

From the Secretary General's desk

A reason why the Société Royale des Sciences de Liège (Royal Society of Sciences in Liège, here abridged as SRSL) must exist is that *el lueno de la razon produce monstruos* (Francesco GOYA, 1797) : when reason lies dormant, it generates monsters. Its aim is to promote and defend science, *id est* to foster rational knowledge, to fight dogmas. At its foundation in 1835, SRSL limited its aims to so-called hard sciences.

Dogmas are gaining strength in this young 21st century. The very idea of biological evolution is counter-attacked by defenders of the Pentateuch. Even the president of the United States of America is known to say, daringly enough that about the theory (*sic*) of evolution, “the jury is still out”. Just read chapter 3 of Genesis : Adam and Eve must not eat or touch any fruit of the tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden lest they die. Then the serpent comes and convinces them that if they do, their eyes will open and they will be as gods, knowing good and evil. In his *Atlas of Creation*, isn't Harun YAHYA trying to prevent our eyes from opening ? Irrationality is so much easier spread than reason. The motto of SRSL is *nec temere nec timide* : let us not be shy about rationality but let us not be latitudinarian either.

Since the year 2005, a few members of SRSL resigned, for want of interest for its goals after losing their scientific activity upon reaching their pension.

Unfortunately, SRSL is in mourning of several members: L. DELBOUILLE (Liège), C. FEHRENBACH (France), P. GILLIS (Brussels), G. HAMOIR (Liège), H.G. HERS (Louvain-la-Neuve), L. LAUBIER (France), J. LERAY (France), Y. LION (Liège), J.-C. RUWET (Liège), G. UBAGHS (Liège) and C.H. WILCOX (Utah).

Those colleagues were, all of them, very active in the advancement of knowledge, the defence of rationality, the greatness of our Society, their Society.

Financially, SRSL is helped by the University of Liège as a matter of course, but by the Walloon Region too and, occasionally by the French Embassy in Brussels. The Society is deeply grateful for their patronage.

Our activities ? Every year, three plenary lectures, usually by foreign scientists and seven or eight small – most often by local colleagues – lectures. Since 1985, SRSL awards quinquennial prizes to young researchers (less than 30 the year of the award) in Biology (Prize Édouard

VAN BENEDEN), Chemistry (Prize Louis D'OR), Mathematics (Prize Lucien GODEAUX) and in Physics (Prize Pol SWINGS).

Up to 2006, SRSL used to publish a *Bulletin* with original peer-reviewed research papers. The *Bulletin* was sent to its members as well as to hundreds of scientific institutions all over the world. This yielded exchanges with as many publications. In January 2006, our publication on paper became financially too heavy and SRSL had to bring it to an end. The publication continues however on the web-site (srsl-ulg.net), available to readers as well as writers free of any charge.

Every year, SRSL organizes a one-day colloquium on a given theme. In 2008 the theme was “The big European scientific institutions” and the speakers, all of them scientists, were high officers of CERN, EMBL, ESA, ESO, ESF and ESRF. The discussions were chaired by Member of European Parliament Dr P. BUSQUIN, former European Commissioner for Research. Both the speakers and the audience expressed favourable impressions of the day.

Finally, SRSL is requested, every now and then, to sponsor scientific activities led by other organizations. For instance, in 2009, it will be associated with the DARWIN's jubilee events and it will arrange, presumably in the fall, a one-day meeting about *The Origin of Species*, the 150 year-old book by Charles DARWIN. Indeed the *nantes in gurgite vasto* are less and less *rari* (the shipwrecked in the vast area – or ocean – are less and less rare or few) and the *gurgite* itself – the irrational ocean – is becoming *vastissimo*.

In 2009, SRSL is chaired by the palaeontologist Ms E. JAVAUX. The vice-chair is occupied by T. BASTIN (physicist).

Jacques AGHION