



December

2010

The Humanists of Ft Worth meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist building 901 Page Ave at 7 PM



From The Chair

Reservations indicate our December 8 party/meeting will ring an attendance bell to equal

the season's best pealing. If you haven't made yours now is the time.

We'll have delicious food, wine or drink of your choice, great entertainment through some dvd moments of George Carlin, live music and song from Jeff Rodriguez and Caroline Nixon, a sing-a-long of holiday favorites, and more fun than you can imagine.

Call Joy Counts at 817-446-4696 or email trice932@yahoo.com to reserve your participation in one fine evening.

Dick

And God said to Noah: Don't fret about global warming

Back in March 2009, when Nancy Pelosi ruled the House of Representatives with an iron fist, one could chuckle at Republicans who came to committee hearings quoting scripture as the rationale for their positions on energy policy.

But now, when one of those very same Republicans are [in the running for the chairmanship of the House Energy and Commerce committee](#), it just doesn't seem so funny.

Juan Cole [does us the unpleasant service](#) of bringing back to life the comments of John Shimkus, R-III., a year and a half ago.

Shimkus starts by quoting Genesis 8, Verses 21 and 22, in which God makes Noah a promise. Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though all inclinations of his heart are evil from childhood and never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done.

As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease.

Shimkus continues: "I believe that is the infallible word of God, and that's the way it is going to be for his creation... The earth will end only when God declares its time to be over. Man will not destroy this earth. This earth will not be destroyed by a flood."

I'm glad that John Shimkus can sleep at night, faithful that that God's word is "infallible, unchanging, perfect." But for those of us who are less confident in humanity's ability to keep from massively screwing up, the thought that the Bible will be determining government energy policy is massively ulcer-inducing.



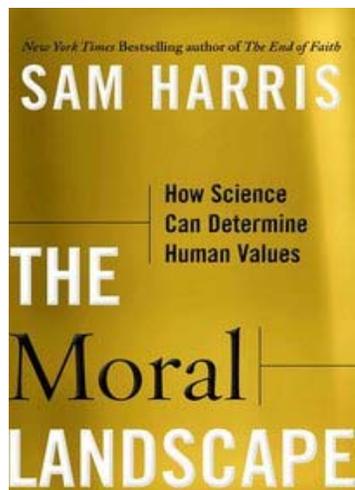
A Conversation with Sam Harris on Science and Morality - The Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard

Sam Harris's first book, *The End of Faith*, ignited a worldwide debate about the validity of religion. In the aftermath, Harris discovered that most people—from religious fundamentalists to non-believing scientists—agree on one point: Science has nothing to say on the subject of human values. Indeed, our failure to address questions of meaning and morality through science has now become the most common justification for religious faith. It is also the primary reason why so many secularists and religious moderates feel obligated to “respect” the hardened superstitions of their more devout neighbors.

In this explosive new book, Sam Harris tears down the wall between scientific facts and human values, arguing that most people are simply mistaken about the relationship between morality and the rest of human knowledge. Harris urges us to think about morality in terms of human and animal well-being, viewing the experiences of conscious creatures as peaks and valleys on a “moral landscape.” Because there are definite facts to be known about where we fall on this landscape, Harris foresees a time when science will no longer limit itself to merely describing what people do in the name of “morality”; in principle, science should be able to tell us what we ought to do to live the best lives possible.

Bringing a fresh perspective to age-old questions of right and wrong, and good and evil, Harris demonstrates that we already know enough about the human brain and its relationship to events in the world to say that there are right and wrong answers to the most pressing questions of human life. Because such answers exist, moral relativism is simply false—and comes at increasing cost to humanity. And the intrusions of religion into the sphere of human values can be finally repelled: for just as there is no such thing as Christian physics or Muslim algebra, there can be no Christian or Muslim morality.

Using his expertise in philosophy and neuroscience, along with his experience on the front lines of our “culture wars,” Harris delivers a game-changing book about the future of science and about the real basis of human cooperation.



Prominent Grapevine pastor linked to luxury From WFAA TV

Not long ago, the Fellowship Church in Grapevine was one of the largest and fastest-growing churches in the nation.

Its pastor, Ed Young, was making national headlines by encouraging married couples to have more sex.

But since that time, sources say membership has waned and some say Pastor Young may have lost his way — putting himself and secrecy over God.

He's splashy and hip; his message contemporary and cool. His marketing is tops in the world of mega-evangelism, making huge waves with his sermon in 2008 titled "Seven Days of Sex."

But in the past few months, it's not theology but physics that may be impacting Young. Namely: What goes up must come down.

One former staff member who says he was close to Young but wishes not to be identified, described it this way: "The lack of accountability. The lavish lifestyle that keeps increasing, while the attendance keeps decreasing."

Over the past few weeks, News 8 has been in contact with a number of individuals who were once close to Young at his massive Fellowship Church in Grapevine, disturbed by his direction and treatment of staff.

Young recently fired his chief financial officer and replaced him with his personal attorney, business partner and fishing buddy, Dennis Brewer Jr.

With Brewer's help and a complex series of business creations and transactions, Young is now jetting around the country in a French-made Falcon 50 private jet; estimated value, \$8.4 million.

Records obtained by News 8 indicate Fellowship Church became the operator of the jet in March of 2007. News 8 discovered the jet parked in a hangar at Alliance Airport north of Fort Worth, tucked away where only a select few can see it.

Those who hear him preach every Sunday have never been told about the aircraft.

"The staff members are told that there is no plane, and several staff members who have actually been on the plane have denied that there is a plane," said the former employee source.

Young, who declined an on-camera interview, told News 8 through a spokesman he "travels globally offering messages of inspiration and transformation to his peers and other pastors."

He makes no mention of traveling in a personal jet.

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But FAA records show that as soon as Young took possession of the jet in 2007, the aircraft logged a week-long trip to the Bahamas.

One month later, Young's jet logged a six-day trip to Chetumal, Mexico, also known as the gateway to Belize.

But it's not just the jet and the international travel the Young keeps out of sight.

News 8 has also learned that Young's 10,000 square foot, \$1.5 million estate on Lake Grapevine is not listed on the tax rolls in his name, but rather in the name of "Palometa Revocable Trust."

Records show that Young was paid \$240,000 a year as a parsonage allowance; that's in addition what sources say is a \$1 million yearly pastor's salary.

Young declined to discuss his salary and compensation with News 8, but his spokesman said the pastor's pay "is governed without his participation by an Independent Compensation Committee, relying on outside consultation with knowledgeable and experienced church leaders."

News 8 has also learned that in 2007, Young sold the intellectual property of Fellowship Church's marketing Web site, CreativePastors. He also sold the church's membership mailing list to a newly-formed, for-profit company called EY Publishing.

Today, CreativePastors.com is used by the Youngs to sell his sermons and books for profit.

"When did the intellectual property, when did the preaching and the Bible notes and the books become intellectual property for the pastor?" asked Ole Anthony of the Trinity Foundation in Dallas. "That's the property of the church."

Anthony says he and his Trinity Foundation investigative team have been monitoring Ed Young for the past three years. He believes Young has fallen into the same trap as many other televangelists he has investigated over the years.

"But now he's just bought in to greed in the name of God," Anthony said. "They are sanctifying greed, and that's what's so evil."

In the past few years, Young and his attorney, Dennis Brewer Jr., have created a number of for-profit companies generating money apart from Fellowship Church, including: Creative Pastors, CreativePastors.com, Creality Enterprises, Creality Publishing, EY Publishing, Ed Young Resources and UOI Resources.

All the businesses list the fifth floor of Dennis Brewer's law office in Las Colinas as their office address.

But the resources used to generate the profits come, in part, from the not-for-profit Fellowship Church. For example, Ed's favorite sermons that were delivered at the church.

SMU law professor Wayne Shaw is a former IRS agent who specializes in tax law. He says it's not unusual for pastors to accrue wealth from church resources, but it must be disclosed and separate from any for-profit business.

"They've been given a very special duty, and they get benefits for getting that special duty, such as tax exemptions, charitable contribution deductions," Shaw said. "I think it's owed to the public that there is transparency that the public sees that there is not something bad going on."

According to Young's spokesman, Larry Ross, "any transactions between the senior pastor and the church are conducted at arms-length with full disclosure to and approval by the board."

No one is accusing Young of breaking any laws, but perhaps he is violating the covenant of honesty with his congregation.

When we asked Young specifically if he has a personal jet, his spokesman told us only that he travels using commercial, charter and leased aircraft, and that he reimburses the church for any personal trips.

Young's spokesman also told News 8 his board approves all spending decisions, and their financial books are audited by an outside accounting firm.

Sure it is! (Ed comment)

Atheist Ministers Struggle With Leading the Faithful Reported by Dan Harris on ABC News

"I am an atheist," says "Jack," a Southern Baptist with more than 20 years in ministry.

"I live out my life as if there is no God," says "Adam," who is part of the pastoral staff of a small evangelical church in the Bible Belt.

The two, who asked that their real identities be protected, are pastors who have lost their faith. And these two men, who have built their careers and lives around faith, say they now feel trapped, living a lie.

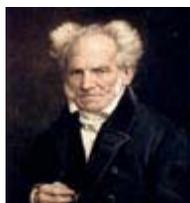
"I spent the majority of my life believing and pursuing this religious faith, Christianity," Jack said. "And to get to this point in my life, I just don't feel like I believe anymore."

"The more I read the Bible, the more questions I had," Jack said. "The more things didn't make sense to me -- what it said - - and the more things didn't add up."

Jack said that 10 years ago, he started to feel his faith slipping away. He grew bothered by inconsistencies regarding the last days of Jesus' life, what he described as the improbability of stories like "Noah's Ark" and by attitudes expressed in the Bible regarding women and their place in the world.

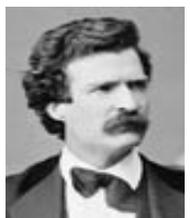
"Reading the Bible is what led me not to believe in God," he said. **(This article was**

What others have said



Arthur Schopenhauer

"Religion is the masterpiece of the art of animal training, for it trains people as to how they shall think."



Mark Twain

"Satan hasn't a single salaried helper; the Opposition employ a million."

"A man is accepted into church for what he believes--and turned out for what he knows."



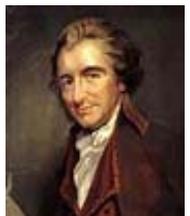
H L Menckhen

"We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect his theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart."



Bishop John S Spong

"The God understood as a father figure, who guided ultimate personal decisions, answered our prayers, and promised rewards and punishment based upon our behavior was not designed to call anyone into maturity."



Thomas Paine

"All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit."



Friedrich Nietzsche

"The Christian resolution to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad."



Michel de Montaigne

"Man is certainly stark mad: he cannot make a worm, yet he will make gods by the dozen."

Visiting Spain, Pope Sees Rise of Antichurch Sentiment Nov 7, 2010

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, Spain (AP) — [Pope Benedict XVI](#) on Saturday strongly criticized the “aggressive” antichurch sentiment that he said was flourishing in [Spain](#) as he sought to rekindle the faith in a once staunchly Roman Catholic nation that is now among Europe’s most liberal.

The [Roman Catholic Church](#) is fighting laws supported by Prime Minister [José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero](#)’s Socialist government that have allowed [same-sex marriage](#), expedited divorce and eased restrictions on abortions.

The pope’s first stop on a two-day trip that began Saturday was in the pilgrimage city of Santiago de Compostela, whose cathedral is said to hold the remains of St. James the Apostle. He prayed before the tomb and watched, a bit awestruck, as the cathedral’s huge incense burner swung like a pendulum across the transept.

On his way to Santiago, Benedict told reporters that the anticlericalism seen now in Spain was reminiscent of the 1930s, when the church suffered a wave of violence and persecution as the country lurched from an unstable democracy to civil war. The reference was striking given the scale of violence back then, when the Roman Catholic Church claims that 4,184 clergy members were killed by the government, or Republican, side, which accused it of backing Franco’s fascist dictatorship.

After celebrating Mass in Santiago’s main plaza later Saturday, Benedict traveled on to Barcelona, where he was to dedicate the famous modernist Sagrada Familia church. The church is a monument to the traditional family, another main theme Benedict is stressing in his visit.

Religion in the Military *Capt. Michael Cummings*

“There are no atheists in foxholes,” the cliché goes. It’s hard to imagine a soldier facing death who doesn’t believe in God. Maybe soldiers need hope; maybe they need the promise of an afterlife to face death. And when this friendly little aphorism was coined, it was probably true.

Now, religion is political. Polls in the [MilitaryTimes](#) seem to back up the religiosity of the Armed Forces. So you’d be forgiven if you viewed that the battlefield was also a religious place — every base loaded with a friendly chaplain, every troop in a foxhole silently speaking to God and every platoon doubling as a prayer group.

Because you’d be wrong.

About a week after arriving at the [Korangal Outpost](#) — after being in Afghanistan a month — the First Sergeant announced that the chaplain had shown up. He would be holding a (nondenominational) Christian service later that night. I expected a big crowd. When I told my men this news, they groaned.

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About 10 minutes before the ceremony, I trudged up the hill, through three feet of snow, from our [hooch](#) to the service. I wore the usual kit for winter — [ACU pants](#), a brown T-shirt, a black fleece jacket, an IBA (Improved Ballistic Armor) and a helmet — I carried a Bible in my cargo pocket.

(When this war is over, the public will remember Improvised Explosive Devices and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. For me, I will remember my pocket Bible collection. Civilians, the USO, and well-wishers of all stripes love to give them to soldiers. They come in all shapes and sizes — but only one color: tactical. Small enough to fit in your cargo pocket, they only have the New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs, leaving out the battles and wars of the Old Testament.)

Our chapel was the Dining Facility, which for us meant an olive-drab tent and wood benches, freezing cold in the wintertime. The tent had the Army version of indoor lighting, which was floodlights aimed awkwardly at the ceiling, running off the diesel generator outside — the only sound on an otherwise silent [FOB](#).

As I entered, I thought for a moment I was in the wrong place. It was empty, save for two other soldiers. Then I saw the chaplain.

He had been around. He had come from the Special Forces and knew the front in this war well. (Well, the closest thing to a front the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan has — remote bases occupied by 18- to 24-year-old privates, sergeants and lieutenants.) The chaplain went where he was needed, by any truck, helicopter or patrol that would take him.

The service itself was awkward. The chaplain had gotten used to conducting these small ceremonies, and he tried to move past the empty silence. We sat there, and he gave his sermon. We each fought the cold, listening, watching our breath and shivering. I can't remember what he spoke about. No matter what it was, I enjoyed it. Though I was confident I'd survive Afghanistan, I was terrified I would fail in leadership. The fear didn't leave for about eight months. Chaplains help assuage such fears.

After the speech, we took communion. We ate the bread and drank the juice, and the ceremony ended. As I walked back down the hill, I was still shaking my head in disbelief. Where was everyone?

I shouldn't have been shocked. Even at the biggest Forward Operation Base in Afghanistan, Bagram Air Field, I attended a service with only about 30 other people. Thirty people out of a base of 30,000. In fact, the only religious ceremony I attended that did have a lot of people was at an Air Force Base in Qatar, well away from the sands, IEDs and insurgencies of Iraq and Afghanistan. If there are no atheists in foxholes, then why aren't there any religious soldiers on our bases?

Bryan Fischer: We've 'Feminized' Medal Of Honor By Not Giving It To Soldiers Who Kill More People

Bryan Fischer, the "Director of Issues Analysis" for the conservative Christian group the American Family Association, was unhappy yesterday that President Obama awarded the Medal of Honor to a soldier for saving lives. This, Fischer wrote on his blog, shows that the Medal of Honor has been "feminized" because "we now award it only for preventing casualties, not for inflicting them."

Here's how the AP [described](#) Medal of Honor winner Army Sgt. Salvatore Giunta heroics:



Giunta, the first living Medal of Honor winner of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, braved heavy gunfire to pull a fellow soldier to cover and rescued another who was being dragged away by insurgents.

Fischer's take? "So the question is this: when are we going to start awarding the Medal of Honor once again for soldiers who kill people and break things so our families can sleep safely at night?"

"We have feminized the Medal of Honor," Fischer wrote. He also quoted General Patton: "Gen. George Patton once famously said, 'The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other guy die for his.'" (Actually, Patton doesn't say anything about the other *guy*: "The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his.")

Fischer [recently argued](#) that it's time to get rid of the "curse" that is the Grizzly Bear because of the number of humans who have been killed by bears: "One human being is worth more than an infinite number of grizzly bears. Another way to put it is that there is no number of live grizzlies worth one dead human being. If it's a choice between grizzlies and humans, the grizzlies have to go. And it's time."

Fischer is a favorite of social conservative Republicans, and spoke at the [Values Voter summit](#) this fall alongside Mitt Romney, Jim DeMint, and other big-shot Republicans.

More about this anal orifice and his demented group

Right Wing Watch reports that American Family Association's Bryan Fischer said on his radio show this week that Hitler surrounded himself with gays (not the effeminate kind, which he persecuted) [because they were savage and brutal enough to carry out the genocide](#).

"Hitler recruited around him homosexuals to make up his Stormtroopers, they were his enforcers, they were his thugs. And Hitler discovered that he could not get straight soldiers to be savage and brutal and vicious enough."

Atheist Ad blitz calls Christmas a Myth

Drivers approaching the Lincoln Tunnel this holiday season will be the targets of an atheist advertisement that its sponsors describe as a strike against Christmas.

A billboard scheduled to be displayed near the New Jersey entrance to the tunnel until the end of the holidays shows a silhouetted manger scene with the message, “You KNOW it’s a Myth. This Season, Celebrate REASON.”

The \$20,000 campaign, sponsored by a national organization called American Atheists, is timed to preempt annual accusations that liberal groups are waging war on Christmas by asking church adherents to question their holiday traditions, American Atheists President David Silverman said.

“If the religious right wants a war on Christmas, this is what they’re going to get,” he said. “If they want a war on Christmas, we’re going to make sure they know what one looks like.”

The campaign is one of several atheist media blitzes scheduled. It joins a \$200,000 national television, newspaper and magazine advertising campaign sponsored by the American Humanist Association and the Stiefel Freethought Foundation meant to challenge biblical morality and fundamentalist Christianity.

Those ads juxtapose passages from religious texts selected because they appear to advocate for “fear, hatred and intolerance,” with quotations from humanist scholars that promote “love, equality, peace, freedom and reason,” according to a press release this holiday season.

The American Humanist Association sponsored a 48-foot sign erected on the New Jersey Turnpike in 2008 that read, “Don’t Believe in God? You are not alone.”

The campaigns come on the heels of studies reporting that rising numbers of Americans identify themselves as non-religious — 15 percent in 2008 compared with 8.2 percent in 1990, according to the Trinity College American Religious Identification Survey.

The Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life reported in April, however, that of the 5 percent of its survey respondents who said they do not believe in God or a universal spirit, only 24 percent actually identified themselves as atheists.

Silverman said his group interprets such numbers as a sign that the country is on the verge of an explosive growth in secularism

Many of those potential secularists live in the New York-New Jersey area, Silverman said. The Lincoln Tunnel billboard, one of several the organization plans in the next year, was placed where it thinks generally affluent and highly educated commuters will have plenty of time to think about it as they inch their way through one of the most chronically clogged roadways in the region.

The message is meant to address what Silverman described as closet atheists: people who attend religious services during the holidays without believing in them.

“Stay home,” Silverman said. “Don’t give the church money. Don’t give the church power. Tell the truth to your friends and families.”

Such campaigns have already received one public response from a prominent Christian organization. The New York-based Catholic League reportedly sent statues of Nativity scenes to the governors of all 50 states, asking them to place them in their rotundas in response to atheists “out in force this year trying to neuter Christmas.”

Catholic League spokesman Bill Donohue could not be reached for comment.

Newark Archdiocese spokesman Jim Goodness said he is aware of the billboard — his son passed it on his way home from a family Thanksgiving meal Thursday night — and that he isn’t impressed.

He added that the archdiocese declined an offer to buy a rival billboard, stating that it has more constructive ways to spend its money. The message of Christmas is too resilient to be threatened by a sign, Goodness said.

“We’re looking at well over 2,000 years of this message being part of humanity,” Goodness said. “One message on a billboard that’s going to be there for a month isn’t going to change that.”



The best idea we've had so far by Bill Nye (The Science Guy) To see the entire acceptance speech go to: www.thehumanist.org/humanist/10_nov_dec/Nye.html

The following is adapted from Bill Nye's speech in acceptance of the 2010 Humanist of the Year Award, presented at the 69th Annual Conference of the American Humanist Association in San Jose, California.

First of all, thank you very much for this award. It's physically beautiful but, of course, spiritually (can I say spiritually here?) it makes you feel good.

I was very excited to do this talk tonight until just a few minutes ago. Someone came up to me and said, "Is Bill Nye your real name?" And I said, "It's William Nye." Everything was going fine but then he said, "Why did you change it?" And this gets into the notion of critical thinking skills and questioning things.

We all have a tendency, in skepticism and to a degree in science education, to find ourselves, dare I say, preaching to the choir. (Did I lose you with that reference? I know many of you have never seen this, but in church, they have a preacher and...) Incidentally, we may assume that the choir is already converted, but we don't really know that. The choir might just be there singing because they like to sing, but the hope is that they'll go along. So let's just say that we have great success in preaching to the choir and it makes us feel good, but we have to do more. We have to reach out.

Now when I say "we," I'm talking about people who embrace science. In the United States there's a unique situation where we have, certainly nominally, the most technically advanced society in the world. You can get into fistfights in the space exploration bar about this but the United States still has a very large technological lead in many things, and yet we have this wacky, very influential sector of society that doesn't believe in evolution. And for me, as a science educator, it's very troubling. I know this isn't news to you, choir members, but I believe that the way to solve this problem is by coming up with stories.

People respond to stories. People respond to a beginning, middle, and end that involves a hero who's had some trouble and then resolves it, and so on. There was a story I was told as a young man. I don't know if it's a true story but it always made an impression on me. My grandfather was in the rotary—I'm sure he would've been a humanist if he'd known about organized humanism—and they had a convention in Philadelphia. In those days, you rented a tuxedo for such things and he didn't know how to tie the bowtie. So he went to the hotel room down the hall, knocked on the door, and said, "Excuse me. Can you help me tie this tie?" The guy said, "Sure. Lie down on the bed." So the story goes my grandfather lay on the bed and the guy tied a perfect bowtie knot. Then my grandfather, a skeptic, said, "Thank you., but why did I have to lie down on the bed?" And the guy

Even if it's not a true story, it's a good story. It's a good joke. So what we've got to do is come up with stories that explain why we believe what we believe, or, if you will, don't believe in what we don't believe.

I was brought up in the Episcopal Church and I was very unsatisfied. I used to be one of the speakers and would get up in front of the microphone at the pulpit. (I don't know if you've ever seen that. They have it in church, the pulpit). I would read from this big, thick book that was in arcane English. I liked that part but the rest of it really didn't make any sense.

For me it's very much analogous to the ancient dinosaurs. I'm so old, I remember when there wasn't really any satisfactory explanation for their disappearance. One yarn was that their brains were too small and they were stupid, and so other animals ate them. Come on, if you're a Tyrannosaurus rex, you're going to kick some butt. You don't really need to worry about the small things, do you? (Except, of course, diseases and parasites.) So, anyway, I was very troubled by the lack of explanation for the ancient dinosaurs. It was quite a revelation when people discovered the massive meteor crater under the Yucatan Peninsula and later theorized that its impact caused the dinosaurs' extinction. Even if it wasn't the whole story, it was a pretty good one. And then the layer of iridium was discovered around the world and associated with this meteoric multiple-object impact which resolved a huge problem. I'm also so old I remember when it was still kind of a wacky theory that Africa would fit into South America in some fashion, even though the fossil evidence was pretty compelling and the stratigraphy, the layers of geological deposits, were very well associated. But now plate tectonics is the underlying idea in all of geology. Now, it all fits together and everybody says, "Oh, yes, of course. Silly us, yes."

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