

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

April, 2015

What makes a terrorist? Religion, ignorance, politics, imperialism, us? Six of us (and the *NYTimes*) wrestle with it all once again herein. We also consider a new award, the not-dead-yet war on science, the anti-humanism of “sharing”, and the breathtaking breadth of dumbth in America ... plus the sellout of secularism right here at home ... and required re-incarnation (really) in China. But if it's Spring, finally, can two secular “out” days – and Day of Reason (page 7) – be far behind? – JR

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO THE “PROGRESSIVE” WE ELECTED MAYOR?

John Rafferty

In the January, 2014, pre-mayoral-inauguration issue of PIQUE (see it on the website, www.shsny.org), three of our members cautioned us about the incoming administration.

Jonathan Engel lamented the slippery phrase “faith based”, so much in current use in politics and the media, that allows politicians to nod approvingly to the most fundamentally religious without committing to (and having to defend) any specific religion's prejudices and idiocies.

Harvey Offenhartz pointed out that both major candidates in the mayoral election, including winner de Blasio, had all but promised a “return of religion to City Hall” in contravention of the U.S. Constitution.

And Dennis Middlebrooks got specific:

“Particularly alarming is de Blasio's plan to use tax dollars to provide ‘security officers’ in secular schools, to allow church services in public schools, and to back off on regulations to introduce basic sanitation to (and warnings to parents about) a barbaric Orthodox Jewish circumcision procedure that places male infants in jeopardy of brain damage and even death.”

Correct, correct, and correct. Oh, and since then add mid-day “prayer breaks” in public prekindergarten classes, and two more religious holidays added to the city's public-school calendar – *Salaam, fast-growing Muslim voting bloc!*

As *The New York Times* pointed out in a front-page article March 19 (“New York City's Unlikely Voice for Religion: A Secular Mayor”) de Blasio was raised secular and has no religious affiliation, clearly implying that his motivations

are purely political.

“Many of [his] religious initiatives began as campaign promises, made during his courtship of evangelicals, Muslims, Orthodox Jews and other religious groups that now make up a substantial portion of the city.”

“This is the area that has been the source of greatest disappointment for us,” said Donna Lieberman, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union.

And Edd Doerr, President of Americans for Religious Liberty, wrote in a *Daily News* Letter to the Editor:

“Expanding pre-K programs is great, but public dollars should flow only to those in public schools, as required by Article XI, Section 3 of the New York constitution. Further, while rest breaks are appropriate for the kids, specifically designated prayer breaks would violate the US First Amendment, as the Supreme Court held over 50 years ago.”

Most Disgraceful

Most disgraceful of all is the “compromise” that our Mayor reached in February with the ultra-Orthodox Jews who sued the city over a 2012 regulation requiring *mohels* (circumcisers) to warn parents of the herpes-transmission dangers (two kids are dead, several are brain-damaged) of *metzitzah b'peh* (oral suction of the cut), and who were openly boasting of their flouting of the regulation.

The compromise? The rabbis got everything they wanted; the city, the children and the parents got nothing, and de Blasio got the blessings of some anti-science, anti-sanitation survivors of the Stone Age whose tens of thousands of followers vote in lock-step unison.

Disgraceful.

P.S.: I voted for Quinn in the primary. – JR



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TERROR AT THE MUSEUM

David Orenstein

(Reprinted from his *Paleolibrarian* blog, 3/18/2015)

It's getting really monotonous writing about and commenting on the religious terrorism occurring around the world. This fundamentalist violence is no longer in the shadows. It is not accidental. It is a deliberate and daily occurrence that exists to destabilize and destroy democracy, end the growth of secularism, and fundamentally remove human and civil rights in favor of religious doctrine and religious law. It remains a threat to peace and global harmony.

Apologists will claim the violent acts are a reprisal by a minority for decades of Western imperialism, or they will attempt to justify the violence as normative because it is part of a culture with differing values. But recognizing and defining organized terrorism that is done by and against others is about respecting modernity. It is purely about calling out evildoers regardless of their faith and political aspirations. It is about putting safeguards in place through diplomacy and military intervention to arrest and remove the perpetrators of violence who appear to have no geographic, philosophic or emotional boundaries.

Since 9/11, terrorist violence has spread across Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Now, because of social media, people who grew up secular but detached from their society have chosen to take up arms and injure those who are their fellow citizens. This recruitment has been too easy and social media has given lone wolves and small cells the impetus to take bold violent action against innocents. Not caring about the age, religious faith, gender or social standing of those maimed or murdered for the sake of religious vendetta.

So now Tunis, with its fledgling secular democracy, can join the nations of the world that have seen senseless violence. ISIS, ISIL, Boko Haram and other religious-based terrorist organizations have declared war against every person on the planet who does not accept the religious teachings and doctrines of one of the most seriously flawed faiths - next to and historically allied with both Judaism and Christianity. Each of these major faiths have their fair share of anti-humanist and anti-secular laws, governance and religious ideals. Each has a history that details their own brand of ethnic violence, violence against women and children, and imperialism of thought.

Today terrorists, violently and without warning, attacked foreign tourists visiting a Tunis museum. More than 20 were killed and many more injured on the steps of the Bardo Museum. Those killed were all civilians, people on vacation or local people engaged with just simply and kindly living their lives freely.

In Boston, Paris, Libya, London, Jakarta, New York, Mosul, Denmark, and in countless war zones and in countless places where terror reigns free, those who wish to go about their lives unencumbered by religious terrorist violence are forced, if not physically, then certainly mentally to take stock of their day. Or need to double-check their

routines, wondering if they'll be next. In this way, organized religious terrorism, the kind that is internationalized by deeds and actions of the organized and violent few, is in essence causing great harm to the peaceful many.

The best and most succinct way to deal with the violence is to meet it head on through as many portals as possible. But this takes willpower and collective understanding of the need to eradicate this terrorist menace. What did Churchill say about confronting the Nazis?

"We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."

This is the political, diplomatic, economic and military will we need now to do the job. Not through appeasement or some form of liberal acceptance. But through the might of better ideas about the human future and the use of every tool at our disposal to eliminate the enemy for the sake of freedom, secularism and democracy.

I thought the next great human rights challenge was going to focus on secular civil rights and the humanist movement's access to the political machine. Perhaps this is true, but before we can ramp up this endeavor, even as secularism and atheism grow around the world, we must perhaps first put a period at the end of the sentence begun on September 11, 2001.

Never again. Never again. Never again. We are all Charlie. We are all Jews. We are all Christians. We are all Muslims. We are all Hindus. We are all Buddhists. We are all atheists and humanists.

We are all of these things and we are none of those things. Because before we are any of them we are all human and we all deserve the right to self-determination and peace.

Any religious faith doctrine or political philosophy that does not guarantee the freedom of the individual to choose their future is a blight on humanity.

THEIR TERRORISM, AND OURS

Jonathan Engel

"The past is never dead. It's not even past" – William Faulkner

On February 5, 2015, President Obama addressed the National Prayer Breakfast. Now one might wonder why, in a country whose Constitution forbids the establishment of religion, we should even have a "National Prayer Breakfast". In fact, Thomas Jefferson, while he was President, refused to issue presidential proclamations of thanksgiving to God, despite numerous requests from evangelical churches to do so. But we'll leave that for another essay.

There was a "National Prayer Breakfast" on February 5, at which the President did in fact give a speech, the substance

of which appears to have ignited a bit of controversy. This in and of itself is not surprising; there are Americans who despise the President to such a degree that they will scream bloody murder at virtually anything he says. If Obama started his address with "Good morning", there are those who would wonder if "Good morning" is a traditional greeting among Muslims, and therefore proof that the President was born in Kenya, or some such nonsense. Actually, what Mr. Obama did at the Prayer Breakfast was compare atrocities committed by Islamic terrorists (most notably ISIS) with atrocities committed by Christians during the Inquisition and the Crusades. His point in doing so was to demonstrate that we shouldn't tar all Muslims today with the actions of vicious terrorists, as Christians have committed some pretty heinous acts themselves (hence the references to the Inquisition and the Crusades) that they would not want all Christians being blamed for.

Outrage ensued, with critics accusing the President of being un-Christian and un-American. No surprises there. One of the arguments that the President's critics have used against him with regard to his comments is that the Crusades and the Inquisition both happened hundreds of years ago, as if this somehow disproves Mr. Obama's point about not blaming all followers of a particular religion for crimes committed by their co-religionists, which it doesn't.

But there's something else to remember here. In the February 10 issue of *The New York Times*, there is a piece by Campbell Robertson entitled "History of Lynchings in the South Documents Nearly 4,000 Names". The article details the efforts of the Equal Justice Institute in Montgomery, Alabama, and its founder, Bryan Stevenson, to memorialize places where African-Americans were lynched in this country during the period 1877-1950.

The article relates some incidents from the great state of Texas: "Farther south (of Dallas) still is the community of Streetman, where 25-year old George Gay was hanged from a tree and shot hundreds of times in 1922. And just beyond that is Kirkin, where three black men, two of them almost certainly innocent, were accused of killing a white woman and, under the gaze of soda-drinking spectators, were castrated, stabbed, beaten, tied to a plow, and set afire in the spring of 1922." In Paris, Texas, "thousands of people came in 1893 to see Henry Smith, a black teenager accused of murder, carried around town on a float, then tortured and burned to death on a scaffold. Until recently, some long-time residents still remembered when the two Arthur brothers were tied to a flag poll and set on fire at the City fair grounds in 1920."

The people who carried out these atrocities, and those who came to watch "for the fun of it"? Good, white, Christian Americans, every one of them. And if white Christian clergy in the south objected to any of this, they sure as hell kept quiet about it. Has anything ISIS done any worse than this? No, it has not. So for those who complain about the President's comparison of ISIS to Christian Crusaders and Inquisitors because the Crusades and the Inquisition happened "so long ago", I give you these examples of 20th

century American history.

This in no way excuses ISIS's barbarity, nor does it change in any way our obligation to speak and act forcefully against these terrorists. But in doing so, we should not sanctimoniously blind ourselves to our own history of hate and cruelty. It is real, and it is not so distant as some of us would like to believe.

AVIJIT ROY: YET ANOTHER VICTIM OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS

Asif Iqbal

Avijit Roy was killed in broad daylight, under the open sky, in a public place full of people, including the patrolling police in the capital of Bangladesh. On February 26, while returning from a book fair, he was stopped and sadistically attacked by a group of five to six machete-wielding killers. They struck him repeatedly on the head, leaving three to six inch cuts that ran deep into his brain. With him was his wife, Rafida Ahmed Bonya. She was also attacked but survived with multiple wounds.

Who was Avijit Roy? He can be introduced in many a way: a Bangladeshi-born US citizen, an Atlanta-based bio-engineer, a writer, a freethinker, an atheist. But to thousands of his fans back in Bangladesh, Avijit is mostly known as a prolific blogger at Mukto-mona.com, a site he founded in 2000. Mukto-mona translates as "free mind".

Through Mukto-mona.com he encouraged hundreds of writers who took up keyboards (not machetes) to express their humanist, atheist, scientific, and political views; through it he created a platform for the propagation of logic over religion. He was a scientist, and he used science to refute the falsehood of Islam, Hinduism and other religions. Here is a paragraph (my translation) from one of his articles:

"I used to know a gentleman. A professor of Dhaka University, and a simple man, he looked just like a good person. But those who suffered at his hands in 1971 knew that there had been no evil stuff that he left undone during that time. At that time, he even came up with a fatwa: if an invading Pakistani soldier rapes a Bengali woman, it won't be considered an offense; the Bengali women are war booty for the Pakistani soldiers because they are fighting for Islam. This gentleman was neither illiterate nor stupid. He was rather famed for honesty and greatness of heart. But this 'good-hearted' man lowered himself to the state of a savage animal, all due to his blind love for religion. He thought that if Pakistan fell apart, Islam would suffer a heavy blow. This is why he did everything that he thought he should do in order to save his religion. He is even alleged to have himself raped Bengali women, just like the Pakistani soldiers. It may seem unbelievable to many, but to have the over-religious commit such acts is nothing unusual. Many a time, they prefer religion over humanity."

Avijit's pen was equally harsh on the ills of Hinduism, the religion he traditionally belonged to. But never did Hindu fundamentalists feel like inflicting deep machete

cuts into his head. It seems there is no promise of instant heaven for such barbaric acts in Hinduism.

In this “politically correct” world, many would say Islamic fundamentalism is not a serious threat in Bangladesh, but I differ. It’s been a serious threat to blogger-writer-scientist Avijit Roy, to Professor Dr. Humayun Azad, and blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider, who did not even use his name in his blogs. They all paid the heaviest price – their lives – for the “crime” of expressing their opinions. Many atheists were harassed, attacked, imprisoned, and many were forced to leave their homeland. There were only five or six killers of Avijit, but those who are openly saying that it is their religious duty to kill “infidels” number in the thousands. And those who secretly wish all infidels to be wiped away in a twinkling of an eye are too many to count. Avijit’s killers are just a tiny tip of a huge and ominous iceberg.

Comment: “Asif Iqbal” is the pen name of an expatriot Bangladeshi SHSNY member writing anonymously to shield his family. – JR

MURDEROUS MUSLIMS

Giddian Beer

In the March issue of PIQUE, Bob Murtha (“The Charlie Hebdo Shootings”) gives good reasons why Muslim anger at the West is justified.

However, though most Muslims are well aware of these and other wrongs, justifiable anger is only an incidental reason for the murders done by murderous Muslims. We know this because, of all the kinds they kill, the kinds they kill most are Muslims.

Murderous Muslims kill people who have insulted Islam or Allah. They kill Muslims who follow different versions of Islam. They kill apostates and Muslims who are not sufficiently observant or puritanical. They kill unbelievers, atheists, devotees of other religions, girls who want an education and people who educate them, all of whom are viewed as threats to Islam. And they kill sisters and daughters who “dishonor” their families.

Islam is divided into two major branches: Shia and Sunni, who differ about who is the legitimate successor of the Prophet. For them, “unbelievers” are those members of the opposing branch; their mutual hatred is implacable and intensely murderous.

The Quran contains many verses that require Muslims to kill unbelievers, infidels and apostates, and to protect and proselytize Islam. Clerics in the most conservative countries, and some elsewhere, invoking devotion to Islam, passionately stress these verses to generate fanatical hatred and murder.

It is important to realize that most Muslims are not murderous. Evidently, they accept the teachings of the Quran but are able to disregard such verses, just as Christians are able to disregard the socialism of Jesus’s teachings about wealth and the wealthy.

Muslims should beware of fanatical devotion applied to murderous teachings, because nothing disgraces or damages Islam more than its murderous fanatics.

CHARLIE HEBDO: IT’S NOT OUR FAULT

Chic Schissel

Robert Murtha (“The Charlie Hebdo Shootings”, PIQUE, March) insinuates, among other things, that the Charlie Hebdo shootings and the murders at the kosher market were understandable. Why? Because, he says, Muslim Anger is justified. Because we of the nasty industrial world “have sought to dominate, control and exploit the Middle East”. It’s all our fault!

Surely the Muslim world is disadvantaged, underprivileged, needy. But is that our fault? Or is it the fault of their leadership, the sheiks and imams who use religion and their dreadful medieval traditions to preserve their own power and wealth and maintain the collective ignorance of their subjects. And whom do the Arab leaders blame? Us, and, of course, those handy historical scapegoats, the Jews. Those Jews who took a small slice of Palestine and turned that desert into a marvel of civilization, technology, and agriculture while the Arabs, under their corrupt leadership, kept their own larger part of Palestine mostly a desert.

Scapegoating has been an effective tool for distracting a frustrated populace from the real reason for their hopelessness, for directing the anger of a miserable populace away from their deceitful and incompetent leadership.

So the imams and sheiks blame us and the Jews for Charlie Hebdo. And, sorry to say, it seems so does Murtha.

YES, IT IS A “FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION” ISSUE

Dennis Middlebrooks

I take exception to some comments made by Robert J. Murtha in his column, “The Charlie Hebdo Shootings” in March PIQUE. He claims “It is hard for me to detect a freedom of expression issue here” with respect to the massacre, because the French government was not censoring *Charlie Hebdo*.

The notion that only the authorities can censor free speech is debatable. Islamic radicals are suppressing or attempting to suppress the free speech rights of critics of Islam all over the world. The feminist and atheist author and poet Taslima Nasrin, a personal friend, was driven out of her native Bangladesh not by the nominally secular government, but by two million bearded theocrats demanding her death in the streets of that nation’s capital. It was on the streets of that city that an atheist blogger, Avijit Roy, was hacked to death a month ago by a devout Muslim for daring to express his anti-religion views. I consider these to have been free speech issues even though the government of Bangladesh was not suppressing either Taslima or Avijit Roy.

Murtha goes on to assert that *Charlie Hebdo* had regularly crossed the line between freedom of expression and incitement to racial or religious hatred for years. In my opinion, *Charlie Hebdo* did nothing of the kind. It merely published cartoons satirizing and lampooning Islam as well as Christianity and various government and celebrity figures. Ridicule does not correspond to a call for violence or hatred against anyone. If that is the case, *National Lampoon*,

The Onion and *Mad Magazine* should have been shut down years ago. I consider Murtha's attempt to draw an analogy between the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons and the rabid anti-Semitism of Nazi war criminal Julius Streicher to be very inappropriate.

We need to stand shoulder to shoulder with the staff of *Charlie Hebdo*, and we must reject out of hand the claim of the religious fanatics of the world, including the pope and the wretched William Donohue of the Catholic League, that criticism or ridicule of religion should be condemned, if not prohibited, and can be considered justification for retaliation against the "offending parties". These are people who are "deeply and profoundly offended" by any and all type of opposition to their "sacred beliefs". Will atheists, humanists and skeptics have the courage to continue to offend them going forward? I certainly hope so.

THE NATIONALIST SOLUTION

David Brooks

(Excerpted from The New York Times, 2/20/2015)

The struggle against Islamic extremism has been crippled by a failure of historical awareness and cultural understanding. From the very beginning, we have treated the problem of terrorism through the prism of our own assumptions and our own values. We have solipsistically assumed that people turn to extremism because they can't get what we want, and fail to realize that they don't want what we want, but want something they think is higher. ...

Religious extremism exists on three levels. It grows out of economic and political dysfunction. It is fueled by perverted spiritual ardor. It is organized by theological conviction. American presidents focus almost exclusively on the economic and political level because that's what polite people in Western capitals are comfortable talking about.

At the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, President Obama gave the conventional materialistic explanation for what turns people into terrorists. Terrorism spreads, he argued, where people lack economic opportunity and good schools. The way to fight terror, he concluded, is with better job-training programs, more shared wealth, more open political regimes, and a general message of tolerance and pluralism. In short, the president took his secular domestic agenda and projected it as a way to prevent young men from joining ISIS and chopping off heads.

But people don't join ISIS, or the Islamic State, because they want better jobs with more benefits. ISIS is one of a long line of anti-Enlightenment movements, led by people who have contempt for the sort of materialistic, bourgeois goals that dominate our politics. These people don't care if their earthly standard of living improves by a few percent a year. They're disgusted by the pleasures we value, the pluralism we prize and the emphasis on happiness in this world, which we take as public life's ultimate end.

They're not doing it because they are sexually repressed. They are doing it because they think it will ennoble their souls and purify creation. ...

People who live according to the pure code of honor are not governed by the profit motive; they are governed by the thymotic urge, the quest for recognition. They seek the sort of glory that can be won only by showing strength in confrontation with death.

This heroic urge is combined, by Islamist extremists, with a vision of End Times, a culmination to history brought about by a climactic battle and the purification of the earth.

Extremism is a spiritual phenomenon, a desire for loftiness of spirit gone perverse. You can't counter a heroic impulse with a mundane and bourgeois response. You can counter it only with a more compelling heroic vision. There will always be alienated young men fueled by spiritual ardor. Terrorism will be defeated only when they find a different fulfillment, even more bold and self-transcending.

In other times, nationalism has offered that compelling vision. We sometimes think of nationalism as a destructive force, and it can be. But nationalism tied to universal democracy has always been uplifting and ennobling. It has organized heroic lives in America, France, Britain and beyond. Walt Whitman was inspired by the thought that his country was involved in a great project, "making a new history, a history of democracy, making old history a dwarf ... inaugurating largeness, culminating time." Lincoln committed himself to the sacred truth that his country represented the "last best hope" of mankind. Millions have been inspired by an American creed that, the late great historian Sacvan Bercovitch wrote, "has succeeded in uniting nationality and universality, civic and spiritual selfhood, sacred and secular history, the country's past and paradise to be, in a single transcendent ideal."

Young Arab men are not going to walk away from extremism because they can suddenly afford a Slurpee. They will walk away when they can devote themselves to a revived Egyptian nationalism, Lebanese nationalism, Syrian nationalism, some call to serve a cause that connects nationalism to dignity and democracy and transcends a lifetime.

Extremism isn't mostly about Islam. It is about a yearning for righteousness rendered malevolent by apocalyptic theology. Muslim clerics can fix the theology. The rest of us can help redirect the spiritual ardor toward humane and productive ends.

JESUS AND MO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GOD

(Transcribed from jesusandmo.net/2015/03/04/wants/)

(They're onstage at an open mic audition, Mohammed on guitar)

Jesus: I'm Jesus.

Mohammed: And I'm Mo.

Both: And together we're ... *Jesus and Mo!*

Offstage Voice: What are you going to do for us tonight, Jesus and Mo?

Jesus: Tonight we're going to explain that God is beyond human comprehension.

Mo: Then we're going to tell you exactly what he wants you to do.

SHSNY CALENDAR: APRIL - JUNE 2015

MARCH BOOK CLUB WAS CANCELLED - BLIZZARD - CALENDAR IS REVISED

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, APR 2, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK**

**40 East 35 St. (Park-Madison)
(Church basement - elevator)**

We'll discuss

DOUBT: A HISTORY

**The Great Doubters and
Their Legacy of Innovation
Part 3**

Jennifer Michael Hecht

We'll conclude our study - from Chapter 8 through the Conclusion - of the efforts of the world's great intellectuals to reconcile the seeming meaninglessness of the universe with the human need for meaning. We'll discuss poet and historian Hecht's thesis that "doubt" is one of the great, if unheralded, intellectual traditions that distinguish the Western mind.

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

**THURS, MAY 7, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York**

**IMAGINE THERE'S
NO HEAVEN:**

**How Atheism Helped Create
the Modern World
Mitchell Stephens**

Traveling from classical Greece to twenty-first century America we explore the role of disbelief in shaping Western civilization. Stephens makes a strong and original case for its importance not only to today's New Atheist movement but to the way many of us - believers and nonbelievers - now think and live. - *Hardcover, Kindle, and half-price download from Amazon.com*

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, JUN 4, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
ROGER WILLIAMS AND THE
CREATION OF THE AMERICAN SOUL: Church, State
and the Birth of Liberty
John M. Barry**

For 400 years, Americans have wrestled with two concepts that define the nature of the nation: the proper relation between church and state and between a free individual and the state.

Here's a revelatory look, by a distinguished historian, at how Roger Williams shaped the nature of religion, political power, and individual rights in America. - *All formats, incl Amazon Bargain Book.*

**FRI & SAT, APR 10 & 11
Columbia University**

**The Institute for Science
and Human Values
presents**

DYING WITHOUT DEITY

A"Perspectives on Death and Dying Symposium" on such topics as end-of-life choices and "the right to die" movement. Featured speakers: Robert Tapp (Chair), D.J. Grothe, Toni Van Pelt, Jennifer Michael Hecht, Anne Klaeyen, and Massimo Pigliucci.

Full registration \$235, but \$192.50 for SHSNY members. Full info at http://instituteforscience-andhumanvalues.com/articles/symposiums-conferences/symposium-columbia_B.htm

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New/Old Venue!

**BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, APR 19, 11:30 am
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)**

Can you do brunch for us, too? we asked. "Absolutely!" said Stone Creek manager Jon Pirozzi. Jon offers a new and expanded, beyond-pub-grub menu that looks tasty and reasonable. And best of all - that back-room privacy for our sparkling conversation. (11:30 start this month because the room is booked for 2:00.)

Come join 15-20 other freethinkers and humanists for food, fun and well-fed conversation.

**Discussion: Your choice:
The Rapture or the Tribulation?**

**MON, APR 13, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT**

**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)**

**MONTY PYTHON'S
THE LIFE OF BRIAN**

Our Passover/Holy Week/Easter offering for your religion- and myth-bashing, blasphemous-promoting delectation. From

the born-in-the-wrong-stable opening to the happy-whistling musical crucifixion finale, Mssrs. Cleese, Chapman, Idle,

Gilliam and Jones are at the top of their silly, brilliant form. Come join the fun. Shall we do a finale sing-along?

After-Film Discussion:

Is there a "bright side of life"?

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)



SHSNY CALENDAR: APRIL - JUNE 2015

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, APR 22, 7:00 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

DR. PETER DIAMANDIS:
"ABUNDANCE:

Why the Future Will Be Much Better Than You Think"

Since the dawn of humanity a privileged few have lived comfortably, in stark contrast to the hardscrabble majority. Conventional wisdom says this gap cannot be closed, but it is closing — fast. According to, Dr. Diamandis, the X-Prize creator and serial entrepreneur, we will soon be able to meet and exceed the basic needs of every man, woman and child on the planet.



Abundance for all is within our grasp through four forces: exponential technologies, the DIY innovator, the techno-philanthropist, and the Rising Billion. Doctor Diamandis gives us plenty of reason for optimism.

Great Lectures on DVD is FREE.
(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

PLANNING AHEAD

The usual SHSNY schedule is ...

Book Club: First Thursday
at the Community Church of NY

Movie Night: Second Monday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Brunch: Third Sunday
at Stone Creek Lounge

Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Studying Humanism: Last Monday
at the Community Church of NY

More info: www.shsny.org,
and/or 646-922-7389

STUDYING HUMANISM

MON, APR 27, 6:30-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
40 East 35 St (church basement)
2014-15 Meeting/Discussion #5

"Religion and Spirituality:
What's the Difference?"

Book:

- Sam Harris, *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* (\$15.85 Hardcover, \$11.95 Kindle at Amazon. A 2-hour video of the book is available at samharris.org for \$4.99.)

- A good review of *Waking Up* is at: <http://bigthink.com/21st-century-spirituality/sam-harris-wakes-up>

Online:

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirituality> - Scan for the basics.
- *Psychology Today - The Psychology of Spirituality* - read it at shsny.org/Calendar

Note: *Studying Humanism is a study group, not a book club. If you have not done the reading, you may still audit the discussion — all are welcome, definitely including newcomers!*

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

New York Philosophy: Fri, Apr 3, 6-11pm at 49 Grove, Cocktails & Conversation: (Subject TBA). Free admission, 100 expected. www.nyphilosophy.com

NY Society for Ethical Culture:

- Sun, Apr 5, 2 pm, *Sunday Assembly-NYC* - Free.

- Fri, Apr 3, 7 pm, Ethics in Film: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). Snacks/bevs, \$5 suggested.

- Fri, Apr 10, 7pm, Ethics and the Theater: Reading of *The Price* by Arthur Miller. 6:30 reception, snacks/bevs, \$10 suggested.

See the full RNY calendar at www.reasonablenewyork.org

BOOK EARLY - SAVE \$5!

SUNDAY, MAY 3, NOON
DAY OF REASON BRUNCH,
at PETE'S TAVERN,
129 East 18 Street
JOHN A. WAGNER

"Promoting Secular Politics
in the Empire State"

Yes, New York may be a lot better than Mississippi, but the push to incorporate the religious agenda into our laws and our tax code is alive and well in the Empire State.



SHSNY Board member John Wagner is Chair of the Secular Coalition for New York. He and his team have been studying New York politics with an eye toward promoting secular values, eliminating religious privilege, and promoting laws based on scientific, rather than superstitious values.

Join us to find what he has learned, to discover how you can maximize your impact in the political arena, to share your concerns, and to discuss tactics with like-minded secular humanists.

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Brunch is just \$25 at the door, for your choice of 11 entrees, tax, tips and a drink included.

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PEEK

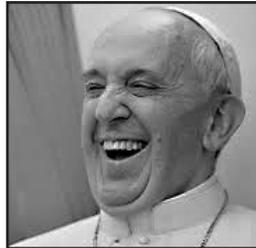
Newsletter of the Sexual Humorist Society of New York

April 1, 2015

APRIL FOOL! WE HID THE BODY!

Exclusive to PIQUE's Vatican City bureau:

Vatican City, April 1 – In a startling late-night admission over pizza and beer at a hideaway Roman pizzeria, Pope Francis tonight admitted that Jewish carpenter/preacher Jesus (or Joshua) of Nazareth, crucified by Roman officials in Jerusalem in the 1st century for sedition, did, indeed, die, and was not resurrected.



Over his third bottle of Peroni beer, and referring to his admission last month that what he most missed about his life prior to his election was the ability to go out unrecognized for pizza, the Holy Father thanked this reporter for smuggling him out of the papal palace.

"You did me a big favor," he said, "so I'll give you a big story. You know, the Easter thing? Crucified, three days, stone rolled back, resurrection? All made up.

"Except for the crucifixion part – that's real."

As this reporter – and customers at nearby tables – gaped in amazement, the Supreme Pontiff continued.

"It's true, and we have the diaries of Peter and James to prove it. They're in the Vatican vaults. *And* the so-called "missing body".

"You know, after the crucifixion there were dozens of deluded guys, followers, running around Jerusalem yelling, 'I'm Jesus!', just like 'I'm Spartacus!' in the Kubrick movie. No one sane believed any of them – except that nutcase Thomas, who started the whole resurrected-rose-into-Heaven story, and once that got going, you know, how do you stop it? People started lining up to convert, and what were we supposed to do, spit in their eye?"

While relishing his outlaw pizza ("Pepperoni only, none of that California crap."), the Holy Father took time to chat with and bless several other middle-of-the-night customers, including two of the neighborhood prostitutes, whom he anointed – on both their brows and buttocks ("for extra good luck") – with tabletop olive oil.

"You going to write this up?" he asked. When assured that his bombshell announcement would appear in April PIQUE, the Supreme Pontiff shrugged.

"What the hell," he said, "it's April Fool's Day, so I'll just deny it all tomorrow. Thanks for the pizza."

Note to SHSNY Treasurer: Receipt: Enrico's Pizzeria for 32.50 Euros, attached. – JR

VATICAN SHOCKER:

POPE REVERSES BAN ON ABORTION

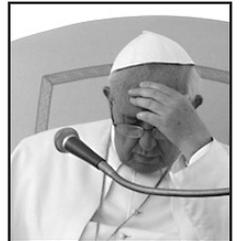
(Based on theonion.com, 4/6/09, and PIQUE, April, 2010)

Vatican City, April 2 – A visibly upset Pope Francis shocked a throng in St. Peter's Square this morning by overturning the Catholic Church's ban on abortion, announcing that the termination of unwanted pregnancies was now "completely and perfectly acceptable in the eyes of God".

The proclamation, which directly contradicts prior teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, was reportedly made by Pope Francis after receiving a late night phone call to his personal cellphone. According to witnesses, His Holiness was seen pacing, wringing his hands, and cursing at himself in a hallway mirror before coming to the sudden decision. Vatican Secretary Monsignor Guido Sarducci was overheard whispering, "If I didn't know better, I'd say he was hung over."

"My friends in Christ, brothers and sisters of the cloth, having an abortion is ... um ... not that big a deal," announced the pontiff while reading from hastily scrawled notes. "In fact, it is written, uh, somewhere, that the taking of an innocent life might even be something of a blessing in some cases. For example, when a mother's life is at risk. Or, say, when someone is just way too old to become a father at this point."

Shocking a crowd of thousands that had gathered in St. Peter's Square later this morning, the infallible religious leader declared that the killing of an unborn child is "not really a mortal sin", especially if everyone involved pretty much wished the whole thing had never happened. Say if two people just met one crazy night weeks ago, got carried away, and made the biggest mistake of both their lives.



"All women, particularly those by the name of Sheila, deserve the right to choose," the Holy Father said. "And if they choose wrongly – if they choose to keep the child, even though that does not make any sense, and might very well ruin someone's career – then maybe they should just leave the country and never come back."

"The Lord came unto me when I could not sleep and He said, 'This is totally an option now,'" proclaimed Francis. "Also, He has said that some people should probably go out and get this done, like, today, and that they shouldn't tell anyone else about it. Amen."

WHAT A MONTH FOR DUMBTH!

John Rafferty

We leave the dominion of the deliberately satirical (previous page), to come back to the realm of the real and really stupid. We have four – *count 'em, four!* – new nominees for the 2015 Dumbth of the Year Award, our horse's-ass trophy for the science-, logic-, and reality-challenged.

Retired neurosurgeon and nonsense candidate for the Republican presidential nomination Ben Carson, who said on “Meet The Press” that scientific notions like evolution may be “just propaganda”, also appeared on CNN’s “New Day” and argued that being homosexual is a choice.



“Because a lot of people who go into prison go into prison straight – and when they come out, they’re gay. So, did something happen while they were in there? Ask yourself that question.”

Ask yourself, Ben, where your medical education went.

Nevada Assemblywoman Michele Fiore (that’s her with the strapped-on sidearm, in her own and preferred-use photo) believes that the gummint is withholding cheap medicines from us, and that cancer is a fungus that can be flushed out of the body with baking soda.



“If you have cancer, which I believe is a fungus, and we can put a pic line into your body and we’re flushing with, say, salt water, sodium carbonat [sic – it’s “biocarbonate”] through that line and flushing out the fungus. These are some procedures that are not FDA-approved in America that are very inexpensive, cost-effective.”

She also suggested, by the way, that college women who don’t carry firearms must “like rape”.



At February’s National Prayer Breakfast, President Obama (that’s not him pictured) reminded the Islamophobic and history-challenged that Christianity had its terrorist moments, too, specifically the Crusades and the Inquisition. The Catholic League’s Bill Donohue reacted not only predictably but, even for him, insanely.

After calling the Crusades “just wars”, he unleashed this baldfaced lie:

“Regarding that other fable, the Inquisition, the Catholic Church had almost nothing to do with it.”

So, the Church was actually okay with Galileo and Bruno?

New Age actress/nutcase Shirley MacLaine, who has previously written that in a previous life she lived in Atlantis and was the brother of a 35,000-year-old spirit named Ramtha, has written another book, “What If?”, in

which she suggests that perhaps the Holocaust was karmic payback.



“What if most Holocaust victims were balancing their karma from ages before, when they were Roman soldiers putting Christians to death, the Crusaders who murdered millions in the name of Christianity ... or those who stormed across the Near East with Alexander? The energy of killing is endless and will be experienced by the killer and the killee.”

Um, Shirley, six million killees might demur.

YES, WE SHOULD HAVE A “GOOD GUY” AWARD, AND HERE’S THE FIRST NOMINATION

John Rafferty

A year ago in these pages I tried to drum up interest in a SHSNY “Good Guy” Award (or “Hero of Reason” or “Smartypants”, or whatever – you tell me), the mirror image of our clucks-of-the-year contest in the column immediately left. But my nomination of Apple CEO Tim Cook, who stood up to profits-only anti-environmentalists at a shareholder meeting with a withering “You should get out of this stock”, was met with a white-hot wave of indifference. (Read it all on page 12 of April, 2014 PIQUE at www.shsny.org)



Okay, let’s try again, this time with the host of ABC’s late-night “Live with Jimmy Kimmel”. Mary Elizabeth Williams told the story on salon.doc on March 3, excerpted here:

“On his show Kimmel took a moment to reference the severity of a problem that has led to an unprecedented measles outbreak, chiding parents who ‘are more afraid of gluten than smallpox’. And acknowledging that ‘You probably aren’t going to take medical advice from a talk show host, and I don’t expect you to ... [but] I *would* expect you to take medical advice from almost every doctor in the world’ – you know, the people who don’t ‘learn about the human body from their friends’ Facebook page’.

“Kimmel, a father of a baby daughter himself, then presented a prerecorded message from a group of real and refreshingly foul-mouthed doctors who support vaccinations, to deliver a bleep-heavy PSA to explain that ‘The potential downsides of vaccinations are almost nonexistent’, and to add that ‘I cannot f—king believe we have to make this PSA.’ ‘Remember that time you got polio?’ another doctor asks. ‘No, you don’t, because your parents got you f—king vaccinated.’ (See the hilarious 5-minute clip on YouTube at “Jimmy Kimmel Vaccination Commercial”.)

Okay, readers, shall we have a Good Guy Award, a trophy for public figures who stand up for reason, science, common, especially for those who stand up to abuse?

Should we restrict it to non-academics/scientists? (They get *paid* to be rational.) What should we call it? What should we award? What do you think? Tell me at editor@shsny.org.

THE W. ADMINISTRATION IS GONE, BUT THE WAR ON SCIENCE GOES ON

Joanna Rothkopf

(Excerpted from Salon.com, 3/2/2015)

House Republicans want to *legally forbid* EPA from looking at science it doesn't like. Two bills are up for a vote in the House of Representatives, both of which could significantly impact the way the Environmental Protection Agency is allowed to use science to come up with regulations.

The secret Science Reform Act and the Science Advisory Board Reform Act both require the EPA to consider only publicly available, easily reproducible data when making policy recommendations. Scientific organizations and environmental groups, as well as a number of Democrats, disapprove of the bills, arguing that they favor industry over real science.

Over 50 scientific organizations spoke out in opposition to the Secret Science bill, noting that large-scale public health studies would be ineligible for consideration because large sample sizes could not be easily reproduced.

"I cannot support legislation that makes it easier for industry to implement their destructive playbook, because risking the health of the American people is not a game that I'm willing to play," said Rep. Paul Tonko (D-NY).

The Science Advisory Board (SAB) Reform Act would change the structure of the SAB, the board of scientists and economists that review EPA risk assessments. The bill would give industry scientists more opportunities to join the panel, *while preventing academic scientists from discussing their own research*, ostensibly to avoid conflict of interest. What it actually does is "turn the idea of conflict of interest on its head," according to Andrew Rosenberg, the director of the Center for Science and Democracy.

ThinkProgress' Emily Atkin reports that both bills have a good chance of passing: Now, with a Republican-controlled Senate that has so far been willing to consider bills President Obama won't agree to, advancing the bills does seem a bit more likely. An aide from the House Science committee told ThinkProgress that companion legislation for Smith's "Secret Science" was introduced in the Senate last week, sponsored by Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY).

The man who would ultimately decide whether to consider the bills in the Senate is Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-OK), chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. ... [who is] one of the EPA's most outspoken opponents, telling *The Washington Post* last year that he would "do everything in my power to rein in and shed light on the EPA's unchecked regulations."

In November of 2014, Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA) spoke out against the first bill. "It's a dangerous attack on the power of knowledge," she said. "Rather than argue with the indisputable facts on air pollution — a losing bet — this bill attempts to discredit the science as secret, when in fact there's nothing secret about it. The only secret here is the true intent of this bill."

DOES THE NEW "SHARING ECONOMY" FIT WITH HUMANIST PRINCIPLES?

David Rafferty

All too often, discussions regarding humanism center on how religion shouldn't play a role in day-to-day life. We actively question the importance of the supernatural to affect our ability to lead ethical lives. But there's a larger "umbrella" theme to humanism that we tend to forget, and it's a thing that no religionist should ever find fault with. That is that humanism is an ethical philosophy that values all human beings equally both as individuals and in the collective.

Treat everyone fairly. Respect others equally. Be nice. Don't take advantage of others, especially if there's an alternative. It's not easy to do these things on a macro, national scale, and for most of human history the world didn't work this way. The strong took from the weak, the powerful subjugated the powerless, and the ones who built civilizations knew how to stay in power: give the people just enough to be happy. But surely we in 21st century America have moved past that. I mean, didn't we spend the 20th century trying to weed out inequality, strengthen the rights of workers, establish reasonable standards for health and safety, all with the goal of empowering a middle class, the likes of which never existed before? Well, we did, but now, not so much.

The American economic landscape changed dramatically during the Crash of 2008 and politicians in this country seized upon that as an opportunity to alter the social landscape as well. Protections were loosened, unions, or any organization dedicated to demanding fair labor practices were savaged, and the contraction of the middle class was accelerated. The net result has been millions of educated, computer-literate people who can't find work, who would be happy for just about anything.

Enter the Internet, and our brand new Sharing Economy. *The New York Times* ran a gushing feature recently on businesses such as Uber, Favor and AirBnb, positioning the runners, drivers and others who work for these "paradigm changers" as ground-floor members of an economy where people take back control of their own economic lives. Like the woman featured in the story who wakes up at 4:30 am every day to register her availability at several of these and other sites. Then she waits. Waits for the text telling her where to go, what to do and how much time she has to do it in. Remember, *The Times* thought this was a positive. Okay, so what do these companies do?

Let's start with **Uber**, the on-demand car service that calls itself "ride sharing" because you can't be a cool Internet company without somehow sharing. My daughter and friends were going into New York for a party and one of the moms told the girls to get an Uber car to take them from Grand Central. Wait, what? This typically overprotective mom has no problem with calling for a car service that prides itself on being unregulated and which could send over any lunatic with a valid driver's license to pick up her

child? (Yes, the company swears everyone checks out, but independent analysts disagree.) But there's a cool app and it's the Internet so, sure.

How about **Favor**? An on-demand "time sharing" service where random strangers ("runners") pick up your dry cleaning or do other menial tasks you feel aren't worth your time. Favor even guarantees that these otherwise unemployed runners can make at least \$9/hour, when they do work, provided they are on-call effectively all day.

But let's stop for a moment and reflect back on why this matters if you call yourself a humanist. Say you're the type who gets righteously indignant about getting fair trade coffee or not buying a shirt made in a country that exploits its workers. Then you can't use companies like Uber or Favor. See, the business model for these companies requires positioning themselves as technology companies and not actual service providers. This allows them to skirt the rules and safety requirements put into place that protect both workers and consumers. That makes them nothing more than exploitive middlemen, something that's far more 19th century than 21st.

Now take **AirBnb**, the "space sharing" behemoth that lets anybody rent out their home, spare room, couch to total strangers because why not. It's your house, hotels are old school, and space sharing sounds so disruptively innovative. I know several local friends who've already availed themselves of this startlingly socialist phenomenon.

In fact, listening to friends and neighbors these days, people are in love with the future of these "stick it to the man", union-busting, bootstrapping, regulation-free 21st century paradigm changers. I mean, don't these bold new adventures in unfettered capitalism beautifully conform to the principle of "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs"? (Ironic juxtaposition intended) Think about it. I have a car, you need a ride. I should be free to turn this into a business deal. I have a house, it should be up to me to decide if I want to rent it to you for the weekend. My time is so much more valuable than yours that I'll pay you to do my bidding.

But all capitalist/communist rhetoric aside, didn't your mom teach you not to get into cars with strangers? While that yellow cab driver may seem sketchy, at least you know he's been vetted, licensed and carries insurance. Your Uber driver? Who knows? But he owns a car and should be able to make a few bucks with it if he wants to, right? Same with the guestroom you rent through AirBnb. However, let me ask you this. How happy would you be if *your* neighbors suddenly decided to start renting out spare bedrooms to a regular parade of visiting strangers?

So what we have right now is an economy growing on the backs of hundreds of thousands of people who are frustrated with being underemployed or unemployed, and who see making a few bucks an hour while spending all day at the beck and call of the gainfully employed as their best option. But in reality the Sharing Economy means you get income instability (you have no idea when you might work or for how long) and loss of protections (you have no

group insurance, no way to bargain for increased wages, no rights as an employee), all while laying out the irreversible personal capital investments needed to run your "business" (the flip side of making money on the car or house you own is that you have incurred the very real and significant expense of owning a house or a car). Sure it can be tempting, but this economy seems like just another version of the CEO Gets Rich While Duping Rubes to Work for Peanuts Economy.

And the consumers who use these services? You can console yourself by thinking that these workers are simply in-between jobs or supporting themselves while they polish their novel, but for most this is the best they can do. And as such, you're exploiting an economically disadvantaged caste while at the same time enabling millionaire and billionaire owners, all at the expense of others (cab drivers, hotel workers, for example) who play by the rules and adhere to the regulations established for the common good.

If to be a humanist is to not take advantage of others and to be fair, then you cannot use exploitive companies such as these, no matter how cool they are.

Note: A version of the above - focused on southern Connecticut - originally appeared in the Greenwich Time, 2/22/2015 - JR

IT DOESN'T GET ANY CRAZIER THAN THIS

John Rafferty

For over half a century, China has occupied what was historically semi-independent, quasi-theocratic Tibet. After the Communist takeover the last independent Tibetan government decamped to a sanctuary in northern India, as did Tibet's spiritual leader, the 14th Dalai Lama, who has since become a globally-acclaimed spokesman for peace, democracy and—cuckoo Buddhist cosmology notwithstanding—reason and science.

But the Dalai Lama is 79. The Chinese, looking forward to his demise - *and reincarnation!* - have made it clear that they intend to choose the next, 15th Dalai Lama by controlling the revelation-by-dreams-at-the-sacred-lake process.

Not so fast, said the politically-savvy old monk on the BBC in December - Maybe I just *won't* re-incarnate.

"There is no guarantee that some stupid Dalai Lama (translation: Chinese puppet) won't come next, who will disgrace himself or herself. That would be very sad. So, much better that a centuries-old tradition should cease at the time of a quite popular Dalai Lama."

The Chinese Communist Party leadership has gone bananas. In Beijing last month, Zhu Weiqun announced:

"Decision-making power over the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, and over the end or survival of this lineage, resides in the central government of China. In religious terms, this is a betrayal of the succession of Dalai Lamas in Tibetan Buddhism."

So ... we have the spiritual leader of one of the world's "great religions" suggesting that his religion's most nutty tradition come to an end. And the leadership of the world's greatest atheist government insisting that it continue - You *will* re-incarnate, goddamn it!

It makes our own Congress seem almost sane.

**OUR VERSION OF "HOLY WEEK":
FROM "ASK AN ATHEIST DAY" (APRIL 16)
TO "OPENLY SECULAR DAY" (APRIL 23)**

John Rafferty

The (relatively) new celebration, "National Ask An Atheist Day", occurs every year on the 3rd Thursday of April. This year it's April 16, and it behooves us to get with it.

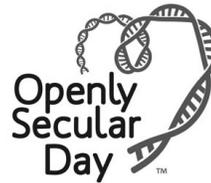
The day is the brainchild of the Secular Student Alliance, an organization that enlists and supports freethinking students on more than 300 high school and college campuses. The idea is to encourage people—particularly people of faith—to approach nontheists and ask questions about secular life.



Okay, PIQUE readers, most of us aren't going to table on campus, but we can each make an effort to spread our "good news" to our neighbors and colleagues. All it takes is something like, "Hey, you know I'm an atheist, right?"

Go to: <https://www.secular.org/event/national-ask-atheist-day-0>

What we think, or what we know, or what we believe, is in the end, of little consequence. The only thing of consequence is what we do. – *John Ruskin*



Tell One Person.

Seven days later—at the end of Unholy Week—comes "Openly Secular Day" on April 23. It's a product of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, in cooperation with the Secular Coalition for America and the Secular Student Alliance, and it's another celebration of freethinkers opening up about their secular worldview.

This is a day to help others understand our values and how we think. Let's use it and celebrate it.

Each time one of us tells a theist, "I'm secular," we help people realize they already know good and compassionate atheist, agnostic, humanist and nonreligious people, and we reduce anti-secularist prejudice a little bit more.

That's what Openly Secular Day is all about. And, as with "Ask an Atheist" Day, we should own it.

Get more info at <http://www.openlysecular.org/more/>

The difference between atheism and homosexuality is that atheism is contagious. The religious rightfully fear us in a way they need not fear gays because we atheists probably will convert them whether they like it or not ... whether we like it or not. Truth is funny that way.

– *Jason Torpy*

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