

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
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Editor: Kent Harker

SOILED LINEN

by William Bennetta

The Shroud of Turin is a 14-foot-long piece of linen that bears two full-length images -- one a front view, the other a rear view -- of a man who seems to have been flogged and crucified. The two images lie head to head, separated by some six inches of bare cloth. There are no side-view images.

The shroud belongs to the House of Savoy but is kept (at Turin, Italy) by functionaries of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church has explicitly encouraged the veneration of the shroud and has palpably, if informally, promoted various beliefs about it. These include the idea that it is the cloth in which the corpse of Jesus was wrapped for burial, as well as the correlative idea that the images and the ostensible bloodstains on the shroud are direct impressions of that corpse. According to one vigorous advocate of those beliefs, the most recent public exposition of the shroud, held at Turin during the summer of 1978, drew some 3.5 million people.

On 14 October 1988 the "New York Times" reported that the shroud had been discredited by radiocarbon dating: Tests had indicated that the linen was no more than 750 years old. The "Times" also recounted the tortuous statements by which the archbishop of Turin, in announcing the results of the tests, had tried to obfuscate the Church's promotion of the shroud and had given assurance that the shroud, even if bogus, had "produced miracles." (1)

I was in Port Chester, New York, at the time, visiting members of my family. When I showed the "Times" to my brother, Bob, he said that the Corpus Christi church -- one of several Catholic churches in Port Chester -- had a shrine entirely devoted to the shroud. I suggested that we go over to the church to see how the shroud was being promoted to the faithful.

As Joe Nickell relates in "Inquest on the Shroud of Turin", the shroud was condemned, very early in its strange history, as a fake. In 1389 the bishop of Troyes, in France, sent a report about the shroud to Pope Clement VII. It began: (2)

"The case, Holy Father, stands thus. Some time since in this diocese of Troyes, the Dean of a certain collegiate church . . .

falsely and deceitfully, and not from any motive of devotion but only of gain, procured for his church a certain cloth cunningly painted, upon which by a clever sleight of hand was depicted the twofold image of one man, . . . he falsely declaring and pretending that this was the actual shroud in which our Savior Jesus Christ was enfolded in the tomb."

Pope Clement declined to suppress the shroud entirely, but in 1390 he imposed restrictions on any future exhibitions of it. There would be no ceremonies or candles or incense or guard of honor, he decreed, and each exposition would have to include the announcement that "it is not the true Shroud of Our Lord but a painting or picture made in the semblance or representation of the shroud."

The Pope's prudent judgment, however, was soon eclipsed. The Savoy acquired the shroud in 1453, and they immediately began to exhibit it as Jesus's burial cloth and to attribute miraculous powers to it. Their enterprise succeeded, and the shroud became widely accepted, among Catholics, as an authentic relic. It enjoyed that status for the next 500 years or so, even though the Church's central administration remained conspicuously ambiguous. They repeatedly provided de facto endorsement of the folklore and superstitions that adhered to the shroud, but they never said definitively that the shroud was the thing that believers believed it to be.

The most engaging episode in the shroud's history has come in our own century, as it has been subjected to scientific and pseudoscientific examinations. The proceedings have been odd, sometimes Byzantine, and often absurd, because they have included the repeated conflation of a real question with a purely theatrical one. The real question, arising from some puzzling visual and physical properties of the images, has been: How were the images formed? The theatrical one, promoted by some Church officials and other believers, has been: Is the shroud authentic? In the context of this latter question, some people -- committed to finding that the shroud is genuine -- have misrepresented their tests or their results and have tried to explain contrary results by inventing supernatural forces.

The question of the authenticity of the shroud and its images is a nonsense because the shroud itself declares unequivocally that it is a work of art. The evidence can be plainly seen and does not require the intercession of microscopes, spectroscopes or any of the other devices that have been enlisted. Let me explain.

The shroud's devotees imagine that the people who buried Jesus placed His body on a part of the shroud and then drew the rest of the up and over, so that it enfolded the head and entirely covered the body's front and sides. The part of the cloth that was under the body, they say, acquired the rear-view image; the part that was laid atop acquired the front-view image.

This is consistent with the head-to-head orientation of the two images, but it is irreconcilable with the geometry of the images themselves. That geometry is so right that it is wrong: When the shroud is laid flat, the images are realistic and well proportioned; they are not the distorted images that you would see if you wrapped a three-dimensional corpse in a cloth, then somehow transferred an impression of the corpse's surface to the cloth, and then laid the cloth out in two dimensions.

In other words, the images do not conform, even crudely, to the explanation by which believers purport to account for them. Nor do they conform to any other explanation but this: The images were devised by an artist who did what artists -- graphic artists, at least -- always have done. He represented his three-dimensional subject by making planar projections, and he omitted features that had no projections on the two planes that he had chosen. This explains two stark properties of the shroud for which, as far as I know, the believers have no explanation at all. It tells why there are no images of the corpse's sides, and it tells why the space between the two images -- which, according to a believers' scenario, should have acquired an impression of the top of the corpse's head -- is bare. For me, the naive geometry of the images has always been conclusive. Readers who want to learn about other impeachments of the shroud's authenticity will find an abundant supply in Joe Nickell's book. I cannot even begin to summarize them here, but I must mention the business of the "bloodstains."

The shroud shows many red marks that represent blood from the wounds that Jesus incurred, during a period of many hours, as He was flogged, crowned with thorns, nailed to a cross, and stabbed with a lance. And like the images of the corpse, these "bloodstains" are much too good to be true. Nickell says:

"The 'blood' stains on the shroud are suspiciously still red, whereas aged blood turns black. In addition they are 'picturelike'. . . . Other questions arise: How could some of the 'clots' or 'flows' which had DRIED (for example, those on the arms) have transferred to the cloth at all? As to blood flowing onto the cloth after the body was supposedly wrapped. . . , how could such WET blood have dried without causing the cloth to adhere to the body? And if such blood had not dried, how could it fail to smear when the body was removed?"

Among those "picturelike" stains, the ones that represent flows from wounds induced by the crown of thorns are especially notable. They depict blood arranged in rivulets, outside of Jesus's hair, but real blood from scalp wounds does not flow in that way; it spreads into the hair, sticking to it and matting it. Various examinations of the shroud's "blood stains" have failed to disclose corpuscles, hemoglobin or any other materials that are specific to blood, but they have given evidence of several substances that were used by medieval artists as pigments.

The reason why the Corpus Christi church has a shrine devoted to the shroud is that Father Peter M. Rinaldi was the church's pastor from 1950 to 1977. Rinaldi was a believer if there ever was one, and he wrote several books about the shroud.

Copies of his "I Saw the Holy Shroud" were displayed for sale in the church's vestibule when Bob and I got there, and I bought one.(3) The text -- credulous, sophistic and highly distortive -- includes a brief, sterilized version of the shroud's history and some commensurately bogus invocations of science. As a whole, it is comparable to a creationist pamphlet.

As Bob and I walked from the vestibule into the shrine, we met a full-sized, fully colored statue of Jesus on His cross. It was meant to be both clinical and horrific; the nearby placard said the statue had been made by a devotee of the shroud and that it reflected what the shroud told about Jesus's awful death.

The statue captivated me for several minutes -- not only because it was wonderfully garish but also because it did indeed resonate with the shroud. Jesus's body bore many spots and stripes of red paint, representing blood from the lacerations inflicted when He was flogged; and even though the flogging had been administered well before the crucifixion, this blood was no different in color from the fresh blood that was flowing from newer wounds. Nor had the spots and stripes been smeared or smudged; nor had they been blurred by the sweat that Jesus had shed during His considerable exertions on the way to His execution. The artist who had painted the statue had made errors like some of the ones that had been made, 600 years earlier, by the artist who had painted the shroud.

The shrine itself was rather dark and physically unimpressive. Its principal resources comprised a reduced-scale photograph of the shroud, some other pictures, and a number of explanatory placards. The placards said outright that the shroud was the true, miraculous shroud of Jesus, asked rhetorically what else it could be, and told that scientists had affirmed that its authenticity had resisted all scientific challenges.

The results of the radiocarbon dating of the shroud, along with the announcement of those results by the archbishop of Turin, have been reported widely and prominently by the popular media, including the daily newspaper that serves Port Chester. And I am sure that the current pastor of Corpus Christi -- even if he has had no particular interest in the Shroud of Turin -- knows, even now, that his shrine needs an overhauling. Just for fun, I intend to visit the church again to see if any changes have been made. I'll let you know what I find out.

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2. J. Nickell. 1983. "Inquest on the Shroud of Turin". Prometheus Books.
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"PSYCHIC" SYLVIA

Oh don't you love it! The "Psychic" in this headline is as it appeared, complete with quotes, on the front page of the October 25th "San Jose Mercury News". The paper reports that the best-known Bay Area psychic, Sylvia Brown, is accused of defrauding lenders on loans in excess of \$200,000. On top of that, or perhaps because of it, she has filed for protection under the bankruptcy laws.

Brown has hated BAS since it's inception. Mention Bay Area Skeptics in general or Bob Steiner in particular, and you will see one hot woman go off to New York. Now, despite this overt hostility -- even though it may be tempting -- we don't crow about Brown's misfortunes, or the possibility that she may be involved in fraudulent activities, but we do crow that this newspaper doesn't put any credence in her "psychic" profession, as evidenced by the quotes.

In the article, with a very unflattering picture of her looking every day of her 52 years, Brown allegedly is involved with her Los Gatos real estate broker in falsifying loan documents. All this is just part of the daily grind of airing the dirty laundry of the celebrities. What makes this particular celebrity noteworthy as far as we are concerned is her claim of psychic powers.

Sylvia charges an average of \$360 for a 40-minute psychic consultation. She has founded a "church" ("Novus Spiritus") of which she is the minister. Reverend Brown has done quite well for herself with her psychic religion business. Much of her consultation relates to business advice; word has it that her mercantile counsel goes at considerably more than the regular fee for the lovelorn and the lost. She became involved with her broker in several ventures, and, if we can believe her side of the story, he took her for a ride.

So why, of all people to get taken down the pike -- presuming her story to be correct -- would it be super-psychic Sylvia Brown? Shouldn't her spectacular precognitive and clairvoyant powers have served her when she needed them most? What reassurance does she have for her many disciples that her powers haven't taken leave of her in wholesale fashion, which could very likely leave them where she is? She despaired that she gave all her financial dealings over to the broker, and SHE HAS NO IDEA WHAT HE DID WITH ALL THE MONEY! She trusted him "like a brother."

"That's something that hurt me really bad," Brown said of her dealings with him. "I'm not psychic about myself -- that's the tragedy."

The real tragedy is the belief she has fostered in the public that she is psychic about ANYTHING.

SUITLESS PSYCHIC

Skeptics' groups nationwide have had a rather nervous eye turned to Hawaii this past year in a case involving parapsychologist Gharith Pendragon, a part-time instructor of non-credit courses at UH. Several skeptics have mailed in newspaper clippings about the verdict, but these accounts mostly announce the CSICOP victory without much background. The details of the case were summarized by CSICOP Executive Director and Australian barrister Mark Plummer in CSICOP's "Skeptical Briefs", official newsletter of the national group. Parts of the following article are something of a summary of Plummer's summary.

The whole flap began in 1986 when attention was brought to some Hawaiian skeptics about course offerings by Pendragon at Windward Community College, an adjunct of the University of Hawaii. The classes were part of WCC's non-credit, extension division program. The titles of the four courses were (1) Introduction to Psychic Phenomena, (2) Mastering Clairvoyance, (3) Developing Telepathy, and (4) Psychic Development. The course description of #3 is particularly interesting: "Telepathy, mind to mind communication, is a psychic trait that has been documented around the world. It is also a talent and a skill that can be deliberately enhanced by individuals. This course explores the theories of why and how telepathy works, as well as various meditations and techniques to increase telepathy."

Without doubt, all of us would like to see the world-wide documentation unless it is, as we might expect, world-wide anecdotes. The most impressive thing about Pendragon's telepathy course would be that he explores the how's and why's of theories for which we have looked in vain all these years to throw at the wall. A theory can be dissected and tested; the statistics parapsychology has given us cannot. Pendragon must be hiding these theories even from his associate parapsychologists.

In July of 1986, a Hawaiian newspaper quoted Pendragon saying he held a master's degree in psychology from USC and that he was a "licensed clairvoyant and psychic." A search produced evidence that Pendragon had no master's degree and that the only license he had was an excise tax license; he later wrote a letter to the paper admitting this.

The results of this inquiry, and the questionable academic nature of his course offerings generated some letters from some

concerned U of H faculty and Hawaiian skeptics to the university administration. Pendragon's annual contract was not renewed, so he filed suit in Superior Court against CSICOP, Paul Kurtz, James Randi, U of H, Hawaii Skeptics, and various individuals associated with HS. He alleged that the activities of the defendants resulted in the cancellation of his courses and he sought redress for: 1. defamation, 2. interference with contractual relations, 3. civil conspiracy to deprive him of his civil rights, and 4. violations of his rights under the first and fourteenth amendments of the Constitution. The plaintiff sought injunctive relief against the University to be reinstated, asserted that there was a conspiracy against him, claimed his constitutional rights had been abrogated, and charged that the defamation had financially harmed him.

In answer to the conspiracy allegations, the evidence showed that the defendant's statements were public, that many of Pendragon's own exhibits did not refer to him directly or indirectly, and that CSICOP knew nothing about the whole affair until late October 1986. Regarding Pendragon's rights, Judge Harold Fong accepted as persuasive defendants' arguments that there is no such thing as a constitutional right to teach a non-credit course, and that the first amendment does not compel a university to hire someone to teach parapsychology.

The defamation aspect turned on the legal definition. Was Pendragon a "public figure"? The judge ruled that, for the purposes of this case, Pendragon WAS a public figure insofar as parapsychology was concerned; this by his own papers, as his resume included radio and TV appearances, letters to newspapers and the like. Law requires that defamation charges against a public figure be backed by solid evidence that the defendants "acted with actual malice, making statements knowing them to be false or with reckless disregard of whether they are false or not." Judge Fong found no evidence to this effect.

The question of defamation turned out to be the most significant portion of the trial as far as Pendragon's case is concerned, and for the wider issue of parapsychology in general. IF PENDRAGON INDEED POSSESSED PSYCHIC POWERS, IT REMAINED TO HIM TO PROVE IT BEFORE HE COULD ARGUE CONVINCINGLY THAT HE WAS DEFAMED BY SOMEONE WHO ASSERTS HE HAS NO SUCH THING. Here would be his chance to not only embarrass these nasty skeptics, but to have a courtroom platform on which to do it while establishing the validity of psychic phenomena. Imagine the humiliation Randi would have to suffer by anteing-up his \$10,000 prize from a courtroom demonstration of psi in addition to the court judgments! The defendants submitted a motion that Pendragon present such evidence to the court to substantiate his public claims. The court agreed, and a "discovery request" was served. Pendragon refused to respond even on order of the court, and now the case was turning black for him.

Fong found Pendragon's objections to the requests were without

merit and that the defendant's motions for sanctions against him and his counsel were valid. Pendragon's pleading turned from bad to non-existent to ludicrous when his wife-attorney argued that the defendant's motions "sought to deprive him of his sixth amendment right to confrontation and discover." Judge Fong responded that "a reasonably competent attorney would know that this sixth amendment right is limited to criminal cases."

The court ruled that the plaintiffs pay court costs and attorney fees of the defendants, finding the lawsuit without merit and frivolous.

While we are obviously pleased with the outcome, we must remember that BAS is not an affiliate of CSICOP, and that no individual has any express or implied authorization to speak for CSICOP or BAS. There is of course a responsibility to address bizarre claims carefully, but the chilling specter of litigation has threatened to silence critics of the nonsense that rains upon us daily. It is reassuring to know that sanity prevails in our court system in light of some of the horror stories we hear to the contrary. The victory is sweet, but we must be nonetheless careful about libel issues.

We would very much like to ask Mr. Pendragon why he couldn't have foreseen the outcome clairvoyantly so as to save his own time and the money he now must pay for the legal expenses of those he sued.

CORRECTION PLEASE

"BASIS" wishes to make several corrections relating to the article we ran on the meeting review of Loyd Auerbach's presentation. That's Loyd, with one "l." If we can't get the name right, is there any hope? Also, Loyd heartily thanked us for the promotion we accorded him -- we like to take good care of our speakers -- but with commendable honesty, he declined the Ph.D. we conferred upon him.

He says his publicist would like to know about the other book he wrote; Loyd only knows of one himself. Maybe the other one we credited him with was written out of body. We confused the subtitle of his only book as being a separate book. That's what you get for having such a lengthy title, Loyd. Auerbach also shrugged the status of "professional magician" with which we graced him. We should have said "professional-quality magician."

For more substantive matters of the article itself, (see the October issue of "BASIS") Auerbach notes that "The panel of magicians at the Parapsychological Association Convention in Boston in 1985 did NOT conclude that magicians need to be present at all experiments. To the contrary, it was noted at that and the previous panel (in 1983) that in most of the experimental methodologies of today, computerized as they are, a magician might be helpful during the design stage of the

experiment, but that there'd be little or nothing for him/her to look for during the running of the experiment. In addition, it's almost impossible for a scientist to determine that the magician he/she consults is knowledgeable enough to really be of any help. Even a magician can be fooled. [emphasis added].

Thanks, Dr. Hourback, for these corrections. -- Ed.

EDITOR'S CORNER

by Kent Harker

The unflappable Dr. Duane Gish, fundamentalist and foremost anti-evolution debater, was in San Jose for a three-day conference on "Bible Science." His schedule was for the church: no outside invitations and no planned debates.

I attended an informal Saturday morning breakfast fellowship organized to enlighten Christians on how to debate evolutionists.

It was an interesting atmosphere: breaking the fast with early-morning evangelists who had come to learn the fundamentals of fundamentalist crusading against Darwinian devils. Little groups collected here and there while the victuals were prepared. I shuffled around and listened in on several of them; I am very interested to see how they talked to themselves. Heads shook in disgust and disbelief as they made comments about the absurdity of evolutionary theory. Disbelief sometimes turned to a hearty guffaw when someone tossed out some favorite creationist straw man.

We enjoyed a respectable meal as discussion continued over the table. I sat across from a young family and talked casually to the woman. She related her trials in the public schools, assuring me that she had been an excellent student until she got to biology. "The teacher was totally closed-minded," she said. He, according to her, would become very angry when she asked certain questions -- questions that "he couldn't answer." I asked her what some of them were, but she couldn't remember. She related how she finally got herself out of that den of humanist snakes and enrolled in a good Christian school where they taught the truth.

"I just couldn't buy all that junk about the dinosaurs being a million years old," she said. "Why, I would not even let my son play with dinosaur models until I found out the truth: that they were all drowned by the Flood!"

I wondered if I tipped my hand when I told her the dratted evolutionists say they are some 65 million years old. When she didn't flinch, I guess there isn't much difference between one million and sixty-five million if one believes the universe is only 6,000 years old.

After the small talk and some plate clearing, the Pastor introduced "the man called by God to do the most important work in our age, Dr. Duane Gish, of the Institute for Creation Research." Gish's physical stature and appearance do not measure up to his renown.

"Should we defend Christianity through material evidence?" he began. "Some Christians object to mixing science and theology, faith and reason. Our mission at the ICR is to turn people to the Bible and the Lord," he pronounced.

What? The ICR tells the PUBLIC that its purpose is academic freedom -- equal time for alternative viewpoints. The fundamentalists have assured us all along that they are only concerned about science - that religion has nothing to do with it. This testimony went all the way to the Supreme Court as their position. Maybe Exodus 20:15 doesn't cut much when it comes to presenting the "Lord's side."

"The debate format is one of the most effective tools of evangelism we have," he continued. "People come from all over. Every time we stage a debate, the rooms are filled to the walls, and there are many testimonies of those who have gone on to accept Christ. The only disadvantage is that we have to share the podium with the evolutionists!"

This is the unvarnished reality. Debates give a platform to the creationists on two false premises: 1) the format is to discuss creation vs. evolution, and 2) that science is the only concern. The format is laid out and orchestrated entirely by the promoters of the debates, the creationists. THEY organize the debates, set the agenda, invite the people, etc. It is in their control and according to their plan. The topic will be evolution, period. There will be no talk of creationism. Part two is a joke. Science is complex. A real discussion of evolution would require that one have a sound working knowledge of physics, chemistry, biology, geology, paleontology and taxonomy. How does this fit the average person? The debate is a stage on which creationists can perform.

The legitimate scientist walking into this forensic booby trap is grist for the mill. There is no time to even scratch the surface of important research and developments. The tactic of the creationists is very effective: Put the hapless opponent on the defensive and he or she will waste the whole time trying to dig him or herself out of the hole prepared by the organizers. And lose we do. Most of the early debates have been badly lost to creationists, which gives them trophies to place on their shelves. Gish proclaimed that "the truth always wins, and the people can see that!" Anyone who has ever been on a debate team can attest to the reality: truth has precious little to do with the debate and everything to do with tactics and forensic skill.

Gish unrolled the basic plan to his breakfast audience. First, it must be simple. (Here he demonstrates his debating skill. Some of

his hapless opponents have hamstrung themselves with the complexities of micro and molecular biology, physics, paleontology, etc.) Second, (of course he did not DIRECTLY say what I am about to say, but it is nevertheless an essential ingredient of creationist success): construct some giant straw men and then pull out the matches. Here is Gish's formula for a creationist debate success, straight from the horses mouth: "We must attack from four points: 1) Probability, 2) The fossil record, 3) Thermodynamics, and 4) Metamorphosis of the butterfly."

Number one is a wonderful straw man. It relies on the false premise that all the appropriate modifiers of chance, viz. "pure," "blind," "nothing but," etc. depict an accurate mechanism for evolutionary function. Of course life is unthinkable if chance is the ONLY feature, and herein lies the popular appeal. But no evolutionary theory offers chance as the ONLY mechanism. Some of the newest research (in the latest issue of "Nature", a Harvard team reports that certain one-celled bacteria begin mutating very rapidly when subjected to lethal environments) suggests that mutation, for example, may be built into the genetic structure; i.e., randomness may not even be the only way for mutation to occur.

Number two is a powerful approach. The public is, for all practical purposes, totally ignorant of the fossil record and the geologic column. There are, to be sure, "gaps" in the historic record. When one thinks about it for a minute, it is a remarkable event when anything fossilizes. Because it is an extreme rarity, there are gaps all over the place; also, what is considered a gap is very subjective. The overall picture is a simple-to-complex one, with eras that are presently silent. But to argue that current silence is proof of nonexistence is specious in the extreme, especially since creationists conveniently side step the lines in which there are tightly linked "intermediaries," of which the genus Homo is an example.

Number three is a creationist mainstay because it has such strong emotional appeal, and a good debater knows that emotion is the way to win a debate. Swing low and the audience will swing with you. Throw in an absurd metaphor or analogy, and they'll be eating out of your hand, metaphors like a wind sweeping through a junk yard to produce a 747. A moron knows this can't happen no matter how much time is allowed, and of course even the simplest life is much more complex than a 747.

The second law of thermodynamics says, in an overly-simplistic way, that things cannot normally proceed from simple to complex. This argument is closely related to number one, because it assumes that chance is the ONLY factor involved.

Creationist would have their listeners believe that scientists world wide have suffered the same, fundamental mental lapse: they all forgot one of the basic laws (the 2nd law of thermodynamics)

of physics.

Item number four is a new trick. Again, the appeal is the simplicity of the approach. This tactic says, "if your theory is correct, it must explain every single thing right now. If I am able to find a single, unexplained datum, your theory does not cover it now and will not ever be able to cover it, and it cannot be modified in any way by newer information to explain this datum. This caricature of science is standard fare with creationists. Since they are ruled by absolutes themselves, they think science must work in a pool of absolutes. At the base of number four is a false dichotomy: if you cannot explain this it was a miracle. Creationists are masters of the false dichotomy -- it is their staff of debate life.

All of this is tactics, the stuff of debate. What to do? there is a sort of damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't dilemma here. If the evolutionary side refuses to debate because we know it is not a format to produce enlightenment, the creationists win by default, so there is no alternative: debate we must. But those who accept debate must come to the podium with a firm grasp of the reality: it is a forensic spectacle, not an exercise in elucidation. All the stuff of modern science -- theories, evidence, scientific methodology, etc. -- is not at all the issue. Since creationists set the agenda -- they require their opponents sign statements about the format -- the event is in their control. Control must be wrested from them on the stage by requiring them to answer the most basic questions about the absurdity of their position: a 6,000-year-old universe, a world-wide flood that is the cause of the geologic column, and the fact that they are in disagreement not only with evolutionary biology, but in direct conflict with physics, astronomy, chemistry, anthropology, taxonomy, paleontology, and just about every other branch of the physical, social and life sciences. Another essential is preparation: the evolutionary side must know the creationist position inside out. (In some early debates, the evolutionists knew little to nothing about creationist positions, again showing the naivete of some responding to the challenge.)

Until we begin to meet creationists at their own level, we will continue to lose debates and we will continue to help them further their fundamentalist religious evangelism.

THERE'S PROGRESS

The "San Jose Mercury", a nationally recognized newspaper, is one of only seven major papers that publishes a disclaimer with its syndicated astrology column. Under the aegis of CSICOP, some 24 Nobel laureates signed a statement about three years ago to the effect that there is no scientific basis for the ancient craft. This declaration was then circulated to the big publishers with a request that they append a disclaimer to their horoscope columns.

The "Mercury" took the declaration even more seriously than CSICOP had hoped and moved Omar's daily spiel next to the comic page, adding the CSICOP disclaimer. On October 8 of this year the editors did themselves one better: they moved the blasted thing right ONTO the comics page. Larson's popular "The Far Side" replaced the horoscope with this note under the cartoon: "The Horoscope has moved to the comics page."

One mustn't look for punishment when there is victory, but the only negative might be that the horoscope is now right next to the crossword puzzle, a situation that might stoke up the wordsmith aficionados to snip off the intruding drivel so as not to be distracted from the serious business of what is a morning ritual pleasure for them.

We ought all to write to the editors to salute this brave move because they are likely to be set back some with subscription cancellations from the many astrology junkies.

But hold on to your horses. Just when we are patting ourselves on the back for the part we had in this minuscule victory, "BASIS" received a call from skeptic Richard Cleverly who sent us a copy of the "Psychic Reader", a Berkeley publication that we (and many serious parapsychologists) would consider the "Enquirer" of parapsychology. Richard notes, to our grand dismay, that the "Reader" boasts over 65,000 subscribers. "BASIS" has one of the larger subscription bases of local groups and we are under 400. Ugh.

This demoralizing information was darkened further by a recent CBS poll about the state of science education in America. Fully one fourth of those surveyed did not know the earth orbited the sun. Ten percent of those vaguely aware of the heliocentric reality believed that earth's orbit is completed in a 24-hour period.

Is it any wonder the public is fair game for anything that drops into the vacuum? Progress is going to be slow, but we may take some minor comfort that, as far as astrology goes, there are seven less newspapers pandering astrobabble than before.

BAS IS ONLINE

Bay Area Skeptics has fully entered the electronic age. Most of the publication of "BASIS" is done by computer as is the submission of most material. In our efforts to expand the communication and offer rapid exchange, BAS Secretary Rick Moen has, with the help of Director Yves Barbero (and some money from BAS chairman Larry Loebig and others), put together a Bulletin Board System (BBS). Rick is the computer expert, and Yves is the scrounging expert. For very little out-of-pocket expense and a

great deal of time and effort, they have assembled a crackerjack system running at 300/1200 baud (N81) for all you computer nuts out there. Moen is the systems operator - SysOp in the parlance.

With the cost of communication hardware so low - inexpensive modems are well under \$100 and the software to run them is in the public domain (free) - you should expand the utility of your own system by adding a modem. The information available at the keyboard with the modem is phenomenal and a source of real enjoyment.

To contact the BAS BBS, have your computer phone (415) 648-8944. You can leave private messages or air your latest challenge to all the callers. If you have articles you would like have considered for publication, upload them with reference to the editor. We welcome criticism and suggestions. Ring us up and keep up with the very latest.

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