



# The Pharmacist Activist

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Editorial

☆☆☆ SPECIAL EDITION ☆☆☆

## Of Greatest Importance – Easter!

Over the years I have had the opportunity to write several hundred editorials. All have addressed issues that I have considered important for pharmacists, our patients, and/or society. Most have been critical or have voiced strong concerns about organizations or situations that hinder us from achieving greater professional and personal success on behalf of our patients/public and ourselves. I justify my primary attention to problems and criticism with my observations that many others are unwilling to do so and, if we do not resolve these challenges, we will not attain the potential accomplishments of which we are capable. On occasion I even resort to satire to address my concerns (please see “FDA Bans Sale of Nicotine!” in the April 1 issue of *The Pharmacist Activist* [www.pharmacistactivist.com]). I do not often enough discuss the positive opportunities for pharmacists, or give credit to those who do. And it is very infrequently that I depart from pharmacy and healthcare topics to consider other matters that are important. I have been remiss in not writing sooner about what I consider to be the matter of *greatest importance* – Easter! I recognize that many recipients of this editorial do not agree with the importance I attach to Easter. However, my hope is that the interest provided for my opinions on pharmacy-related issues will be sufficient to provide the time and patience to read this commentary.

### Why now?

I am a Christian and I believe in the accuracy and integrity of the information provided in the Bible. I believe that there is one God who created life, that he sent his son Jesus Christ to be born to the virgin Mary, that Jesus died, and that his resurrection from the dead (Easter!) provided the gift of forgiveness of sins and the anticipation of eternal life in heaven to those of us who accept it. In addition to the celebration of Easter, there are several other experiences and commentaries that contribute to the timing of this editorial. These include my recent trip to Israel, the writings of Charles Krauthammer, the writings of C. S. Lewis, the increased promotion of beliefs and actions that are not consistent with my faith, and comments by Penn Jillette.

### Israel

Earlier this month my wife and I joined 18 other individuals on a 10-day tour of Israel that was very capably planned and led by Christian author, speaker, and pharmacist Jennifer Sands (Jennifer’s loss of her husband in the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11, and her subsequent conversion to Christianity are experiences I encourage you to read on her website, www.jennifersands.com). Our tour was inspirational, informative, and intense.

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The Bible came alive as we visited, learned, walked, and meditated in the areas in which the experiences of both the Old and New Testaments occurred.

The Israelites are God's original chosen people and this was abundantly evident in what we saw and learned that built further on our knowledge of the Bible. However, whereas I believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, those of the Jewish faith do not believe that the Messiah has come, and continue to anticipate that event.

There are shared beliefs among Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims, many of which are based on biblical accounts. However, the walls, barriers, security checkpoints, and signs warning of the dangers of traveling into certain areas were constant reminders of the differences and even hatred that exist among the multiple religions and ethnicities of those living in Jerusalem.

### Charles Krauthammer

I have long admired the late syndicated columnist and political commentator Charles Krauthammer. He demonstrated inspirational courage in not being held back by the challenges of paralysis and disability from a diving accident as a young man, and I considered him to be a genius with respect to the depth and breadth of his knowledge and perspectives on so many topics. I also appreciated the morality and boldness with which he voiced his opinions, even when he recognized that some others would strongly disagree.

I very much enjoyed and learned from his book, *Things That Matter*, that included a collection of his columns and other writings over a period of several decades that continued to have timely importance. He was preparing another book, *The Point of It All*, at the time of his death in June, 2018, which his son Daniel edited, completed, and published, and that I am now reading.

Raised in an Orthodox Jewish home, Krauthammer devoted a section (Chapter 12) of this book to The Two Last Tribes of Israel that contains five of his columns starting with The Miracle, at 60, that was initially published in *The Washington Post* on May 16, 2008. My reaching this section of the book coincided with my trip to Israel. This

column observed the 60th anniversary of “the return and restoration of the remaining two tribes of Israel—Judah and Benjamin, later known as the Jews—to their ancient homeland. Besides restoring Jewish sovereignty, the establishment of the state of Israel embodied many subsidiary miracles, from the creation of the first Jewish army since Roman times to the only recorded instance of the resurrection of a dead language—Hebrew, now (in 2008) the daily tongue of a vibrant nation of seven million.” Krauthammer cites historian Barbara Tuchman as writing, “Israel is the only nation in the world that is governing itself in the same territory, under the same name, and with the same religion and same language as it did 3,000 years ago.” God's chosen people.

### C. S. Lewis

I have marveled at and learned so much from the intellect, reasoning, and perspectives in the writings of the late religious scholar C. S. Lewis, the best known of which is his book, *Mere Christianity*. But Lewis was not always a religious scholar. At one time he was an atheist, and it was only following his personal thorough investigation and analysis of religious beliefs and debates that he became a Christian. Now, many years following his death in 1963, his writings and reasoning continue to be among the most widely cited by Christians in explaining and defending their faith.

Speaking in 1942, C. S. Lewis gave prominent attention to the argument of whether Jesus was a liar, lunatic, or the Lord. His statement, as included in *Mere Christianity* published in 1952 is provided below:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level of a man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you

can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to... Now it seems to me obvious that he was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however, strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God”

For those who persist with the description of Jesus as a great moral teacher, Lewis expands further:

“He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects – Hatred – Terror – Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.”

Some contend that the Jesus of the Bible may not be a liar or a lunatic or a Lord, but rather a legend or, in other words, the Jesus of the Bible is not the Jesus of history. Lewis responds:

“Now, as a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing. They are not artistic enough to be legends. From an imaginative point of view they are clumsy, they don't work up to things properly. Most of the life of Jesus is totally unknown to us, as is the life of anyone else who lived at that time, and no people building up a legend would allow that to be so. Apart from bits of the Platonic dialogues, there is no conversation that I know of in ancient literature like the fourth Gospel.”

## Changing times

At this season of my life I have the opportunity to reflect on the changes that have occurred over a period of more than seventy years. Today, it is common for many types of entertainment and behaviors to be characterized by sex, violence, profanity, and deception. Activities and language that would have been rejected and even punished during my youth, are now not only tolerated by many, but even promoted and celebrated. Yes, times change! But my foundational Christian beliefs and faith do not, and

many current actions and behaviors are in sharp conflict. Numerous examples can be cited, but to do so here would risk distraction from the theme of Easter as the source of love, redemption, and hope.

## Penn Jillette

Penn Jillette is an atheist and it will be a surprise to many readers that I identify him as contributing to my writing of this commentary. Penn and Teller are skilled magicians whose performances have entertained thousands of people over the years. Penn Jillette relates a story about a man who came to speak with him following one of his magic shows. The man complimented him on the show and handed him a New Testament with the Psalms that he wanted to give to him as a gift.

Jillette was moved by the man's action and recalls:

“He was kind, and nice, and sane, and looked me in the eyes, and talked to me, and then gave me this Bible. I've always said, 'I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? If I believed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe it, that the truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point that I tackle you, and this is more important than that. This guy was a really good guy. He was polite, honest, and sane, and he cared enough about me to proselytize and give me a Bible.”

Now Jillette is still an atheist, and he further notes:

“I know there's no God, and one polite person living his life right doesn't change that. But I'll tell you, he was a very, very, very good man. And that's really important. And with that kind of goodness, it's okay to have that deep of a disagreement.”

Penn Jillette's comments are extremely important, convict

me for my lack of boldness in sharing my faith, and are an important contributing factor in my decision to write this commentary. Now that I have retired from my faculty position, I am sometimes asked whether there were things I would have done differently during my experience. One of my responses is, "I would have been bolder sooner! Bolder in sharing my faith and bolder as an advocate for my profession and the patients we serve. And I am still not nearly bold enough!"

## Faith

Some years ago I attended a presentation by a professor who was speaking on the subject of Intelligent Design, or God's creation of life. A faculty member who was present asserted that, "No reputable scientist believes in creation. There is no scientific evidence for it." I responded that there are reputable scientists who believe that God created humans in his image, as well as other forms of life. I acknowledged that I did not have scientific evidence with respect to the specifics of creation, but I also noted that there was not complete evidence to support the concept of evolution or other explanations for the origin of life. We agreed to disagree.

My experience, particularly my efforts to understand the complexities of the pathology of diseases and the actions of new drugs, has resulted in my realization that the more we learn, the more we realize how much more we don't know. Notwithstanding remarkable advances in discoveries, knowledge, and technology, I believe that the amount of information we still do not know far exceeds what we have learned or can contemplate. As examples, some of the drugs marketed in the last several years act in still unknown ways on receptors that were not identified ten years ago. I have concluded that neither I, nor anyone else, will ever have a complete understanding or evidence with respect to the origin and continued mysteries of life, and what I consider to be the complexity beyond discovery of how cells and our bodies function. Another reason for

this conclusion is, *if it was possible to learn everything, we could do everything ourselves and there would be no need for faith or God.*

Faith is an essential component of religious beliefs. Faith is described in Hebrews 11:1 (the Bible) as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see," and Hebrews 11:3 notes, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command." Genesis 1:27 reads, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." I believe these statements. However, for those who don't, I would suggest that it might require less faith to believe that God created life with all its complexities, than would be required to believe that untold billions of cells came together in a random event in just the right sequence at exactly the same time to create and sustain life.

## Continuing conflict

The joy and celebration of Easter Sunday was quickly confronted with the headline: "Easter Blasts Kill more than 200 in Churches and Hotels in Sri Lanka."

What a contradiction to the message of Jesus in Matthew 22: 36-38. A Pharisee who was an expert in the law tested Jesus with the question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

## HE IS RISEN!

Daniel A. Hussar

Your comments and questions are always welcome and will reach me at danandsue3@verizon.net.

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