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April 20, 2014: A Joyous Easter to All Christians—and Go See Particle Physics

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Title: A Joyous Easter to All Christians—and Go See Particle Physics

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4/20/2014—Of course if he is risen, it is a joyous day for all humanity, whether we know it or not. Sometime this week, I'll return to Bishop Spong on the resurrection. But back to Particle Fever, the documentary telling the story of the discovery—verification—of the Higgs Boson, which is the particle that explains "why some fundamental particles have mass when the symmetries controlling their interactions should require them to be massless, and why the weak force has a much shorter range than the electromagnetic force." (I don't actually know what that means). The story is told from the perspectives of several of the physicists involved—what is at stake, what it means to know and discover, how their lives have been affected by this 20-year wait. It is a compelling story telling apart from the science. Two insights for nonscientists. First, several times the theme of science and art is invoked, and by several physicists. Yes, the search is to know, but it is also a search for beauty. This kind of realm is often unknown among hard-edged anti-religion atheists. These men and women are not merely empiricists. They are well aware of an invisible world. They regard the mathematical structure of reality as a kind of miracle. And they have their own kind of faith. Secularism risks descending into its own kind of know-nothingness in which it rejects in principle much of what makes a human life worth living. Second, while the cancellation of the American collider project in 1993 did not harm humanity's search for truth—although it slowed it down—it can serve as a symbol for the breakdown of America's public life. As I remember, that cancellation was a part of the anti-Clinton movement in the Republican Party, aided and abetted by anti-technology leftists. But that may not be entirely true, as I now look at some of the material from the time. It may just be that America is tired, and was tired then. The irony is that, given the constant state of war we have been in since 2001, the collider would have been chicken feed. The money was not spent elsewhere, on science or anything else. The cancellation may have marginally contributed to the Clinton budget surplus, but it accomplished nothing else.