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# To Know or Not To Know

*And God Said: Let There Be Evolution!* by Steve Henn, NYQ Books, 2012

If someone asked me what the poems in Steve Henn's *And God Said: Let There Be Evolution!* are about, I'd have to say they're about not knowing. Well, first I'd try to avoid answering the question at all, because answering such a broad question in such a definitive way is counter to the spirit of Henn's poems. But if I were pressed, I'd say the poems were about not knowing. They're about not knowing the answers to big questions or small questions, and they're even more about being impatient with those who think they do know the answers to questions big or small.

Henn is in the perfect place to make his observations about the qualities of knowing. He teaches high school English in northern Indiana. He's surrounded by populations – teenagers and rural Hoosiers – who often take pride in not knowing things but who are also often pretty sure that they know more than you do. The poems in *And God Said* were written when Henn was re-examining his connection to Catholicism, so there's also the element of conflict between religious mystery and dogma. The intersection of all these circumstances is inhabited by absurdity, and Henn notices all of it.

Many of the book's poems, as the title suggests, focus on the contradictions in popular expressions of faith. As much as he wants to plumb the depths of spirituality, Henn is also awed by physics, so he's likely to pull string theory into his consideration of Heaven. In the title poem, he argues that evolution can be rationally fit into an understanding of God's plan, especially since no one understands God's plan, not even Pat Robertson. It's all a big mystery, and you can even say something like "The Voice of God Told Me Agnosticism Is the One True Faith," and no one can really prove you wrong.

Elsewhere, Henn points out the silliness of pious musings by irreverently bringing spiritual figures down to earth. In "What would Jesus really do?," he wonders whether, if Christ were here with us right now, would he be as ego-centric and superficial as the rest of us.

Conversely, in "Note to my



## On Books

EVAN GILLESPIE

Atheist Friends (who will be coming over for a party)," he proclaims, "The fact that we don't know if God is not proof of His/Her/Its/Their inexistence, but I do know this," followed by a list of social trivia; in these things that he and his friends will do tonight, "I have everlasting faith." And that's all he knows for sure.

It's not all about religion, though. Sometimes it's about the things that some of us believe that are demonstrably wrong. In "Political Will," he pokes at people who hold strong opinions about things they don't understand, and in "Margaret Hires a Personal Thinker," he envisions the ultimate outcome of our journey toward proud ignorance.

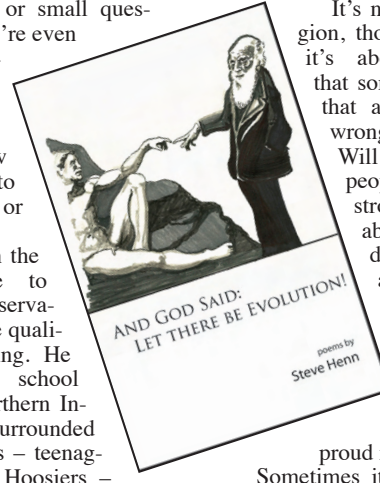
Sometimes it's just about ridiculousness. The poem "I can't wait until J.D. Salinger dies" is followed two pages later by "I Killed J.D. Salinger"; apparently Henn wrote the first poem less than a week before Salinger died, and the experience leaves Henn feeling "pretty good" about himself because "I didn't know I had that kind of pull in the universe."

But even if he holds a higher-than-expected position in the universe, he still has to endure grocery shopping, hair cuts at Great Clips and the infuriating customer service at Verizon, all of which are examined in other poems.

When your world view revolves around uncertainty, you're not going to be serving up many answers, and these are not the sort of poem that offers anything approaching an ultimate truth. Overall, Henn seems to be fine with the realization that there are some things we can know and many things that we can't. It seems, though, that he wishes that most of us would try harder to sort out which is which.

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Steve Henn, is a school teacher and a freelance writer for whatzup. For more information or to order either of his two books, *And God Said: Let There Be Evolution!* or *Unacknowledged Legislations*, go to [www.nyqbooks.org/author/stevehenn](http://www.nyqbooks.org/author/stevehenn).



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