



The Enlightenment



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America: What Went Wrong?

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, America experienced a savings and loan crisis. It was the failure of about 747 out of 3,234 savings and loan (S&L) associations in the United States. The S&Ls made long-term loans at fixed interest using short-term money. When interest rates increased, the S&Ls could not attract adequate capital and became insolvent. This debacle, plus a number of other occurring problems prompted Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele to publish a book entitled *America: What Went Wrong* in 1992. Here are the headings to some of the chapters.

- The decline of the middle class.
- Losing out to Mexico.
- Shifting taxes from them to you.
- High cost of deregulation.
- Playing Russian Roulette with health insurance.
- The disappearing pensions.
- The political connection.
- Reworking the government rulebook.



Sound familiar? The authors' purpose in writing the book was to point out the errors that were made in the hope that lessons would be learned and mistakes would not be repeated. Well apparently lessons were not learned because mistakes continued to be made and prevailing greed caused another crisis in 2008.

Recently, Canadian author Conrad Black published a book entitled *Flight of the Eagle*, a comprehensive well written history of the United States from its beginning to the present. Commenting on the period from the beginning in 1776 up until about 1965, he recounts the many events that occurred to make America the greatest democracy in history while extolling the leaders who made this happen. Then, starting with the futile Vietnam War and the 1974 oil crisis, things started to go down hill. Military spending increased while taxes were being cut and finally gridlock occurred in the Congress. On the last page Black states, "America made democracy the dominant world political system, but the United States is now not a very well functioning democracy itself." Throughout the book, Black lauds the dozen or so exceptional leaders who made America great. At the end he states: only if an outstanding leader comes on the scene to solve America's problems, can American become great again. He is optimistic this will happen. In this vein, the article beginning on page three outlines some of the characteristics that may lead to great leadership.

President's Remarks

As I write this, the cold, snowy days of winter are upon us once again. This is the time of year when people of ancient times celebrated the winter solstice with joyful gatherings, singing, and feasting, in anticipation of the new year and the promise of spring. In keeping with this ancient tradition, I look forward to joining with HALA members and friends later in December for a time of fun, food, and fellowship at our annual Winter Solstice party. Looking back, the past year has been a good one for HALA. We began the year with the debate at Western on the topic of government funding of Catholic schools. This was a great success and led to several new members joining our association. At our monthly meetings through the year we had a variety of very interesting speakers on a range of topics, and our membership numbers continued to rise. Over the past month, the HALA Board has been conducting an on-line survey of members and friends to ascertain their interests and preferences for topics, formats of meetings and other activities that we could become involved in. I want to thank all of you who have completed the survey, and encourage those who haven't to do so before the end of the year. In the new year, we'll compile the results and make them known to our members. Looking ahead, we will use this information as a guide to planning future activities, seeking to maintain an interesting program to meet the needs and interests of our current members and to attract others to Humanism. I wish you all a happy holiday season and I look forward to another good year for HALA. ~ Rod Martin

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The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, 505 Dundas Street in London, on the second Wednesday of the months September to June inclusive at 7:30 p.m. Please use the rear door off the parking lot. *The Enlightenment*, edited by Don Hatch, is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. Special issues are published from time to time. Please note: We reserve the right to edit and publish articles at our discretion.

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Leadership

*Some are born great,
Some achieve greatness,
And some have greatness thrust upon them.*

The above quote from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* aptly portrays how great men or women might assume positions of leadership in various ways. But not all leaders can be described as great. In fact only a select few, whether they are in government, the military, industry or other disciplines, can be singled out as being truly great and historically significant. I will not attempt to make a list of great men or women who have assumed the mantle of leadership and made the world a better place, because everyone's list would be different. What I want to touch on though, is the reality that every now and then an individual possessing outstanding judgment and leadership abilities comes along at just the right time and place to fight for a good cause and win. For example, in the history of the United States the founding fathers, principally Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton and Madison all came on the scene just at the opportune time. Other great American leaders were Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Martin Luther King Jr. In Great Britain, Winston Churchill immediately comes to mind and there were numerous others as well in the course of Britain's glorious history. And Canada would not be what it is today without the skills of John A. Macdonald in its formative years. In more recent times, Nelson Mandela, a man possessing great courage and diplomatic skills, is greatly admired.

But where do great leaders come from? A recent article in the *Globe and Mail* dwelt on leadership. The article listed six different kinds of leaders, the great and the not so great. (1-4 are not great, 4&5 can be great).

1. The Sociopath. Gadhafi and his ilk are examples.
2. The Opportunist. Bernie Madoff is an example.
3. The Chameleons. Leaders like Mitt Romney who bend with the wind.
4. The Achiever. Achievers are common in executive ranks. They are monomaniacs with a mission, energetic and results oriented. But the weakness is obvious: They can be narrow-minded as they drive to their goals without the broader mission. Mark Hurd, the ex-CEO of Hewlett-Packard is an example. He doubled the company's stock price, but decimated the infrastructure and the intellectual seed corn, the R & D of the company, causing untold problems.
5. The Builder. Builders manage for the long term without being pressured for short-term profits and continued high stock-market valuations. They have a grand vision for the future of their organizations, and they infect others with their energy and integrity. Examples are Tom Watson of IBM and Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors.
6. The Transcendent Leader. These leaders go beyond organizations or groups to benefit society as a whole. While Builders unfortunately are scarce, Transcendent leaders are even rarer. Examples are the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. Dare we hope Barak Obama can achieve this level? He has the intelligence and the vision, but can he develop the political skills of FDR and outsmart the greedy Achievers and turn around a sluggish economy? Time will tell.

It seems plainly obvious that humanity has no chance of overcoming the many problems we currently face without competent skillful caring leaders. Somehow we need to find a lot more Builders, but where are they? It would seem that modern business schools cranking out MBAs have created many Achievers but very few Builders. And what about Transcendent Leaders? Intelligent people with a grand vision that can infect others with their vision, energy and integrity. And note that all three Transcendent Leaders mentioned above are people of colour, and that two of them are religious leaders. They are people with messages of equality, justice, fairness, empathy and compassion. Societies need to search for competence in leadership, and above all we must certainly not overlook the leadership abilities of women.

Further insight into Builder and Transcendent Leaders can be gained from Abraham Maslow's pyramid of the hierarchy of needs. (See the April 2010 Enlightenment for a short discourse on Maslow's work). At the top of the pyramid is Self-Actualization. Maslow suggests that only about 2% of the world's population reach this level. But what exactly does he mean by self-actualization? To arrive at his conclusions he examined the lives of a few outstanding historical figures including Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jane Adams, William James, Albert Schweitzer, Benedict Spinoza, and Aldous Huxley, plus twelve unnamed people who were alive when he did his research. From the biographies, writings, and the acts and words of these personalities, he developed a list of qualities that seemed to be characteristic of these people, as opposed to the remaining majority. (It is perhaps worth noting that the beliefs of many of these historical figures would include Deism, pantheism, agnosticism and atheism, rather than conventional religious beliefs.).

Maslow found these outstanding people were *reality-centred*, which means they could differentiate between what is genuine and what is fake or dishonest. They were *problem-centred*, meaning they treated life's problems as difficulties demanding solutions. They enjoyed *solitude*, and were comfortable being alone. They enjoyed deep *personal relations*, with a few chosen friends and family members, rather than more shallow relationships with many people. They enjoyed *autonomy* and *resisted enculturation*, i.e., they were not subject to social pressures to conform. They had a *non-hostile sense of humour* – preferring to joke at their own expense, instead of directing their humour at others. They had a quality Maslow described as *acceptance of self and others*, which means taking one as he or she is, and not trying to change them into what others might think they should be. And then comes *spontaneity and simplicity*, being oneself rather than pretentious or artificial. Furthermore he found these people had a sense of *humility and respect* toward others as well as a feeling of *human kinship* – social interest and compassion accompanied by *strong ethics* that was spiritual, but seldom conventionally religious. Self-actualized people had a certain *freshness of appreciation*, an ability to see things, even ordinary things, with awe and wonder. And it almost goes without saying that these people were *creative, inventive and original*. Finally, these individuals had more *peak experiences* than the average person. A peak experience takes one out of oneself, and makes one feel very insignificant or very large, at peace with life or nature and provides a feeling of the infinite and the eternal. Putting all, or even most, of these qualities and characteristics together, you indeed have a very rare and admirable person. It is probably correct to surmise as did Maslow, that no more than 2% of humanity reach or even approach this level of *self-actualization*.

It is self-evident today that there is a crying need for Self Actualization type leaders to deal with and solve the serious economic and other problems facing humanity. Leaders with a long-term vision who will put partisan politics aside and achieve what will be of benefit to all citizens, not just the top one percent. We need leaders who will utilize diplomacy rather than resorting to war. And leaders who will work together as Churchill and Roosevelt did in WWII to achieve a common goal.

Today societies are undergoing a paradigm shift as we go from an industrial age to a robotic and information age. Old industrial jobs are disappearing as a result of automation and moving offshore. The

new jobs becoming available require new kinds of knowledge and skills, putting a huge burden on education systems. As President Obama keeps emphasizing, successful societies require a large prosperous middle class, with low income disparity in evidence. The challenges ahead are almost unprecedented, and solutions will require outstanding leaders who rise above the norm and are able to successfully meet the challenges, particularly the challenge of lessening the influence of “big money” in governments. Where will these leaders come from? Maybe from unexpected places, but in any case we must hope that a few exceptional individuals with the requisite skills will appear at the right place and at the right time and lead us to better days. Our grandchildren deserve no less.

So far we have been considering leadership as it applies mainly in the non-Muslim parts of the world. But what about the predominately Muslim countries where in many cases the challenges are even greater? When the events of the so-called Arab Spring unfolded in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt in 2011, and dictators were overthrown, there was hope of a new beginning with democratic governments being elected. But unfortunately the dictatorships have been replaced with turmoil. (Tunisia may be an exception). No leaders have emerged that can unite the religious and secular elements, and the military will not let go of their influence. Consequently the unrest and violence continues. The unspeakably horrible situation in Syria clearly illustrates the problem. If Assad is defeated, there will likely be turmoil and unrest and possibly violence because the chances of finding a leader who can unite the various factions and form a stable government are not great. Any leader will also have to deal with the Sunni/Shi’ite differences and this will not be easy, as the current mess in Iraq has demonstrated.

It would seem to be a reality that there will never be peace in certain parts of the Muslim world until the Sunni/Shi’ite conflict is ended. To contemplate how difficult this will be, perhaps we can look to Europe’s 30 Years War of 1618-1648. Initially the war was fought largely as a religious war between Protestants and Catholics, although disputes over internal politics and a balance of power within the Holy Roman Empire also played a significant part. The war caused the devastation of entire regions, populations were reduced through famine and disease, and most of the combatant powers became bankrupt. Thankfully, the signing of the Peace of Westphalia finally brought the last religious war in Europe to an end.

Do we now have a similar situation on our hands? Will there have to be utter devastation (it is now occurring in Syria) before Sunnis and Shi’ites realize the senselessness and futility of their battles caused by a hatred that originated shortly after the death of Muhammad? Or will capable outstanding leaders emerge from each side that can work together to bring about a lasting end to this insane conflict, and at the same time bring an end to *Jihad* and hatred toward the West. Let’s hope it is the latter, but the prospects at the moment are not rosy because any leader attempting to bring Islam into the twenty-first century will face death threats and require bodyguards. He or she will have to be courageous enough to accept the risks, as did Gandhi and Martin Luther King, who were both murdered.

Most readers of this *Enlightenment* will remember the optimism that prevailed on New Year’s Eve 1999, as the new millennium was ushered in with elaborate fireworks displays in cities around the globe. The major wars of the twentieth century were behind us, and the world was by and large at peace. Then on September 11th 2001, a new threat in the form of Islamic *Jihad* reared its ugly head, leading to war in Afghanistan and an unnecessary costly war in Iraq. Then in 2008, a financial meltdown caused by greedy financiers occurred. And it became apparent that income disparity had been gradually increasing as the top one percent became increasingly wealthy, while the middle class was shrinking. Also, unemployment became a serious problem. In short, much of the world is in one hell of a mess.

With all the advances that have been made possible in the last two hundred years through science and technology, surely we humans should have the desire and the ability to begin to cooperate and solve the

economic problems and religious conflicts we now face. But this will not happen unless skillful competent leaders can emerge, leave their differences aside, and work together for the benefit of all humanity, not just those at the top of the heap. Over twenty-three hundred years ago, Plato advocated that it would be beneficial for all political leaders to study philosophy, and his pupil Aristotle is reputed to have said, “it is the duty of the Statesman to provide the good life for the citizens.” Notice he said Statesman, not politician. We definitely need more leaders who are Statesmen or Stateswomen who are more concerned with doing what is right for their country’s citizens, rather than doing what is expedient for reelection. Surely the best way to assure being reelected is to perform in a competent manner and bring about results that the majority of citizens desire.

Finally, speaking of politicians, many politicians, though certainly not all of them, are not held in the highest of esteem and may often be the butt of jokes. Following are a few humorous comments about politics and politicians, but there are also grains of truth within. Enjoy. (DAH)

What is Politics?

Politics is the gentle art of getting votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich, by promising to protect each from the other. ~ **Oscar Ameringer, "the Mark Twain of American Socialism."**

A politician is a fellow who will lay down your life for his country. **Texas Guinan. 19th century American businessman**

I have come to the conclusion that politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians. **Charles de Gaulle, French general & politician**

Instead of giving a politician the keys to the city, it might be better to change the locks. **Doug Larson (English middle-distance runner who won gold medals at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, 1902-1981)**

We hang petty thieves and appoint the bigger thieves to public office. **Aesop, Greek slave & fable author**

Those who are too smart to engage in politics are punished by being governed by those who are dumber. **Plato, ancient Greek Philosopher**

Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even where there is no river. **Nikita Khrushchev, Russian Soviet politician**

America is a country that was designed by geniuses, so that it could be run by idiots. **Thomas Friedman.**

Incidentally, the word politics is derived from the word “poly” meaning many, and the word “ticks” meaning blood sucking insects.

Book Review

Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth

By Reza Aslan

In the mid-summer of 2013, Fox News interviewer Lauren Green spent a painful 10 minutes interviewing Reza Aslan about his new book *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. Green just could not comprehend how a Muslim and non-Christian like Aslan, could possibly write a credible book about Jesus of Nazareth, the avatar of the Christian Church. She was too shortsighted to realize that a non-Christian scholar could more likely write an unbiased book about Jesus than many Christians who might be tempted to be subjective rather than objective. The end result of this agonizing Fox News interview was that *Zealot* immediately soared to the top of the *New York Times* non-fiction bestseller list and was soon on the bestseller list of numerous other news publications. It is most fortunate for religious scholar Aslan that he persevered through the interview, because without it, sales of his book would likely have been much lower.

It is not surprising that the book quickly became popular, particularly in the United States, where 46 percent of Americans still reject Darwinian evolution and believe that God created humans within the past 10,000 years. But I suspect fundamentalist Christians who read the book were disappointed because *Zealot* is not primarily about Jesus-the-Christ on whom Christianity is based, but about Jesus of Nazareth a fully human man. (After about three months, *Zealot* has fallen off most of the bestseller lists). The distinction between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus-the-Christ is critical because it is only a human Jesus, rather than the supernatural Christ, that can be assessed by historical means. Aslan uses the term zealot to describe Jesus as being, “a magnetic preacher who defied the authority of the Temple priesthood in Jerusalem with the goal of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.” Now 2000 years later, the Jesus-the-Christ, created by the apostle Paul and others, has utterly subsumed the Jesus of history, but Aslan expresses the hope that his book will direct renewed attention to the historical Jesus and, “reveal that Jesus of Nazareth – Jesus the man – is every bit as compelling, charismatic, and praiseworthy as Jesus-the-Christ.” According to Aslan, “he is in short, someone worth believing in.”

Zealot is a well-written scholarly book containing copious supporting notes. It is well worth reading by both believers and non-believers who have an interest in exploring the origin of Christianity. Among other things, it thoroughly documents the historical events that occurred in the eastern Mediterranean area during the first four centuries of the Common Era. It is virtually impossible to attempt to get as close as possible to the realities of the life of Jesus the man and the early propagation of Christianity, without a considerable amount of knowledge about the contemporary history.

It is noted that Aslan agrees with many other scholars who have characterized the historical human Jesus of Nazareth in a positive rather than negative light, when they describe him as a sagacious teacher with a credible message on how to live a righteous life, or in other words, he is a figure who merits being considered as a role model, worthy of adulation and emulation. But this popular favourable characterization goes against the contention presented in previous *Enlightenments* that Jesus was really a clever imposter who convinced a few of his followers that he was indeed the promised Messiah. It is my contention that the latter is closest to reality, and arguments to this effect have already been made in previous *Enlightenments*, so is there really any need to dwell on this any further? Perhaps there is because there is one aspect of the life of Jesus of Nazareth that is seldom mentioned by religious scholars or by Christians as a whole, and that is the thirty-year gap from the birth of Jesus until the assumption of his ministry, a gap of which we know almost nothing for certain. Aslan, however, offers a suggestion that is considered in the following discourse along with other possibilities. (DAH).

The Thirty Year Gap in the Life of Jesus of Nazareth

To begin, we can be confident that the virgin birth stories in Matthew and Luke should be ignored because they are fictitious accounts based on ancient myths designed to impart supernatural qualities to Jesus in order to promote the Christianity preached by the apostle Paul and others in the early churches. Also, most scholars discount the story in Luke's gospel about a twelve-year-old Jesus discussing learned questions of theology with the priests in the Temple.

Therefore, we must search outside the gospels. In his book *Zealot*, Aslan suggests that Jesus spent his twenties working as a carpenter helping to restore the nearby city of Sepphoris for Herod Antipas, after it had been pillaged by the Romans. Another scenario is put forward in a lengthy novel entitled *Joshua: The Odyssey of an Ordinary Man*, wherein the author Theckedath Matthew avers that as a teen, Jesus studied Greek philosophy under a tutor and then took off to Egypt, Rome and Athens in order to learn more about the ways of the world. On returning to Nazareth he married his fiancée Mary Magdalene and the pair then left for Babylon. Mary later returned to Nazareth while Jesus travels farther east to learn about the oriental religion of Hinduism, and the philosophical teaching of the Buddha and Confucius. After supposedly acquiring a prodigious amount of wisdom, he returns to Nazareth, where he finds he has a six-year-old son. He then embarks on his ministry at about age 30.

These are interesting scenarios, but I believe there is another that could be closer to reality. In a novel entitled *The Liars' Gospel*, Jewish author Naomi Alderman offers another possibility. This novel portrays a picture of Jesus as seen through the eyes of his mother Mary, Judas Iscariot, Caiaphas the high priest and the criminal Barabas. All of the four regard Jesus as fully human and an imposter who claims to be the promised Messiah, thus the title *The Liars' Gospel*. Jesus' mother Mary and the villagers of Nazareth notice he is a complaining petulant child, different from other children and wonder if he has gone out of his mind when he later chose to stay with the Essenes, "those men who live without women and refuse to defecate on the Sabbath." So where did the idea of this involvement with the Essenes come from? Although her book is a novel, Alderman draws on three sources to intersperse doses of reality throughout her book. The sources are the gospels, the historical accounts of Josephus, and the Talmud. It is from the Talmud that the implication of the Essenes is introduced.

The Talmuds, were written in the early centuries of the Common Era after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, and after the Bar Cochba uprising in 135 CE. They contain the opinions of thousands of rabbis on a variety of subjects including law, ethics, philosophy, customs, history, lore and many other topics. They are the basis for all codes of rabbinic law and are much quoted in other rabbinic literature. There are two Talmuds, the Jerusalem Yerushalmi and the Babylonian Bavli. The Bavli is sometimes considered by some scholars to be the preferred of the two, because the Babylonian rabbis had more freedom than those in Jerusalem who were under Roman rule. The writings are voluminous and it takes special effort to search through them to determine if there are any references to Jesus of Nazareth. But certain scholars have done just that, and the results have been documented by Peter Schafer, the Perelman Professor of Judaic Studies and director of the Program in Jewish Studies at Princeton University, in his book *Jesus in the Talmud* (2007). Little has been found in the Yerushalmi, but there are, in the Bavli, fragmentary and scattered references to Jesus of Nazareth and they do present a daring and counter-gospel to the New Testament. And in his book *Versus Israel*, the late French University of Strasbourg professor Marcel Simon, mentions many of the same findings as Schafer.

According to excerpts ferreted from the Bavli, Jesus was the illegitimate son of a harlot named Miriam and his biological father was a Roman soldier named Panthera. Later Miriam married the man known in the gospels as Joseph. The adult Jesus of Nazareth must have been a clever intelligent individual because

it is mentioned that he enrolled in a rabbinical school (possibly the Essenes) to become a rabbi. (This is a credible possibility because as the gospels reveal, Jesus was very knowledgeable concerning Old Testament scriptures). He is reported to have been expelled from the rabbinical school for various sexual misdemeanors, then traveled to Egypt and while there tried his hand at learning magical powers. He returned to Palestine full of conceit, claiming to be the promised Messiah, and the son of God and established a cult with twelve disciples and a number of followers. The Jewish authorities recognized Jesus as being an imposter and called for his execution. The Jews felt no sense of guilt for causing the execution of Jesus. They claimed he was not only an imposter, but also a blasphemer and an idolater and he got what he deserved. Rather than sitting in heaven at the right hand of God, it is postulated in the Bavli that Jesus is in the Netherworld sitting in boiling excrement as punishment for his deceptions.

Some scholars searching for the real historical Jesus refute all of the above scenarios because the references in the Bavli are at best obscure and were not recorded until several hundred years after the death of Jesus. Certainly none of this can be proved beyond a reasonable doubt, but there is one aspect that has a touch of reality and that is the existence of the Roman soldier Panthera. Tiberius Julius Abdes Panthera, was born in Sidon in Phoenicia in 22 BCE. He was an archer in the Roman army and was serving in Judea about the time of Jesus' conception. In 9 CE he was transferred to Germany and remained there in the army until his death in 40 CE. All of this information is taken from his tombstone that was discovered during railway construction in Bingerbrück Germany in 1859. Is it possible that the father of Jesus was this Roman soldier? Yes, it is possible and maybe even probable.

Unfortunately, however, much of the foregoing is speculative and unprovable material and cannot conclusively be used as ammunition to refute the supernatural stories in the gospels that the religious fundamentalists so fervently believe. Nevertheless, I have cited these apparent references to Jesus in the Bavli because they do come up from time to time and I think readers should be aware of them. On the other hand, I do think that we should take seriously the known fact that the Jewish authorities in the Jerusalem Temple recognized that Jesus was an imposter, as did the French curate Jean Meslier (1664-1729) in his *Testament* (See the October 2011 *Enlightenment*) and the German philosopher Herman Samuel Reimarus (1723-1789) in his *The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples*.

So who was Jesus of Nazareth? It is proposed that he was a clever imposter, who was able to convince a group of followers that he possessed supernatural powers, including the power to forgive the sins of those who believed in him and grant these believers everlasting life in heaven. After his death the apostle Paul successfully preached Jesus' message of "faith" and established the first Christian Churches based on the fallacious claims of this supposedly supernatural Jesus. Later the Church established creeds to describe and codify these fallacies that were purported to be gospel truth. Conclusion: The Christian Church, that has had so much influence on the western world, is based on the shaky foundation of a supernatural Jesus-the-Christ who was invented by Jesus of Nazareth himself. And the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed an imposter is strengthened by details found in the Babylonian Talmud concerning Jesus' activities during the "Thirty Year Gap." (DAH)

Strategies For Humanists

For at least a decade, the "new atheists" have been attempting to convince as many people as possible that the monotheistic God of the Jews, Christians and Muslims does not exist, but with limited success, and with no success among the fundamentalists. In fact the likes of the late Jerry Falwell and his ilk just get their dander up and call the new atheists agents of the devil. And surveys show that in the United States, atheists are the most hated group in society, even worse than homosexuals. So I submit that shouting from

the rooftops that God does not exist will do little to help solve the problems being created by the fundamentalists, problems that should be of great concern to humanists.

I have been wondering if rather than concentrating on the non-existence of God, why not attempt to show the speciousness of the supernatural Jesus-the-Christ that the fundamentalists revere so dearly? That is why I have done so much research to try and determine what really happened in first century Palestine and uncover as much as I could regarding the human Jesus of Nazareth and the founding of the Christian religion. Many of my findings have been covered in previous *Enlightenments*, and others are outlined above. In the end I conclude that the scenario portraying Jesus as a clever scheming imposter is more likely to be closer to reality than the story of the supernatural Jesus-the-Christ of the gospels. But in view of the limited success of the new atheists in changing the minds of the fundamentalists concerning the existence of God, I fear attacking their beloved Jesus would achieve very little and in fact would cause them to dig in their heels even more. Therefore, perhaps secularists need to examine other approaches that might increase secularity and decrease religiosity for the benefit of society. What might the tactic be? Well, I come back to the Scandinavians. They have shown that an effective route to a secular society with a minimum of religiosity, and complete separation of church and state, is the establishment of a democratic society led by competent leaders, and having adequate social safety nets and low income disparity. So we have come full circle. We are back to the critical matter of leadership. Unless the leaders in the United States Congress can get over their partisan obsessions, lessen the influence of big money, and show genuine concern for the middle class, there is little hope for improvement and, regrettably, the number of fundamentalist believers will possibly increase rather than decrease in that country.

It took thirty years of effort for the fundamentalists to obtain sufficient influence in the Congress and, among other things, ensure the election of George W. Bush. During this same period, humanists were content to hold interesting conferences, publish academic articles, bash religions and proclaim God does not exist. Only a few including Susan Jacoby, Sam Harris and David Niose, the current president of the American Humanist Association, have urged humanists to be more active politically and gradually succeed in getting more secularists into political office. This is the challenge that lies ahead. (DAH).

Avoiding The Stresses of Christmas Time

Many of us are now going through the stress of preparing for the Christmas season. Even though we may not believe in the Immaculate Conception or the virgin birth, the premises on which the holiday is based, we still get caught up in the frenzy of gift buying and do all the things that are expected of us. All the things that the clever merchandisers thrust upon us in order that they may wind up with a profitable year-end. Believers in the Christian miracle often complain that commercialism and the almighty dollar have taken away the true meaning of Christmas, minimizing genuine feelings of love, compassion, forgiveness and concern for fellow humans. This is all very true. So how do non-believers overcome crass commercialism and instill feelings of thankfulness for the good things we enjoy, while also being concerned for the well-being of everyone in our society?

Humanists who do not believe the birth stories portrayed in the gospels may elect to celebrate the winter Solstice instead of Christmas. Celebrate rebirth as the days begin to get longer and prepare for the brighter days ahead. Express thankfulness that we live in Canada, one of the best countries in the world, and make vows to do whatever is necessary to maintain and increase separation of church and state while being mindful of the less fortunate. Confine gift giving to children so that we may observe the joy on their faces as they open presents on Solstice morning, but tell them the presents came from loving parents, relatives and friends, rather than from Santa Claus. This will avoid the stress of buying gifts for adults. Instead, offer the free gifts of love, friendship and understanding, to all our adult acquaintances. (DAH).