the New York Secular Humanist Society, on February 12, which will be my last, knocked me out. Here’s an organization repositied with my most cherished convictions, discrediting them. Not by any act of malice but by sheer sleepy slovenliness. I found the same at the quirky atheist crowd next door and at the once-estimable New York Society for Ethical Culture, which is down to bartering its future for rental fees on its auditorium.

What is it with organizations that place such a high verbal premium on Reason? Why are they so impotent? so unReasonable? Why don’t they display at least as much

organizational and promotional smarts as the putatively nonReasonable religions? Are they so convinced of the righteousness of their cause (and they're all, essentially, the same cause), so satisfied talking to each other, so resigned to the futility of moving their butts, that they sit back and wait for their adherents to flock to their hearths and curse their failure to do so—even if their adherents never heard of them?

If questioned (as I tried to question them at that nerve-rattling “membership” meeting) on what they're doing to enlarge their feeble membership rolls, they have ready if incredible answers, if I may paraphrase: Oh yeah, are you kidding? They know all about that problem. Sure they thought of it, they'll tell you with waving hands, but nothing works. What have they tried? They tried ads in *The Village Voice*, for crying out loud, and they handed out leaflets at a Gay and Lesbian Pride parade. Can you believe? Did you know? Their excuse is the shortness of money; it's like looking for a lost object under a lamppost because where it was lost, down the block, has no light. If this stuff appeared in PIQUE (which is the only thing the Society has going for it), I missed it, or I would have screamed then.

Why do they think in paltry terms, like letters to the editor, which anyone can write—rather than Op-Ed pieces in *The New York Times*—or ads on that page? (Yes, Virginia, they are affordable.) Why don't they stand up tall for what we believe in? Why are they obsessed with incessantly knocking organized religion, tearing down that straw man again and again and again—instead of doing the much tougher and more constructive job of articulating what we do stand for? Why don't we speak out, fluently and loudly, on vital issues (that are our issues) on the front pages day after day? Why do we, with our dumbness, forfeit the battle to the opposition? No, you don't have to be big or rich to crash into print, only good.

What gives our leadership (new or old, it's the same clique) the illusion that the Society is automatically, by virtue of its name, as good as the grand cause of humanism? Why don't they work toward raising the Society to that worthy level? Why don't they improve the Society's “product” before trying to sell it? What's the use of coaxing young blood to meetings that will drive them away?

I don't know if there's any hope for this organization. But it sure doesn't reside in the nice, well-intentioned, clubby and snoring bunch running it now. They have no right to bury organized humanism, in New York yet, of all places. I hope there are others who feel the same way. If you're interested or curious, attend the next membership meeting. It's liable to be the best one they've ever had. I'm sorry I'll miss it. There's only so much excitement I can take.

***A Response from “Them”:*** In Mr. Alexander's letter, above, there are 30 instances of the words “they,” “them” and “their” to refer to the membership and leadership of SHSNY. Mr. Alexander is reminded that this is a membership organization, and that he has as much right as any other member—and an equal duty—to democratically change whatever about SHSNY he doesn't like. In other words, Mr. Alexander, get involved: you can't affect the game by booing from the bleachers. Perhaps, for a start, you might donate the “affordable” \$3,507 that a standard ad on *The New York Times* Op-Ed page costs.

We—the whole “clubby, snoring bunch”—invite Mr. Alexander to every SHSNY meeting, call for his opinions on policy, and promise to put to the democratic process any

and all of his suggestions for any group actions, initiatives or events in which he is willing to participate, and for which he is ready to work.

**ASK NOT WHAT THEY SHOULD DO.  
HERE'S WHAT WE CAN DO**

**John Rafferty**

*(Excerpted from "Each One Reach One," PIQUE, Feb '02)*

What can we do to grow membership? I suggest that we rely on the best and cheapest advertising and communications tool of all: direct, personal solicitation.

"Each one teach one" is the mantra of adult-literacy workers in developing nations. Each person taught to read is enjoined to themselves teach at least one more person, who is in turn obligated to teach one ... etcetera, until, in a perfect society, everyone can read a newspaper or a ballot, and write a letter. I propose that we adopt and adapt the same principle: Each one reach one. Every member of SHSNY recruit at least one new member in the coming year.

It isn't that hard to do. Every one of us knows people with roughly the same beliefs and non-beliefs as our own: convert them! When asked what you want for your birthday (or Christmas or Hanukkah or Kwanzaa), answer simply: "I want you to join SHSNY." You're only asking them to invest a piddling thirty bucks, and why let the door-to-door Mormons have all the fun?

When I wrote the above in February, 2002, I promised to bring in a recruit by April, and did. My dear friend Irv Millman joined (and has renewed twice), simply because I asked him. Since then, I have also asked Jane Bertoni, Fred Pomerantz, Colin and Marleny Rafferty, and Juliet Nierenberg, all of whom have joined. As did Ellen Peckham, who then bought gift PIQUE subscriptions for three other freethinkers, one of whom has just renewed from her Vermont address. Flash Light became a subscriber, as did out-of-towners David Rafferty, John Coe (just this week), and Janet Strauss, who also bought her nephew a subscription.

I recount these successes not to sound my own horn—not everyone says Yes, and I'm sure a few people make the sign against the Evil Eye when they see me coming—but to emphasize: It's not hard to do—just ask!

**OMNIPOTENT AND OMNIPRESENT,  
BUT NOT, IT SEEMS, OMNISCIENT**

The prayer card reproduced below—along with the usual foam-at-the-mouth denunciations of “liberals” and the usual pitch for money—was received by our own George Rowell, who promises that whoever put him on the mailing list of the College Republican National Committee had *better* start praying.

<p style="text-align:center"><b>Prayer Card</b> <b>For President George W. Bush</b> Dear Lord - please be with our President George W. Bush, as he is in need of your strength, love and support in the challenging days ahead. We thank you for your sovereign grace. Amen.</p> <p>Signed: _____</p>
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Question: That space for a signature? Um ... wouldn't God *know* who was praying?

The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts. — Bertrand Russell

**A MUSICAL VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY WITH CHARLES DARWIN**

**Richard Milner**

**Reported by John Arents**

We expected to hear a lecture on February 19 by Michael Shermer on “The Science of Good and Evil,” the title of his new book. The meeting had been arranged hastily because Dr. Shermer planned to be in New York that day for a morning CBS television interview. The day before, we learned that the interview and trip had been canceled. Dr. Shermer called his New York friend Richard Milner, of the American Museum of Natural History—anthropologist, songwriter, and performer—to fill in for him. Mr. Milner graciously agreed and the meeting was rearranged even more hastily.

Mr. Milner presented an exciting, entertaining, highly original program about the life and times of Charles Darwin, whose 195th birthday was celebrated last week. He also spoke about the impact of Darwin's evolutionary ideas on Western culture, including conflicts with the authority of traditional religion. The lecture was interspersed with Mr. Milner's original songs (which he sang to instrumental accompaniments from a compact disc), and all his songs are inspired by true historical events. The program was a truncated, informal version of a show he has given all over the world.

Charles Darwin was portrayed as a shy, kind man, a “beautiful soul.” His father was a physician, but Charles was so appalled by watching an operation (before anesthesia) that he abandoned any thought of a medical career. He studied theology instead with the idea that as a country parson, he could also be a naturalist, studying and collecting the local wildlife. This combination of religion and science was common at the time.

Then came an offer he could not refuse: to be the naturalist on HMS *Beagle*, which was going on an expedition to survey the coast of South America and circumnavigate the globe. From the end of 1831 to 1836, he collected many boxes full of specimens and notebooks and diaries full of observations. He was especially entranced by the riot of life

in the Brazilian rain forest, a “chaos of delight.” Tribal people also fascinated him: could our ancestors have been like these “naked savages”? His grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, had already proposed some ideas of evolution and common ancestry, and Charles wanted to pursue the family quest to find “the laws of life,” the counterparts of Newton’s laws of physics. Charles was determined to make sense of all the rocks, plants, and animals he had encountered on the voyage. He came to see all living things as related: branches on a great Tree of Life.

Another brilliant Victorian naturalist was Alfred Russel Wallace, 14 years younger than Darwin, who traveled to the rain forests of Brazil and the Moluccas (now Malaysia, Indonesia) collecting specimens and observing nature. He had the same thoughts about natural selection independently of Darwin, unaware that the older naturalist had been working on a book about the subject for twenty years. He wrote a paper in 1858 and sent it to Darwin for his comments. Poor Darwin was devastated by the possibility that he would be scooped by Wallace. He had been procrastinating for years, held back by his determination to collect more and more data, his shyness, and his fear of religious controversy. However, letters he had sent to other scientists in the 1840s attested to his priority. Kind and gentle man that he was, he arranged for Wallace’s paper and his own to be presented before the Linnaean Society on the same day. *The Origin of Species* finally came out in 1859.

Reading it changed the life of the zoologist Thomas Huxley. A brilliant scientist and friend of Darwin, he became “Darwin’s bulldog,” a role for which Darwin himself was singularly unsuited. Huxley loved to challenge authority, usually churchmen. In his most famous debate, in 1860 with Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, he announced that he would rather be descended from an ape than from a man who uses his brilliance and learning to ridicule those who are doing serious scientific work. The arguments against evolution have not changed much in 144 years. However, active opposition has faded in most of the industrialized world. The one striking and puzzling exception is the most advanced, scientifically productive country of all: the United States.

One of Mr. Milner’s musical numbers, a satire on the Wallace episode, was written in the style of the beloved comedian Jimmy Durante, who claims (in a comic fantasy song) that it was really he who beat both Darwin and Wallace to the punch. But instead of sending his paper to the Linnaean Society of London, as Darwin and Wallace did, Durante sent it to “the Linoleum Society.” Milner performed two other songs, in the style of Gilbert and Sullivan, which he had composed at Michael Shermer’s request for a tribute to Stephen Jay Gould (during his lifetime). There were many other toe-tapping tunes, including a blues about the Scopes “Monkey Trial” in 1925 (“The most sacred thing that a man can do/Is tell the world what he believes is really true”) and a poignant imaginary soliloquy about Darwin’s fear of playing second fiddle to Wallace.

The audience was overwhelmingly grateful for Mr. Milner’s enlightening and entertaining presentation. There were numerous questions about the science, the history, and Mr. Milner’s remarkable combination of talents. They were interrupted only by the urge to go downstairs and eat a belated dinner, where the discussion continued.

**If You Missed It, or Want to See It Again**

On Thursday, March 11, at 6:30 p.m.,

**Richard Milner**

will perform his full-length show

**Charles Darwin: A Musical Voyage of Discovery**

as part of the Lifelines Center program at

All Souls Church, 1157 Lexington Ave. at 80th Street.

Milner fans will be treated to the premiere of a brand-new song, “Darwin’s Nightmare,” based on “The Nightmare Song” from Gilbert & Sullivan.

Admission is FREE!!

There is no charge for the 70-minute performance, but for \$15, you can also attend a catered after-show dinner at the church, where Mr. Milner will answer questions and sign his CDs.

**THE ARTISTS ARE COMING!**

**THE ARTISTS ARE COMING!**

*(Excerpted from “G-d Damn Hipsters” in Harper’s, March, 2004, which was itself excerpted “from a prayer distributed in January by Hasidic Jews at a demonstration in Williams-burg, Brooklyn” against artists moving into the low-rent neighborhood. Translated from the Hebrew.)*

FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF OUR CITY OF WILLIAMSBURG  
FROM THE PLAGUE OF THE ARTISTS  
Master of the Universe, have mercy upon us  
and upon the borders of our village and do not  
allow the persecution to come inside our home;  
please remove from upon us the plague of the artists,  
so that we shall not drown in evil waters,  
and so that they shall not come to our residence to ruin it.

**THE BOOK CLUB READS**

**TERROR IN THE NAME OF GOD**

The SHSNY Book Club met (for the first time ever) at Conrad Claborne’s apartment on February 18 to discuss Jessica Stern’s best-selling *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*.

Stern, who spent four years interviewing Muslim, Jewish, and Christian terrorists—actual and would-be, leaders and “cannon fodder”—first analyzes the factors that go into the making of terrorists: *alienation* from the modern world (and subsequent identification with the terrorist group); *humiliation* (national and ethnic, yes, but even personal, like the Christian neo-Nazi who can’t forget that as a sickly child he had to take Gym with the girls); *demographics* (especially the Muslim world’s huge youth population for whom there are no jobs); *history* (Serbs who talk about 14th century atrocities as if they happened Saturday); and *territory* (the “holy land,” the “sacred rock”).

Stern then moves on to a dissection of the various types of terrorist organizations, with the chilling caveat that the most effective are those that exist mainly in the fevered

dreams of their followers and the ether of the Internet, without a fixed physical location or even an identifiable command structure. Attacking them with an army (current U.S. policy), she says, is “like trying to kill a swarm of mosquitoes with a machine gun.”

Stern admits she has no solutions, but warns that even success against terrorism may be only temporary. As we know, our friends the *mujahedin* did not lay down their arms after we helped them drive the Soviets from Afghanistan. Now, as the peace process moves forward in Sri Lanka, 10,000 Tamil Tiger terrorists, “among the best-trained and most disciplined in the world,” will soon be out of work. In Indonesia, “thousands of *Laskar Jihad* fighters decommissioned in October, 2002” are similarly unemployed. Their job prospects are pretty much limited to smuggling, drug-running, “or selling their expertise to the highest bidder.” “Counterterrorists,” Stern says, “should be seriously thinking about outbidding *Al Qaeda* and its sympathizers, before it’s too late.”

**Q.** You say that terrorism never works. Never?

**A.** Never. Look at Ireland, a century of IRA terror, and the British are still there, the Protestants are still there. Look at the Red Brigades in Germany in the 70s, the Bader-Meinhof Gang, who bombed department stores to bring down capitalism. How’s capitalism doing?

**Q.** So why do they keep doing it?

**A.** You tell me.

*(From the script of the post-9/11 episode of NBC’s The West Wing, quoted on E-Skeptic, Nov. 10, 2003.)*

**Next: CARL SAGAN’S THE DEMON-HAUNTED  
WORLD: Science As A Candle In the Dark**

Not new (1996), but a book we hope will interest more members (especially if you’ve already read it—no homework!). The Book Club will meet at 7:30 p.m., Wed, March 24, at John Rafferty’s apartment, 141 East 56th Street (10F), between Lexington and 3rd Aves. Please call (212-371-8733) or email ([john@rafferty.net](mailto:john@rafferty.net)) if you’re coming, so he’ll know how many cookies to bake.

“If we can’t think for ourselves, if we’re unwilling to question authority, then we’re just putty in the hands of those in power. But if the citizens are educated and form their own opinions, then those in power work for us. In every country, we should be teaching our children the scientific method and the reasons for a Bill of Rights. With it comes a certain decency, humility and community spirit. In the demon-haunted world that we inhabit by virtue of being human, this may be all that stands between us and the enveloping darkness.”

— Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*