



The Enlightenment



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On the Environment, On Books, and On Bridging the Gap

First: On the Environment

Who's Minding the Store?

By Goldwin Emerson

Seventy-five years ago it was common, in rural areas, to have a general store serving the needs of the community. Typically, the store was owned and operated by a husband and wife who knew each of their customers. The general store stocked basic goods that farmers themselves were unable to produce, but it was more than a place to buy things. It was a meeting place where news could be shared or a letter mailed from the small post office in a back corner of the store. It was a place to visit with neighbours, to discuss the weather or the price of cattle or grain or to display posters announcing local auction sales. In another corner of the store there might be a barber's chair surrounded by coils of fencing wire or cans of coal oil or binder twine and a few kegs of nails.

Most of the produce would be neatly stored on shelves behind wooden counters appearing to separate the storekeeper from the customer. These stores were not the current self-serve variety. In fact, the wooden counter produced the opposite effect. To purchase anything, the customer enjoyed the full attention of the storekeeper.

But the storekeeper did more than simply receive money from the customers. He, or she, needed to have in mind the specific needs of the customers. In March, it was important to have an adequate supply of wire and fencing staples so farmers could repair the winter damage. In late August, the prudent storekeeper stocked up on pencils, a few rulers and scribblers, and some children's shoes, since the summer of barefooted freedom was drawing to a close. As November approached, it was wise to have for sale, a few extra pairs of long underwear. In other words, the successful "minder of the store" had to look ahead and anticipate the community's needs.

Now I invite you to imagine a larger store existing in our present time. This store is really huge. It is called the "global" store. Instead of serving a small rural community, it serves everyone on this planet. The global store has vast quantities of goods within it. It contains a lot of fresh water, though not as much as it had seventy-five years ago. *(Continued on page 3)*

President's Remarks

In the past, evolutionary theorists tended to view humans as essentially selfish and competitive. In this traditional view, it's a dog-eat-dog world in which the most self-centred and ruthless individuals are most likely to survive and reproduce. More recently, evolutionists have begun to place more emphasis on the social nature of humans, noting that we evolved in the context of small tribal groups that provided mutual protection, support, and benefit to their members. In this view, abilities to get along with others, to form supportive alliances, and to resolve conflict are also important survival skills. Although we can at times be cruel and egotistical, a capacity for compassion, altruism, co-operation, and empathy is also a part of our human nature. As Jonathan Haidt puts it, in his book *The Righteous Mind*, humans are "groupish" as well as selfish. To survive and thrive, we need to be part of a larger group of people who share a common worldview and care for one another. This is why religions have always been such an important part of all cultures, and it also explains why people become such devoted fans of their favorite sports teams. As an alternative to religion, Humanism can also offer its members a shared sense of community. In addition to providing for the intellectual needs of our members through interesting monthly speakers and lively discussion, we need to provide for their social and emotional needs as well. In this spirit, I look forward to seeing all of you at the annual HALA summer picnic on July 15. This year the picnic will be at the home of Ellie and Reinhardt Schmoll in Woodstock. (A separate notice with time and directions has been sent out). This will be an opportunity for us to get to know one another better, to have fun together, and to deepen our sense of community ~ 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 July 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. Please note: We reserve the right to edit and publish articles at our discretion.

Visit our web site at www.humanists-london.org

New members are welcome. Contact Membership Secretary, Walter Heywood (519) 434-9237 e-mail wjheywood@yahoo.ca Membership fees are listed below.

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(Who's Minding the Store Continued)

It has clean air, though in Southwestern Ontario not as much as in the rest of our province. The global store has lots of natural resources, though fewer than it had decades ago. The global store has over six billion customers and the number is increasing daily. Every day all of them come to shop because there is only one such store. Although it is the only store, it is quite convenient. It serves so many people that we don't get to know everyone who takes supplies from it. But some people think that's good. We get what we want, and we don't take time to listen to other people's problems.

Actually, we have *more* of some things than we used to have. We have *more* global warming. This addition contributes *more* erratic weather patterns, including *more* floods and *more* droughts as well as deserts in *more* countries than previously. Today, one person out of every seven is starving. We still have quite a few international agreements to help six billion people get along, but now we have *more* unilateral action and *more* wars than previously. In fact, the most powerful countries are working unilaterally to shape the rest of the world in their own image. Other unilateral actions include rejection of land mine treaties, rejection of World Court decisions, and refusal to agree to the rejection of atomic bombs as first strike weapon.

So the question arises as to who is minding the global store? Where are our leaders who will think in global terms? I have come to believe that responsibility for the global store rests on our own shoulders. The problems of our world, whether war, poverty, starvation, pollution, overpopulation, illiteracy or lack of health care emerge as our own, human-made problems that, in the end, must be dealt with by our own human-made solutions, including a generous and caring world view.

Second: On Books

Every weekend I read the non-fiction list of bestseller books in the *Globe and Mail* and the *New York Times*. During the last couple of years there were three books that kept regularly appearing at various levels on these lists. They are: *The Book Of Awesome* by Canadian Neil Pasricha, 190 pages published in 2010; *Heaven is for Real* by Todd Burpo with Lynn Vincent, 157 pages published in 2010; and *Sh*t My Dad Says* by Justin Halpern, 158 pages also published in 2010. Having seen these books on the lists for such an extended period, my curiosity got the better of me and I ordered all three from Amazon in order to get some idea about the genres of literature that the general public is reading. I got a few surprises.

The Book Of Awesome

Before starting to read this book, I imagined and hoped, that it would contain accounts of phenomena and experiences that could elicit profound feelings of awe and wonder. I anticipated things such as the wonders of nature, the miracle of life itself, falling in love, the birth of a child, a Mozart symphony, a Picasso painting, a majestic cathedral, and walking in the woods. Instead, the book is about the simple things in life and sort of trivializes the word awesome, but as we know, the word is being overused more and more in general conversations.

The premise of the book is that it is easy to forget the things that make us smile. With the 24/7 news cycle reporting that the polar ice caps are melting, hurricanes are swirling in the seas, wars are heating up around the world, and the job market is in the deep freeze, it is tempting to feel the world *is* falling apart. *The Book Of Awesome* reminds us that many of the best things in life are free and that we often overlook the little things that make us smile. There are, to name a

few, things like the aroma wafting from a bakery, hitting a series of green lights in a row, waking up and realizing it is Saturday, finding money in your pocket, fixing electronics by smacking them, wearing underwear just out of the dryer, illegal naps, having a whole row to yourself on a plane, when the socks from the dryer match up perfectly, finding your keys after seemingly looking forever, getting gas before the price goes up, the smell of freshly cut grass, getting served breakfast in bed, the smell and sound of a campfire, and returning to your comfortable bed after visiting the bathroom in the middle of the night.

The last heading in the book is, "Remembering how lucky we are to be here right now." It reminds us that each one of us is the final result of the mating of our ancestors over countless generations and that we should be in awe of the fact that we even exist, and are alive to enjoy the many pleasures, simple though they may be, that are available to us. Mention is also made of the vastness of the universe, and how lucky we are to be only an infinitely small part of this expanding cosmos. Except at the very end, this is not a book that expounds on profound topics, but with all the woes prevalent in today's world, it provides some sense of relief and encourages the reader to find pleasure in the simple things of life. Judging by the popularity of *The Book Of Awesome*, there are a great many readers who find this simple and uncomplicated approach appealing. And now there is a sequel, *The Book of (Even More) Awesome*.

Heaven is for Real

This book relates an incredible story. Todd Burpo is a pastor of Crossroads Wesleyan Church in the village of Imperial, Nebraska. His wife Sonja works as office manager at a realty office. They also have an overhead garage door business to supplement their modest incomes. They have three children, a daughter Cassie and two sons Colton and Colby. Back in March 2003, while on a family trip, three-year-old Colton developed a fever that was diagnosed as stomach flu. When the fever did not subside, the family checked Colton into a hospital in North Platte Nebraska where it was determined he had a ruptured appendix. He was operated on immediately and he survived the operation, but then suffered a relapse and the doctors had to go in again and clean up an abscess. There was a time when it became touch and go as to whether Colton would pull through, but the people in the Wesleyan Church organized a prayer brigade and prayers were offered for Colton's recovery. He survived and of course the prayers were credited with being a significant factor in his recovery.

On the 2003 Fourth of July holiday, the Burpo family set out to visit relatives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Their route took them through North Platte, Nebraska, where they stopped for gas a few blocks from the hospital where Colton was operated on for his ruptured appendix a few months earlier. Sonja asked Colton if he remembered the hospital and he replied, "yes mommy, I remember; that is where the angels sang to me, they sang 'Jesus Loves Me' and 'Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho'." Colton went on to relate how he sat in the lap of Jesus and although he was never clinically dead, he says he had an out of body experience looking down on his parents praying for him. During the next year or so, Todd Burpo would encourage Colton to talk, without trying to lead him on, about what he experienced and what he saw during the time he was anesthetized. Here are some of the things Colton reportedly revealed about his experiences during the three minutes he says he was in heaven:

- Jesus told Colton he had a cousin who baptized him. (John the Baptist)
- Jesus had 'markers' on his hands and feet. He wore white but had a purple sash. His hair was brown. His eyes were so pretty. He had this gold thing on his head.

- Everybody in heaven has wings, everyone except Jesus.
- All the people have a light above their head. It never gets dark in heaven.
- No one is old in heaven. Most are middle aged, but there are a lot of kids. Jesus really loves kids. Nobody wears glasses.
- God's throne is very big. Jesus' throne is on the right next to his Dad's. The angel Gabriel's throne is on the left. Colton described God as 'kind of blue,' very indistinct.
- Colton said he met his grandfather, who he never saw in person on earth.
- Angels carry swords so they can keep Satan out of heaven.
- There is going to be a war and the good people will fight against Satan. Jesus wins the war and throws Satan into hell.

And there is more, but the above is enough to indicate the sort of picture of heaven that Colton supposedly painted for his dad. It is worth noting that for every one of Colton's descriptions, Todd Burpo cites a verse of scripture that corresponds almost exactly to everything Colton describes. In all there are thirty-two such references. This degree of correspondence indicates to me that the book is a hoax. Just as the prophecies fulfilled in the New Testament were contrived to correspond to the prophecies in the Old Testament, Todd Burpo started with the scriptures and made Colton's supposed conceptions of heaven correspond to the Biblical accounts. The book is obviously a fabrication and it is worth noting that the co-author is Lynn Vincent, the very person who co-authored Sarah Palin's book *Going Rogue: An American Life*. If you Google "Heaven is for Real – Hoax," a number of entries come up that strongly suggest that the book is a hoax.

But if you Google "Heaven is for Real" without the word hoax, many entries come up supporting the conclusions in the book. On April Fools day 2012, Heaven is for Real was at number three on the bestseller non-fiction list in the *New York Times*, and it had been on this list for sixty-one weeks. The week before, it was number one. And lo and behold, it was number one on the *Globe and Mail* list on April 14th 2012. How does one account for the tremendous popularity of this book that should be on the fiction, not the non-fiction, lists? Well, this is just another indication and substantiation of just how religious the American, and I guess to a lesser extent Canadian, societies are. There are millions and millions of people who still not only honestly believe in supernatural phenomena, but also apparently get considerable comfort from their beliefs. It will be a significant amount of time before our two societies are predominately secular, and unfortunately the current depressing economic conditions may well lengthen this period as people look to religions for some form of support. Nevertheless, as Humanists, we need to keep trying to hasten the trend to a more secular society.

Sh*t My Dad Says

At the outset, this book requires an explanation of what it is all about. Justin Halpern was a screenwriter in Los Angeles who planned to move back to his hometown of San Diego and live with his girlfriend when a change in jobs allowed him to do so. His girlfriend did not go along with this arrangement and she decided it was time to end the relationship. Justin then approached his parents, at age twenty-eight, to see if he could move back home and they readily agreed. Justin's mother works as a lawyer for a non-profit organization. His seventy-three-year-old father is retired after a career as a doctor engaged in cancer research employing nuclear medicine techniques at the University of California – San Diego. His mother was raised as an Italian Catholic and his father is of Jewish extraction, but Justin was raised with two half brothers in a totally secular environment.

After moving back home, Justin was once again exposed to the blunt, colourful, profane language used by his father, language not expected to be used by a well educated doctor. But, if Justin is not exaggerating, Sam Halpern did, in fact, use the whole gamut of swear words to very effectively get his points across, often using humourous philosophical idioms. On the encouragement of a friend, Justin started posting some of his father's more humourous expressions on Twitter to a few other friends. To his surprise, his quotes immediately became very popular. Soon, there were over a million followers on Twitter and after more encouragement, Justin decided to record many of his father's utterances in a book using the unlikely, but descriptive, title *Sh*t My Dad Says*.

The book consists of chapters with titles like: "A Man's House is His House; Do Not Be a Goddamned Liar; It's Important to Know the Value of a Dollar; Not Everyone's Balls Should Be Busted; Always Put Your Best Foot Forward; You Have to Believe You're Worth a Damn; At the End of the Day, at Least You Have Family; You have to Listen, and Don't Ignore What You Hear; Sometimes It's Nice when People You Love Need You," and several more. Each chapter ends with a relevant selection of one-liners that his dad has uttered at one time or another, all loaded with a string of expletives, but often offering sound, logical advice on how to live well.

A chapter worth commenting on is "Focus on Living, Dying is the Easy Part." Although Justin was raised in a secular home, for some reason, he developed a fear of death, and he longed for some form of comfort to help allay these fears. One day, he asked his father what he thinks happens after death. His father replied, "Well it's nothingness for eternity. Nothingness, you know. Nothing. Like, you can't even describe it because it's not anything. I don't know if that makes you feel better, just picture infinite darkness, no sound, no nothing. How's that?"

This did not allay Justin's fears and he asked, "How do you know that? It's just your opinion."

"Nope. Not my opinion. That's what happens. Fact. Do you know the great part about infinity? It is never over, you, your body, the energy inside it, it all goes somewhere, even after you die it is never gone."

"So you're saying you think we live forever? Like, ghosts and all that stuff?" Justin implored.

"No, for God's sake. You need to take a friggin science course or something. What I am trying to say is that's what makes you up, it's always been around, and always will be around. So really the only thing you should worry about is the part you're at right now. Where you got a body and a head and all that stuff. Just worry about living, dying is the easy part."

Obviously this is not a book for anyone who is offended by course language, but if you can stand the continuous use of expletives, it is a hilariously funny read, interspersed with philosophical wisdom on how to live contentedly. Judging by its longevity on bestseller lists, it has attracted a lot of readers. I thoroughly enjoyed laughing all the way to the end.

Third: Attempting to Bridge the Gap

Between 2004 and 2007, four books were published by four famous atheists. The books were as follows: *The End of Faith: Terror, and the Future of Reason* by Sam Harris; *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins; *Breaking the Spell* by Daniel Dennett; and *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* by Christopher Hitchens. Before long, these men became known

as “The Four Horsemen” in humanist circles and elsewhere. All these individuals are, or were, quite prominent in their respective fields; Harris in neuroscience, Dawkins in biology, Dennett in philosophy, and Hitchens in journalism, but now they are also widely known for expounding on the non-existence of God and on the harms caused by religions.

These books have served a useful purpose by informing the English-speaking world that traditional religious beliefs are being seriously questioned because of lack of logic and credibility. In addition, the books document how religions have caused untold harm in the past and that they are still causing major problems in today’s world. As a means of aiding these authors in the promotion of their atheistic thinking, some humanist organizations have attempted to make the general public more aware of their message by placing signs on buses and elsewhere, proclaiming that God does not exist. Others, however, have questioned the value of these tactics noting that evangelicals immediately swing into action and erect counter signs asserting that God does, in fact, exist; the Bible says so. Therefore, it would seem that some other approach is required in order for the actions of humanists and other like-minded individuals to make a meaningful contribution toward improving our societies. It is very near impossible to convince devout believers that there is no God, and a significant number of people just don’t care anyway, so why bother? Putting up signs is probably a waste of money that could be better spent elsewhere.

Recognizing that the “new atheists” (the term horsemen is being used less frequently) have started the ball rolling, and are making a notable contribution to the humanist cause by “getting the word out there,” more than a few humanists are suggesting that something more is required. In the April 2012 *Enlightenment*, HALA President Rod Martin, in an article entitled “Faith, Reason and Atheism,” talks about “bashers and builders,” suggesting that in addition to “getting the word out there” there is a real need to build a feasible and better alternative to what is being bashed. But what is this alternative? Surely the alternative is a peaceful, prosperous and stress free secular society where religions fade into the background. The question immediately becomes, how can we bridge the gap from where we are now, to where we want to be? The remainder of this article attempts to deal with the challenge of how.

A noted humanist who promotes the building, not bashing, approach, is Greg Epstein, the Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University and author of the book *Good Without God*. He admires the new atheists because they seek to right the religious wrongs of our time, but he says atheism goes astray when it simply says there is no God, no heaven and no hell; there is just science. He goes on to say, “The new atheists seem to be cut off from emotion, from intuition and a spirit of generosity toward those who see the world differently. Science can teach us a great deal, but science won’t come and visit us in the hospital.” Epstein is adamant that humanists should not just work alone, but should also work alongside those of like mind and even alongside religious people if there is a common worthwhile cause. He ends his book by stating that humanists must not be known only for denying the existence of God; they must also be known for their constructive actions.

Taking the approach of building a well-functioning secular society, the afore-mentioned philosopher Daniel Dennett has suggested that humanists consider looking inside the “tool shed” of religions, in order to ferret out the good things that humanists might use to their advantage. The good qualities he mentions are a strong sense of community, outreach work to help the underprivileged, and buildings. Dennett notes that most humanist organizations do not own a building in which to meet regularly and he suggests that there are many abandoned

churches available. Perhaps surprisingly, Dennett also mentions music. There is a wealth of great Christian music available, and although the words may make a humanist cringe, many of the tunes are spellbinding. Dennett proposes that humanists should create their own compendium of music, but just where and when it might be used is not clear.

Also looking to religion for helpful “tools” is Alain de Botton, author of *Religion for Atheists*. In this book, de Botton claims the real issue is not whether God exists, but where to take the argument once it is decided that he or she does not exist. The premise of the book is that it must be possible to remain a committed atheist and at the same time find religion sporadically useful, interesting and consoling – and be curious as to the possibilities of importing religious ideas and practices into the secular realm.

Religion for Atheists consists of ten essays on the subjects of Wisdom Without Doctrine, Community, Kindness, Education, Tenderness, Pessimism, Perspective, Art, Architecture, and Institutions, all good secular subjects. But de Botton is only partially successful in capturing the attributes of religion that humanists might want to grasp onto. The longest and perhaps most valuable essays are in the important areas of education and sense of community. In other areas, his ideas are less than realistic or practical. For example, in the architecture essay he suggests that, rather than religious temples, there could be temples to kindness, to serenity, to forgiveness, to knowledge and even to perspectives. A little over the top, n'est-ce pas? *New York Times* critic David Brooks put it this way: “The atheists know what they don't believe in, but they don't seem to realize what they don't feel. This gap has existed for centuries, and de Botton doesn't fill it.”

So how do we bridge the gap? How do we instill in non-believers the awe, wonder and contentment that believers claim they receive from their religion? Well, for the long term, I think we must begin with the education of children, teaching them in their formative years about the wonders of nature, science, and the arts. It is in the early years that religions start to instill highly questionable supernatural concepts into the minds of children. Instead, we need to encourage children to look around and observe the wonders of the physical natural world, as well as the plants and animals therein, and impress upon them how they themselves are living miracles that originated in their mothers wombs. Children should also be encouraged to be in awe of the creativity of human beings in the arts, sciences and technology. They will quickly learn how to use all the latest electronic gadgets, but they should also be encouraged to acquire some sense of the expertise required to invent and produce these electronic wonders that, only a few years ago, were considered to be in the realm of science fiction. Of course all this will have to be imparted at levels appropriate to the age of the child. Rather than taking it all for granted, if a sense of awe and appreciation of all that is available, is instilled early and is maintained into teenage years, then perhaps - just perhaps - there will not be as much temptation to get into the drug scene. In any case, just not being exposed to supernatural phenomena should help children get started on the right track, and today there are encouraging signs that more and more young people are having little interest in religion or in the religious message. Children must also, of course, be encouraged to acquire education in the fields of their choices, and also be responsible citizens, not a drain on society.

Teaching children about the realities and wonders of the secular world will, I believe, be a useful long-term strategy in helping to bridge the gap, but what about the shorter term? Today we are hearing more and more about humanism lacking a sense of community. Now why is this important? Perhaps looking at the Introduction to Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*, will help provide an answer. The book is mainly about determining the skills and characteristics that go

into the making of ultra-successful people like The Beatles, Wayne Gretzky and Bill Gates. But before getting into the general theme of the book, the Introduction, entitled *The Roseto Mystery*, deals with community. Roseto is a small town in Pennsylvania that in the 1950s had a population of less than two thousand. Most residents were descendents of immigrants who hailed from the town of Roseto in Italy. While visiting the area in the late fifties, Dr. Stewart Wolf learned from the local doctor that rarely does anyone from Roseto, under age sixty-five, suffer from heart disease, and the incidences of other diseases were low as well. People just died of old age. Wolf, along with sociologist John Bruhn, set out to find the reason these conditions prevailed by interviewing all adults in the town and taking blood samples. After ruling out factors including diet, exercise, environment and genetics, they concluded the reason was the community atmosphere unique to Roseto. They observed three generations living under one roof, people sitting on their porches talking to each other, and greeting each other on the street. It was magical. They also observed people contentedly going to mass on Sunday and the abundance of civic organizations. They also noted that the well-to-do did not flaunt their fortune, but helped the less successful to minimize their failures.

The point in relating the Roseto story is not to suggest that we can or should attempt to establish similar communities in the twenty-first century. This would hardly be possible. We don't have many front porches and many small towns either get larger or disappear. The point is that a strong sense of community, or belonging has, in the past, been a very real and absolutely necessary requirement for good health and minimizing stress in people's lives. How do we capture this environment in a secular world? This is the daunting challenge we face.

In Jonathan Haidt's recent book *The Righteous Mind – Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, there is a chapter entitled "Religion is a Team Sport," in which the sense of community provided by religions is front and centre. Haidt cites a survey by political scientists Robert Putnam and David Campbell who attempted to determine what features of their religion the participants felt were most important. The results showed that supernatural beliefs and religious practices mattered very little. The only thing that was reliably and powerfully associated with the moral benefits of religion was, "how enmeshed people were in relationships with their co-religionists. It is religious belongingness that matters for neighbourliness, not religious beliefs. It is the friendships and group activities carried out within a moral matrix emphasizing selflessness, that will bring out the best in people." This agrees with my own observations that mainline churches are basically social clubs, with most members living morally and often helping the needy, but it is almost impossible to engage anyone in an intelligent conversation about beliefs. They just don't care and are often uncomfortable discussing these matters. Therefore, instead of trumpeting the non-existence of God and bashing today's religions, the new atheists need to suggest ways to instill a strong sense of community in a secular society. Admittedly this is not easy.

So what can substitute for this close sense of community in today's world where, in many Western countries, life is considerably more stressful for many than was the case in the 1950s? If humanists agree that a secular society with low religiosity is superior to a society with a high or moderate degree of religiosity, how can stress levels be minimized if people are unable to fall back on their religion or three-generation families for comfort or assistance? A partial answer is prosperity. Somehow, it is necessary to revive and reestablish a large prosperous middle class by providing productive, well-paid jobs in order to minimizing the gap between the earnings of the well-off and the others. This is a tall order and in view of the corporate greed existing today, solutions are elusive. It may take a world calamity, such as drought and famine caused by climate change, to sort things out, but let's hope we come to our senses before this happens. In

the meantime, it would seem that an important way humanist organizations can help, in the short run, is to become politically active in supporting the issues that will benefit the middle class and others, perhaps even by participating in occupying movements. In any case, as Greg Epstein and others have said, it will take infinitely more action than just proclaiming there is no God. And as Rod Martin has said, we must be builders.

Those of us who grew up during the last century have to realize that things will never be the same. The rapid and incredible changes in technology will not allow it. If we look around us it is evident that young people are not being enticed into joining the traditional community organizations. Membership is declining in mainline churches, and as would be expected, in veteran's organizations, and many other community organizations are looking for members with mixed results. Perhaps the social media of Face Book, YouTube and Twitter will help provide a sense of community that will satisfy the young of today and citizens of the future, but it is too soon to tell. Hopefully, instilling sound, secular moral and ethical principles into the minds of the young, and taking actions that will provide prosperity for the masses, will help relieve stress levels and make the world a better place. We do know that there are prosperous and peaceful secular societies in northern Europe that seem to have found the right combination of circumstances to enable the living of meaningful, satisfying lives, and they may well be worthy of emulation. But can they maintain this prosperity in the long term? We hope so, but as we know, some of them have immigration problems to deal with.

So have we proposed practical ways of helping to close the gap and hasten the arrival of a more secular stress free society with less religiosity, where citizens genuinely feel they are experiencing the sense of community formerly provided by religions? Realizing that sure-fire solutions are not easy to come by, perhaps we have closed the gap just a little. Suggestions for closing it more are welcome. (DAH).

A Few Quotes

Nothing is so firmly believed as what is least known. -Michel de Montaigne, (1533-1592)

Prayers are to men as dolls are to children. They are not without use and comfort, but it is not easy to take them very seriously. -Samuel Butler, poet (1612-1680)

There are two things that are infinite. One is the universe and the other is human stupidity; and I am not sure about the universe. – Albert Einstein.

Which is it: is man one of God's blunders, or is God one of man's blunders? - Friedrich Nietzsche.

There is no cure for birth and death, save to enjoy the interval – Mark Twain.

If God does exist, he must be an underachiever. - Woody Allen.

There is in every village a torch: the teacher; and an extinguisher: the clergyman. – Victor Hugo.

A great conductor is credited with saying: "If you have Mozart, you don't need God."

Those who can make you believe absurdities can also make you commit atrocities – Voltaire.