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PERRY SPEAKS ABOUT SPIRITUALITY AT LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

By Philip Rucker

Texas Gov. Rick Perry offered himself here Wednesday as a decidedly anti-intellectual candidate,

PHIL, DID HE HAVE A CHOICE?

LET'S FACE IT, THE ONLY PEOPLE IN AMERICA WHOM HE COULD BEAT IN A WRITTEN EXAM ARE SARAH PALIN AND JOE BIDEN.

making light of flunking out of some of his classes at Texas A&M University, and instead casting his life and presidential aspirations in deeply spiritual terms.

PHIL, AGAIN ... WHEN YOU ARE A PROVABLE MORON, WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

Perry said he spent many nights in his 20s pondering his purpose,

THERE'S THE PROBLEM PHIL: WHILE PERRY SPENT MANY NIGHTS PONDERING HIS NAVEL, HIS FELLOW STUDENTS WERE PONDERING THEIR TEXTBOOKS.

“wondering what to do with this one life among the billions that were on the planet,” but that God’s answers were revealed to him in due time.

PHIL, IT'S TOO BAD GOD DIDN'T MATERIALIZE A LITTLE SOONER AND HELP PERRY GET THROUGH SOME OF HIS CLASSES.

In an address at Liberty University, the Christian college founded by evangelist Jerry Falwell, Perry said “He who knows the number of drops in the ocean, he counts the sands in the desert, he knows you by name. . . . He doesn’t require perfect people to execute his perfect plan.”

PHIL, I PREFER CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS QUOTE MYSELF, "IF THEY GAVE JERRY FALWELL AN ENEMA BEFORE HE DIED, THEY COULD HAVE BURIED HIM IN A MATCHBOX."

Perry said, “As spiritual beings, we are meant to live in relationship with our creator and with one another.

RICK, SO HOW DO SLAVES FIGURE INTO THAT SCENARIO?

And the happiest moments of every experience are when I am in communion with God and in community with other.”

RICK, I DON'T FIND IT PARTICULARLY COMFORTING THAT AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, YOUR GREATEST MOMENTS OCCUR WHEN YOU ARE TALKING WITH YOUR INVISIBLE FRIENDS. THOSE WOULD BE MOMENTS BETTER SPENT WITH A PSYCHOANALYST.

Evoking Moses and David of scripture, Perry added: “God uses broken people to reach a broken world.

WELL RICK, THEN MAYBE YOU ARE THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB AFTER ALL.

The mistakes of yesterday say nothing about the possibilities of tomorrow.”

RICK, THAT'S TRUE ... ESPECIALLY IF YOU DON'T LEARN FROM THEM.

Perry’s 20-minute address here was one of the longest and most personal of his campaign to date. It was shorn of policy prescriptions,

PHIL, OF COURSE IT WAS SHORN OF POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS. HE WAS PANDERING TO AN ARENA FULL OF GHOST WORSHIPPERS. THEY PROBABLY COULDN'T EVEN UNDERSTAND POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS.

and he avoided any discussion of the HPV vaccine he required for girls as governor that has sparked an uproar among some religious conservatives.

SEE PHIL, THAT RIGHT THERE IS THE KIND OF COWARDICE YOU WOULD EXPECT FROM SOMEONE WHOSE PLAN FOR CONFRONTING PROBLEMS IS TO PRAY TO A GHOST FOR HELP. HE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE COURAGE TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF IN FRONT OF A GROUP THAT HE KNEW WOULD DISAGREE WITH HIS ACTION; ACTION THAT, FOR ONCE, WAS ACTUALLY THE RIGHT THING TO DO. HE KNEW HE WAS SPEAKING TO A CROWD OF MORONS, AND HE KNEW WHAT TO SAY AND WHAT TO AVOID. THIS IS WHY MOST POLITICIANS MAKE ME RETCH; PERRY MORE THAN MOST.

Instead, Perry spoke of growing up with modest means in Paint Creek, Tex., of struggling academically in school and, in his late 20s, after he returned home from the Air Force, finding God.

Perry said, “My faith journey is not the story of someone who turned to God because I wanted to, it was because I had nowhere else to turn.

BINGO! WHEREVER YOU GO IN THE WORLD, RELIGION PREYS UPON THE WEAKEST MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.

I was 27. I had been an officer in the United States Air Force, commanding a fairly substantial piece of sophisticated equipment, telling men and women what to do, but I was lost — spiritually and emotionally. And I didn’t know how to fix it.”

RICK, WHAT YOU ARE REALLY SAYING IS THAT AFTER LEAVING THE AIR FORCE YOU NEEDED TO FIND ANOTHER WAY TO GET INTO A POSITION WHERE YOU COULD AGAIN TELL PEOPLE WHAT TO DO.

In the speech, the governor exhorted an estimated 13,000 students and faculty, who packed Liberty’s Vine Center basketball arena as they do three times a week for a mandatory convocation service, "not to muzzle your voice. You have the right to insist on change, to tell the people in power that you will not have your inheritance spent or your future mortgaged. Your voice matters. Use it. This country is your country as well. Don’t leave it to a bunch of Washington politicians to tell you how to live your life.”

RICK, REMIND ME AGAIN, WHAT ARE YOU CAMPAIGNING FOR? TO BECOME A WASHINGTON POLITICIAN?

THAT GOLDEN NUGGET MUST HAVE HAD EVEN SARAH PALIN ROLLING ON THE FLOOR IN HYSTERICS.

RICK, DON'T YOU HAVE SPEECH WRITERS WHO ARE SUPPOSED TO CATCH EMBARRASSMENTS LIKE THAT BEFORE THEY HAPPEN?

Perry presented his life in populist terms, saying that growing up, all he knew was “that little place called Paint Creek” and joking that he finished “in the top 10 of my graduating class — of 13.”

RICK, ONLY AMONG THE DEVOUTLY RELIGIOUS IS IGNORANCE WORSHIPPED AS A QUALITY TO BE ADMIRED.

Perry said “For me, indoor plumbing was a bit of a luxury until I was about 5 years old, and I didn’t worry about the latest fashions; my mother sewed most of my clothes. I didn’t know that we weren’t wealthy in a material sense.

PHIL, NOTICE ANYTHING ABOUT THIS GUY PERRY? LET ME HELP: HE DIDN'T HAVE INDOOR PLUMBING UNTIL HE WAS 5, AND HIS MOTHER HAD TO SEW HIS CLOTHES BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T AFFORD TO BUY THEM, AND YET PERRY ADMITS HE COULDN'T FIGURE OUT THAT THEY WEREN'T WEALTHY IN A MATERIAL SENSE.

NOW I'M STARTING TO FEEL A LITTLE BAD FOR PERRY. IT'S OBVIOUS THAT WHEN HE WAS CONCEIVED, HIS PARENTS PASSED HIM DNA THAT WAS A FEW STRANDS SHORT WHERE IT COUNTED.

I knew that we were rich in a lot of things that really mattered — in a spiritual way.”

RICK, YOU JUST GOT THROUGH TELLING US THAT YOU DIDN'T FIND GOD UNTIL YOU WERE 27. SO WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE BOY, HOW WERE YOU RICH IN A SPIRITUAL WAY? WERE YOU A FAMILY OF BUDDHISTS?

As a student at Texas A&M, Perry said, it was “my heart’s content” to be a veterinarian.

RICK, I SEE A SILVER LINING: YOUR FAILURE WAS AT LEAST A VICTORY FOR THE ANIMALS.

He worked for a vet every summer and took advanced science classes. But the dean of the veterinary school dashed his dreams. Perry joked, “He said, ‘Son, I’m looking at your transcript. You want to be an animal science major?’” (Indeed, Perry’s transcript shows he received an “F” in organic chemistry, a “D” in veterinary anatomy and a “C" in animal breeding.”)

RICK, SOUNDS LIKE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MATERIAL TO ME. SO WHERE'S THE PROBLEM?

IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE IT WAS THE DEAN WHO DASHED YOUR DREAMS, BUT YOUR INCOMPETENCY IN THE REALM OF MENTAL ACHIEVEMENT THAT DASHED THEM.

Perry again joked, “Four semesters of organic chemistry made a pilot out of me.” As he prepared for Wednesday’s visit, Perry said, “I got my Webster’s out and I just looked up the word ‘convocation’ to make sure I knew what I was walking into here.”

It has been tradition for Republican presidential hopefuls to make a pilgrimage here to Liberty University, founded 40 years ago by the late Falwell to educate a generation of students in the fiery preacher’s strict brand of evangelical Christianity. Falwell’s son, Jerry Falwell Jr., is now the chancellor

GEE PHIL, HOW TO YOU IMAGINE THAT HAPPENED? HARD WORK? EDUCATION? GUTS? DETERMINATION? OR BECAUSE HIS DADDY BUILT IT?

PHIL, HERE'S A HINT: GO WITH THE LAST ONE.

BUT I STILL CAN'T GET OVER HITCHENS' QUOTE ABOUT FALWELL AND THE MATCHBOX. THE REASON WHY IT IS SO FUNNY IS BECAUSE IT IS SO TRUE.

After Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.) speaks here later this month, Falwell said, five of the eight leading Republican presidential contenders will have addressed the university.

PHIL, ISN'T IT NICE TO SEE SUCH A BALANCED VIEW BEING PRESENTED TO THE STUDENTS? BUT AFTER A FEW YEARS AT LIBERTY, I'M SURE THEY'RE PRETTY USED TO ONLY HEARING ONE SIDE ... OF ANYTHING.

Falwell told reporters he would not endorse a candidate, but he gave an enthusiastic, 10-minute introduction.

PHIL, A 10-MINUTE INTRODUCTION? AND THEN HE CLAIMS HE'S NOT ENDORSING HIM? WAS THAT BEFORE OR AFTER HE WINKED AT THE CROWD?

WELL, TO BE FAIR, LET'S WAIT TO SEE HOW LONG AN INTRODUCTION BACHMANN GETS. KNOWING HOW WOMEN ARE VIEWED IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY, MY GUESS IS, MAYBE 2 MINUTES IF SHE'S LUCKY.

Falwell said Perry had lived “an extraordinary life” and noted his “A+” rating from the National Rifle Association, a line that drew loud applause in the arena.

PHIL, A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS; AND THAT SAID IT ALL. THESE BONEHEADS WHO HAVE WASTED YEARS STUDYING ABOUT MAGICAL GHOSTS FROM ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS COULD CARE LESS ABOUT POOR GRADES AT A UNIVERSITY, BUT PLACE ALL THEIR VALUE IN A TOP GRADE FROM THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION?

WELL, THE GOOD NEWS, I GUESS, IS THAT PERRY FINALLY FOUND A CLASS HE COULD PASS.

THE FACT THAT WE ACTUALLY LIVE IN A WORLD, IN THE 21ST CENTURY, WHERE THOUSANDS OF SUPPOSEDLY EDUCATED AMERICANS COULD PLACE MORE VALUE ON A GRADE FROM A GUN CLUB THAN FROM A UNIVERSITY, SHOULD SCARE THE HELL OUT OF MOST RATIONAL AMERICANS. IT SOUNDS TOO FUNNY TO BELIEVE. BUT ONCE YOU REALIZE THAT THIS IS ALL TOO REAL ... IT NO LONGER SEEMS SO FUNNY.

Falwell labeled Perry “one of the most pro-life governors in American history,” again drawing applause.

PHIL, DON'T YOU FIND IT ODD THAT THE GOVERNOR WHO APPROVED THE EXECUTION OF MORE PRISONERS THAN POSSIBLY ANY GOVERNOR IN HISTORY IS DESCRIBED AS "PRO-LIFE?" DON'T YOU FIND IT ODD THAT THE GOVERNOR WHO FIGHTS ABORTION, AND THEREBY PUTS THE LIVES OF MANY WOMEN IN JEOPARDY, IS DESCRIBED AS "PRO-LIFE?"

PHIL ... YOU SHOULD.

And after referring to then-candidate Ronald Reagan’s visit to Liberty’s campus in the 1970s, Falwell said: “I have a feeling today that history is about to repeat itself.”

PHIL, I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT FALWELL SAID HE WASN'T ENDORSING ANY CANDIDATE?

Falwell even drew a personal comparison between himself and Perry.

PHIL, FALWELL DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE A CLUE THAT ... THAT'S NOT REALLY A GOOD THING.

“He was a prankster in college,” Falwell said. “One of his most famous pranks was when he placed live chickens in the closet of an underclassman during Christmas break.

PHIL, MAYBE IF PERRY HAD SPENT LESS TIME WITH CHICKENS AND MORE TIME IN THE BOOKS, HIS COLLEGE CAREER WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SUCH AN EMBARRASSMENT.

When I was a student at Liberty, I was known for placing live chickens in a crowded cafeteria.”

WELL PHIL, FALWELL COULD GET AWAY WITH IT. WHAT WERE THEY GOING TO DO, KICK OUT THE FOUNDER'S KID?

Perry, sitting in a leather armchair on stage, laughed. Then, Falwell added, “We’ve got more in common than I realized, governor.”

PHIL, FALWELL SEEMS EVEN DUMBER THAN HIS DAD, IF THAT IS POSSIBLE. HE WAS INSULTING HIMSELF ... AND DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

FLATWORM FLOUTS FUNDAMENTAL RULE OF BIOLOGY: WORM REGENERATES WITHOUT CENTROSOME, A STRUCTURE LONG THOUGHT NECESSARY FOR CELL DIVISION

REPORTING IN THE JOURNAL SCIENCE, RESEARCHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO (UCSF) AND THE STOWERS INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH IN KANSAS CITY, MO, HAVE DISCOVERED THAT THE WORM LACKS A KEY CELLULAR STRUCTURE CALLED A "CENTROSOME," WHICH SCIENTISTS HAVE CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL FOR CELL DIVISION.

EVERY ANIMAL EVER EXAMINED, FROM THE MIGHTIEST MAMMALS TO THE LOWLIEST INSECTS, HAS THESE CENTROSOMES IN THEIR CELLS. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME RESEARCHERS HAVE FOUND ONE THAT DIDN'T.

THE FACT THAT FLATWORMS LACK THESE CENTROSOMES CALLS INTO QUESTION THEIR PURPOSE.

THE NECESSITY OF EVEN DIVISION

A CENTRAL COMPONENT OF ALL MULTICELLULAR LIFE IS THE ABILITY OF CELLS TO DIVIDE -- AND DIVIDE EVENLY. BEFORE A CELL DIVIDES, IT HAS TO ASSEMBLE TWO EXACT COPIES OF ITS DNA AND THEN MAKE SURE THAT THE DNA SORTS EVENLY INTO TWO SEPARATE HALVES AS THEY PINCH OFF. MANY HEALTH PROBLEMS ARISE FROM CELLS LOSING THIS ABILITY.

A HALLMARK OF CANCER, FOR INSTANCE, INVOLVES ABNORMALITIES IN THIS DIVISION. TUMOR CELLS OFTEN DUPLICATE EXTRA PIECES OF DNA. CERTAIN FORMS OF CHILDHOOD MENTAL RETARDATION ARE ALSO MARKED BY ABNORMAL DIVISIONS, WHICH CAUSE THE LOSS OF LARGE PIECES OF DNA, LEADING TO DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS IN CERTAIN BRAIN STRUCTURES.

CENTROSOMES HAVE BEEN SEEN AS THE ULTIMATE EVOLUTIONARY FIX FOR THIS PROBLEM. PLANTS AND FUNGI DON'T HAVE THEM, BUT ANIMALS HAVE HAD CENTROSOMES IN THEIR CELLS, AS LONG AS THERE HAVE BEEN ANIMALS. THESE STRUCTURES WERE THOUGHT TO PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN CELL DIVISION -- LAYING DOWN TRACK-LIKE SPINDLES ONTO WHICH THE CELLS SORT THEIR DIVIDING DNA. CENTROSOMES WERE SEEN AS SO IMPORTANT TO CELL DIVISION THAT ALL ANIMALS WERE ASSUMED TO HAVE THEM.

THE DISCOVERY THAT AT LEAST ONE ANIMAL DOESN'T, CAME QUITE UNEXPECTEDLY.

WORM REGENERATES WITHOUT CENTROSOMES

WITH A CHARMING NAME THAT MASKS AN OTHERWISE HUMBLE APPEARANCE, THIS WORM IS A PUDDLE WIGGLER JUST A FEW MILLIMETERS LONG AT MOST. BUT ITS REMARKABLE REGENERATIVE ABILITY HAS MADE SCHMIDTEA MEDITERRANEA A GREAT SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY. WHEN CUT INTO TINY PIECES, EVERY PIECE WILL GROW INTO A PERFECTLY NORMAL WORM IN A MATTER OF DAYS. EACH OFFSPRING CAN THEN BE SEGMENTED OVER AND OVER AGAIN AS WELL -- IT'S HOW THE WORM REPRODUCES.

THE ORIGINAL INTENTION OF THE STUDY WAS TO SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WORM WHEN IT LOST ITS CENTROSOME.

RESEARCHERS MANIPULATED THE FLATWORM TO KNOCK OUT GENES NEEDED TO ASSEMBLE THESE CENTROSOMES. WITHOUT CENTROSOMES THE WORMS SHOULD HAVE LOST THEIR ABILITY TO REGENERATE NORMALLY -- OR SO THEY THOUGHT.

THEY WERE AMAZED TO FIND THAT LOSING THESE STRUCTURES DIDN'T AFFECT THE WORMS' ABILITY TO REGENERATE AT ALL. THEN THEY LOOKED MORE CAREFULLY AT THE WORMS AND DISCOVERED THAT THEY NEVER HAD THESE CENTROSOMES IN THE FIRST PLACE.

WHAT THIS MEANS, IS THAT THE EVOLUTIONARY PRESSURE THAT HAS MAINTAINED THESE STRUCTURES IN NEARLY ALL ANIMALS MAY HAVE VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH CELL DIVISION ITSELF. THERE MAY BE ANOTHER FUNCTION FOR CENTROSOMES THAT IS STILL OBSCURED.

(THE ARTICLE, "CENTROSOME LOSS IN THE EVOLUTION OF PLANARIANS," BY JULIETTE AZIMZADEH, MEI LIE WONG, DIANE MILLER DOWNHOUR, ALEJANDRO SÁNCHEZ ALVARADO AND WALLACE F. MARSHALL, IS PUBLISHED IN SCIENCE EXPRESS ON JAN. 5, 2012).

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FAMOUS QUOTES

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS (DIED 12/15/11 AT THE AGE OF 62)

BIO PREVIOUSLY GIVEN.

“OUR BELIEF IS NOT A BELIEF.

OUR PRINCIPLES ARE NOT A FAITH.

WE DO NOT RELY SOLELY UPON SCIENCE AND REASON,

BECAUSE THESE ARE NECESSARY RATHER THAN SUFFICIENT FACTORS,

BUT WE DISTRUST ANYTHING

THAT CONTRADICTS SCIENCE OR OUTRAGES REASON.

WE MAY DIFFER ON MANY THINGS,

BUT WHAT WE RESPECT IS FREE INQUIRY, OPEN-MINDEDNESS,

AND THE PURSUIT OF IDEAS FOR THEIR OWN SAKE.”