

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

Volume XXVII, Number 31 *A parish in the classical Anglican tradition* August 23rd 2016

FROM THE RECTOR

Atheism is on the rise, but still a foolish conceit

Ten years ago Michael Novak, the noted writer on theology and religion, declared atheism to be on the defensive in America. He reached this conclusion because he detected an "odd defensiveness" in a then recently published spate of books by a slew of well-known unbelievers attacking God and all his works.

Writing in the journal *First Things*, Novak argued that very few people outside Western Europe were listening to eminent atheist apologists, including the late Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett and Sam Harris.

In America, Novak declared, religion was surging. As evidence, he cited a 2007 Princeton Survey Poll for the magazine *Newsweek* that indicated 97 per cent of Americans believed in God, while only three percent said they were atheists.

Novak deduced that the atheists' defensiveness – "the odd feeling they give of making one last stand" – probably arose from two major events that undermined the fundamental premises upon which atheism is based.

The first was the death of socialism as an ideal and a political program. The second was the collapse of secular humanism as an ideal.

Today one might be forgiven for concluding that, in making this claim, Novak was guilty of *hubris* – behavior that according ancient Greek belief challenged the gods and the consequence of which was *nemesis* or downfall.

First, Senator Bernard Sanders' presidential campaign graphically illustrates that socialism as a political philosophy is just as potent as ever – prospects of boundless free stuff will always exert a powerful appeal to human cupidity.

Second, surveying the success of recent campaigns to marginalize Christian influence on society – the silencing of even private prayer in schools, barring public expression of Christian thought, the efforts to impose on religious institutions activities antithetical to their beliefs – indicates the secular humanism is thriving.

The Pew Research Center's latest report on religion in America showed that by 2014 the share of Americans who identified themselves as atheists had roughly doubled since 2007, the year Nova wrote his article.

Pew's 2014 Religious Landscape Study found that 3.1 percent of American adults professed to be atheists when asked about their religious identity, up from 1.6% in a similarly large survey in 2007. What's more, an additional 4.0% of Americans call themselves agnostics, up from 2.4% in 2007.

The news, however, isn't all good for Messrs. Dawkins, Dennett and Harris. (Mr. Hitchens, in his current state, is probably best described as a "former atheist.") There seems to be a curiously eccentric, not to say illogical, quality about American atheism.

For starters, Pew reports that 8 percent of them believe there is some sort of god or "universal spirit," while 31 percent if them report regularly feeling a sense of spiritual peace or wellbeing, up from 28 percent in 2007. At the same time 54 percent admitted to "wondering about the universe," up 17 percent from 2007.

The comparable figures for agnostics were: "Feeling a sense of spiritual peace or wellbeing" 38 percent, up from 31 percent in 2007; "wondering about the universe" 55 percent, up from 48 percent from 2007

None of this changes the fact that atheism is a most foolish conceit of an exceedingly conceited age.

It is the corollary of the equally silly notion that belief in God is achievable only by totally suppressing one's reasoning and rational thought processes.

Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. Belief in God is entirely rational. It is the proposition that our vastly complicated universe was brought into being by some super colossal cosmic accident that defies reason.

To swallow such a curious and illogical supposition takes an act of the blindest faith. "Acting in blind faith" is the only way to describe folks who stubbornly close their eyes to an overwhelming preponderance of evidence to the contrary and, instead, cling to the irrational position that God does not exist.

Blind faith, moreover, is merely a polite way of saying "ignorant superstition." And, truth to tell, atheists are even more in the thrall of ignorant superstition than savage animist pagans are in thrall to their primitive deities.

Savages at least can muster sufficient logic to grasp the fact that a God must exist somewhere. Their problem is identifying the right one.

Conversations with ignorant and superstitious people do not fall into the category of feasts for the intellect – which explains why dialogues even with intelligent atheists tend to be interminably dull.

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Phyllis, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Adele, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Beth, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Pam, Warren, Cary, Courtney & Marie.

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy

IN MEMORIAM: Phyllis J. Cadwalader

FOR THOSE WHO MOURN: The Cadwalader Family

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN

Debating the obvious – "Does God exist? – is too boring for words. And until one gets past that, one cannot even begin to discuss the fundamental question: "Does God care?"

One thing that lightens up the whole business is that God has a marvelous sense of humor. Atheists, for example, are usually quite ignorant of the Bible and, thus, they write it off as myths and legends, unprovable by modern "scientific" investigation.

God, however, has a way of puncturing their smug complacency. Jericho's walls, it turns out, came tumbling down exactly as the Book of Joshua describes. Modern archaeology has demonstrated that St. Luke knew First Century Jerusalem far better than the critics who claimed that he made up his descriptions of the Holy City out of whole cloth.

Characters who supposedly never existed come crawling

out of the grave to greet us. Skeptics claimed Pilate was an imaginary figure . . . until archaeologists started digging up inscriptions bearing his name. And they similarly questioned the existence of Caiaphas, the Chief Priest who helped engineer Christ's crucifixion until they dug up his grave a dozen or so years ago.

It's richly ironical that in life Caiaphas condemned Jesus as a liar, while in death he bears witness to Christ's truth. Funny the way God works, isn't it? GPH✳

FROM THE TREASURER

Pity the poor treasurer!

“Are there no work houses? Are there no prisons?” that was Ebenezer Scrooge’s to people who begged him for alms at Christmas time. But I hope it won’t be your response to your church treasurer’s annual summertime plea.

The trouble is that folks cast all cares aside when they go away vacation and among the cares they cast aside are all thoughts of poor

church treasurers struggling to make ends meet with no pledge money coming in.

Parishioners go on vacation. Church treasurers get to go on vacation too – but only if they are up-to-date with the bills. And, sad to relate, bills never take a holiday.

Please do me a favor and bring your pledges up to date before you go away. That way I can take care of the bills and go away myself. Scrooge would say: “Bah! Humbug!” Personally, I’d much rather say: “Have a great vacation.”

FROM THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

We need help badly

The Sunday School is in desperate need of people to assist with the nursery during the 9:15 AM service. Current mothers, experienced mothers, stepmothers, mothers to be, foster mothers and men who mother, many hands make light work. Please consider stepping forward and signing up for the rotation. Look for the sign up form in the Church lobby. DIANE NOVICKI

St Stephen’s Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093

Office: 410 560 6776 · **Rectory:** 410 665 1278

Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Ven. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*

The Ven. Michael Kerouac, *Vicar* · The Rev. Michael Belt,
The Rev. John Novicki, The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*

The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*
Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) –
evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Ladies Who Lunch

Wednesday, September 21st, 12.00 PM

Venue to be announced

Afternoon Tea

Thursday, September 8th, 2.00 PM

Weekly Silly Summer Suppers

Wednesday August 24th, 6.30 PM

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

St Stephen's Anglican Church
11856 Mays Chapel Road
Timonium, MD 21093

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TIMONIUM MD