

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet  
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Editor: Kent Harker

## MENSA MADNESS

[Mensa is an organization comprised of those whose I.Q.'s test above 135. While it is easy to think that high intelligence, especially when coupled with special training, might provide some measure of inoculation against irrationality, it is often wrong. Every area of nonsense has its proponents. Often the purveyors of nonsense are highly intelligent and educated at some of the best schools. How and where does solid thinking go awry is one of the more vexing questions we would like to understand. -- Ed.]

The May issue of the "Intelligencer", the official publication of that elite society of the superintelligent known as Mensa, carried an announcement by editor Burt Schmitz inviting the membership to participate in some remote-viewing experiments at SRI. In the article, Schmitz asks, assumptively, "Why does RV [remote viewing] work?" The researchers at SRI apparently expressed an interest in having some cerebral types participate, perhaps reasoning that high I.Q. might in some way produce high Psi-Q.

"BASIS" contacted Mr. Schmitz by phone and found that he is a believer. From informal conversation, his assessment was that if there was not outright acceptance of psi among Mensa membership, certainly a large proportion are sympathetic. If Schmitz's evaluation of the extent of psi belief in Mensa is correct, what it establishes for sure is that there is little correlation between I.Q. and what we would like to see as careful skepticism.

It turns out that the SRI invitation was offered by Dr. Edwin May (himself a physicist, out of his area of specialty), Director of the Cognitive Sciences Program. May is working to establish evidence that remote viewing is real. This is the same Dr. May about whom the January issue of "BASIS" recounts the skeptical view (investigations done by Don Henvick) of the same kind of test that the Mensa group would encounter.

While some in Mensa might not like the tenor of that article, several points Don made are well taken: 1) Dr. May has not published his findings in over 12 ("BASIS" mistakenly told Schmitz 7) years, 2) protocol for a scientific test were almost entirely lacking, and 3) it looks for all the world as if May's work at SRI is about equivalent to looking at Rorschach Ink Blots: Whatever one sees is a hit.

Schmitz said that Dr. May was quick to make it clear that the tests would not be "formal scientific tests." This is another problem that exists all too often in parapsychological experiments: the "official" part begins when it looks like something unusual is happening. This has the effect of "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't mess with mister in-between." This business of twelve years of work just to see what happens, or for the sheer experience is a bit much. It is all supposed to fall under the rubric of scientific experimentation.

In the course of the conversation, Schmitz said that ESP (or, as parapsychologists prefer, "psi") is an "intuitive field" and hence not amenable to scientific investigation. That directly contradicts his "Intelligencer" article, viz., ". . . and [May's] continuing SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH is eminent in this field. . . ." and ". . . this is a rare opportunity to become an actual participant in an ACCREDITED FIELD OF SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION. . . ." (emphasis added).

Schmitz's assessment (that psi isn't subject to scientific analyses) is a rather common pronouncement. However, it does seem that the believers in psi want to have the respectability of science but few of the rigors required thereof. If parapsychology is indeed "an accredited field of scientific investigation" we wonder why, in well over 100 years of concentrated, worldwide research there is not a SINGLE replicable (by non-parapsychologists) experiment.

Schmitz mentioned the cold-fusion controversy on the phone. "BASIS" offered that the backbone of scientific method is replicability - the cold-fusion debacle so beautifully demonstrated this by its failure. In over 100 years there is not even a working theory of psi: "Parapsychology is the study of psychic or `psi' phenomena (pronounced `sigh'). We have no central theory of psi functioning. There, I've said it, plain and simple" (Auerbach, "Handbook of Parapsychology", 1986, p. 97).

Loyd Auerbach is an active parapsychologist doing research. Is there any other accredited field of science that has continued for so long with so little to show for it? Schmitz had no answer other than to say that it is a new field of inquiry (they laughed at Galileo) and that hard evidence will soon be forthcoming.

The other problem "BASIS" has with psi is that if there is such a force or energy it must necessarily countermand almost everything we currently hold about the laws of physics:

- All of nature's forces with which we are familiar diminish in intensity with time and distance.
- Transmission of information cannot take place at speeds faster than that of light.

In great contrast to this, psychic information is alleged to occur:

- Instantaneously across any distance

- Backward and forward in time.

Paraphysicists have tried to enlist the apparent paradoxes of quantum theory, such as the EPR thought experiment, to support psi function. Most physicists agree this is bankrupt.

Our cosmology would have to undergo a complete paradigm revolution. Schmitz did not disagree with this, which is refreshing. Most believers think there is nothing extraordinary about psi function. Of course, such a revolution is possible, but we suggest to Mensa - and anyone else interested in the question -- that we proceed rather skeptically, faced with such a drastic alternative.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Schmitz mentioned that he had had several personal experiences so powerful that they left him helpless to find any rational explanation. (This makes it clear that there is what may properly be called a spiritual component to belief in psi.) Nearly all of us have had some kind of strange experience.

However, one must be wary, because personal experiences are subjective, and "accredited fields of science" shun subjectivity. Scientific examination absolutely requires objectivity. It has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of most that human subjective human experience is prone to the most egregious errors. As the scientific method is understood today, it is of singular importance to eliminate any subjective bias that may skew the results of an experiment.

Another point to make about the Utah group is that they are out of their area of expertise: they are both electrochemists, and they made some very bad physics errors -- errors that are understandable precisely because they aren't nuclear physicists. Their problem was that they would not collaborate with experts in relevant fields.

We see the same thing happening in laboratories in which physicists, for example, who have little or no understanding of the best research available in psychology -- and, alas, trickery -- conduct tests that have very much to do with human psychology and trickery. Russell Targ's and Hal Puthoff's work at SRI in the 70's was so heavily flawed in these regards that they have almost become classics of just how shabbily things can be done. They are models of how personal belief and desire can destroy objectivity.

Of course the question is still open. We in the skeptical community hope to see some of the legitimate scientific results that should come from an "accredited field of science." Until such evidence is forthcoming, we suggest all should keep an open mind -- especially those in Mensa -- and not jump to conclusions based upon the mere hopes and wishes of subjective experience.

Those unfamiliar with the scientific process are impatient with the sometimes lumbering body. This conservative approach is necessary

to keep the halls clear of the debris and chaff that would quickly clog if the door is thrown open to everything. (There are some eminent philosophers of science, notably Paul Feyerabend, who have advocated that the portals should be thrown wide-open -- nothing excluded. This is tempting, and sounds like it might produce many new theories, but it doesn't work.)

The Pons-Fleishmann experience should teach us that it is better to withhold judgment about the existence of some extraordinary phenomenon until there are replicable, verifiable scientific tests, the requirement of any "accredited field of science."

## BAS IN THE NEWS

BAS makes a splash at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) meeting in Chico, California.

BAS founder Robert Steiner, BAS advisor Dr. Wallace Sampson, BAS board member Lawrence Jerome, former board member Don Henvick, and Sacramento Skeptic's Terry Sandbeck were panelists for a special session at the AAAS, the most prestigious science organization in the country.

Steiner began with a display of some of his best magic routines to demonstrate how easily he can lead someone to believe he has paranormal powers. When Bob does his thing before an audience of believers the common reaction is anger; to anyone else, wonderment and delight are the enthusiastic responses. One way or the other, he stirs things up.

Dr. Sampson (oncologist at Stanford) talked about the dangers of medical quackery and the most common pitch the quacks throw: The medical establishment is wicked and entirely consumed with the desire to make money, which it can only do by keeping people sick.

Sadly, large segments of the population have bought this. When that notion is coupled with the fact that many quacks truly believe that they have found a remedy means that we may win some battles but lose the war. The quack's most powerful weapon is the happy client -- someone who felt better after a visit.

What can be said about Don Henvick? He told an amused audience of the many ministrations he has received at the hands of some of the most illustrious faith healers. He showed some of the video tapes he has of the whole charade. It was clear that Don's charade was the only honest thing that happened at those crusades.

Lawrence Jerome used his statistical studies of astrology to show the emptiness of astrological claims, reiterating the point that there is not a single shred of evidence to support the assertion that astrological bodies have any control over our lives.

Dr. Sandbeck, a psychologist, spoke about why we believe as we do. He was careful to separate belief from faith, pointing out that our beliefs are subject to questioning whereas faith is outside the realm of scientific scrutiny. He suggested that many believe in demonstrably false things out of simple intellectual laziness and willingness to accept authority without question.

The consensus of the panelists was that when faced with something amazing, one should accept the most reasonable answer before searching for a supernatural explanation.

The BAS presentation made the front page in local papers.

## RAMPARTS

[Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and your participation is urged. Clip, snip and tear bits of irrationality from your local scene and send them to the Editor. If you want to add some comment with the submission, please do so.]

Our word "gypped" did not come into existence without a venerable background. Gypsy scammers are still on the loose, reports the L. A. "Herald Examiner". Since Gypsy lore seems to be the embodiment of everything mystical, it may come as no surprise that Gypsy crimes often involve supernatural claims.

One Olga Cruz, an illegal immigrant, allegedly swindled well over \$300,000 in cash and jewelry from people who responded to her advertised powers. She claimed to be able to "cure illnesses, make women fertile, keep husbands faithful, bless valuables to make them even more valuable, and make things purchased with blessed money more valuable."

Her victims brought money, jewelry -- even credit cards -- for her blessings. Olga would retire to a private room to perform the benediction and quickly continue her retirement from the building through a back door. When the police caught up with her she was wearing several rings on every finger and had her whole body draped with gold chains, bracelets and necklaces. Her dog was wearing several gold chains.

A lot of people could save a whole lot of money by subscribing to "BASIS" and "The Skeptical Inquirer".

Organic foods are not enough. The very word "organic" has lost some of its punch over time. It has a nice visceral appeal, but it isn't technical-sounding enough. The public's quest for superlatives in insatiable, which is reason enough for wackos to concoct whatever formula to tap into popular gullibility. The latest is "biodynamic farming," a term which seem to have captured the hearts of some who want nature AND something that sounds high-tech. In marketing, we

learn that what you call it is more important than what it is.

The "Wall Street Journal" did a high-visibility piece on this latest wrenching irrationality. The method combines spiritual and "potentizing" rituals in connection with SUPER-organic methods - ordinary organic stuff is not adequate. The fertilizers are evidently the key to this latest horticulture horror, and it is about as far-out as one can imagine: "Dandelions aged in cow membrane, yarrow blossoms that have lain all winter in a stag bladder, and oak bark that has spent the solstice in an animal skull buried by a stream."

Natural pesticides include such things as a snail brew, "collected from five gallons of the slimy creatures, thrown into a pot and stewed for a month." The farmer claimed it worked, but the stench was so powerful she gagged whenever she went to the field where it was applied.

Give us alar any day.

If you are all breathlessly interested in looking for the roots (no pun intended) of this farming method, it turns out to be no less an infamous figure than Rudolph Steiner, the founder of anthroposophical medicine as reported by Dan Dugan in our July issue.

Rudy, (no relation to Bob) placed his mark on just about every aspect of human health and the lack thereof. Steiner's treatises on biodynamics are so arcane that special schools operate to explicate them. In one conducted in Mission Hills, CA, farmer Claire Mamakos reports "it has taken 12 weekly sessions to get through the first 31 pages."

That can't be because these clodbusters are dumb, either. No, no. The price for their wares is about three times that of "ordinary" organic crops, and the demand is increasing all the time, especially in Europe. No wonder this article was reported in the "Journal".

WISE HE'S NOT

Former NASA engineer Edgar Whisenant is on a new space career. He launches himself into thin air with no discernible means of support. His antics have succeed remarkably, and he may have broken a space record for just how far into the nether parts of the galaxy mankind can travel without a spaceship.

"BASIS" reported the failure of his first prediction in our November 1988 issue. Ed, upon careful exegesis of the entire Bible and world chronology, discovered that the curtain was going to come down in September of 1988.

Now one would think that such a proposition is eminently falsifiable, viz. by the fact that this is written and you are reading it here a year after. Dreamers, we are. Space cadet Whisenant was not wrong. Our CALENDARS are wrong, according to the seer. Since our calendars are off by a year, we're still in for it around the first part of September 1989 -- soon (the preparation of this article took place near the end of August). Well, maybe soon. We may be nonetheless fortunate to have some time left to repent. Chicken Little ain't got nothin' on Whisenant.

Whisenant's last monogram was titled "88 Reasons Why The Rapture Will Be In 1988". (If the calendar is wrong, that should only knock out one reason. What about the other 87?) If Ed learned nothing else from his first embarrassment, he learned how to hedge his bets. The title of his current attempt to wipe the egg of his face is "The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993". The format of the title has the years in a perspective, receding and fading into the horizon. Presumably we can take that to mean that if not '89, '90 might go, etc.

It won't make any difference anyway, because if Whisenant has his latest arithmetic straight (and if there isn't another mistake lurking in the calendar), you won't be reading this -- at least not with mortal eyes. Ed might laugh at us, telling us that he warned us in plenty of time for us to be taken up in the clouds with the faithful.

A call to the Whisenant publishing house (in Tennessee) was placed on 16 August to ask if they thought there would be enough time to send material, with what may only be a couple of weeks left. The woman taking orders asked for a Visa account number and did not seem at all amused when told to send the stuff without billing because there wouldn't be enough time for the transaction to be processed anyway. After a long moment of silence, she said, "Sir, do you want to place an order or not?"

Now for a prophecy by "BASIS": Whisenant will find more reasons why things didn't happen this year and more reasons we should buy his books explaining why this book overlooked something. Whisenant is definitely wising up on how to include lots of maybes, ifs, buts, and et ceteras. He is also learning how to sell lots of booklets.

Maybe Whisenant is pretty sharp after all. -- Ed.

## BAS PICNIC

In a word: WOW!

The July meeting consisted of a veritable feast put on by BAS's own BEN AND CAROL BAUMGARTNER. With over 75 to cook for, Ben and Carol provided and prepared ALL the food, and they did not skimp on

quality or quantity. Barbecue and teriyaki beef and chicken, skewered seafood, salad, delectable desserts were enjoyed by all. If Ben and Carol hadn't done enough, they gave prizes in several categories (who had come the farthest, etc.).

At about 3 pm, a stuffed crowd of relaxed people lost their skepticism when BAS co-founder Bob Steiner performed a great magic routine. Someone yelled out that he could duplicate psychically whatever Bob could do by sleight of hand.

We all enjoyed wonderful food and great camaraderie. It is not decided what we will do next year, but it will certainly be difficult to top this.

Again, a hearty and heart-felt "THANK YOU" to Ben and Carol.

## WRITERS! WRITERS!

We call for some help with the information deluge. We have a backlog of tapes, articles, etc. that are sitting for want of a write up. We would like to keep a little more current on the results of BAS's encounters with the media. People from BAS have had newspaper, radio, and TV interviews; several BAS people have been called to appear on talk shows to debate the other side or to answer questions from the listening audience. We have video and audio tapes of some these sessions. They are interesting, informative, and tangible evidence that we are having an impact.

We think that the rest of the BAS group would like to read about these events.

If you would like to do write ups from these tapes and articles for "BASIS", please write to Kent Harker at Box 32451, San Jose, CA 95152.

## A TRUTH PATROLMAN TRACKS PROF. JOHN

by Frank Zindler

(introduction by William Bennetta)

[The September issue of "BASIS" had a short piece -- "Meet Professor John" -- in which I described a radio interview given by John Morris, who is an officer and a "full professor of geology" at the Institute for Creation Research. Soon after I wrote that piece, I received from Frank R. Zindler, of Columbus, Ohio, a report about another of Prof. John's ventures in broadcast quackery. Zindler had confronted Morris in February on "AM Indiana", a television show produced in Indianapolis. Their topic was the "creation-science" that seeks to validate the biblical story of Noah and the Flood -- one of Morris's specialties.

After the broadcast, Zindler investigated some of the misrepresentations that Morris had peddled. Then, in July, when Morris went to Yellow Springs, Ohio, to give a talk, Zindler was ready with a handout called "Truth-Patrol Report on John D. Morris". Here are edited excerpts from the handout, all dealing with what Zindler observed during and after the "AM Indiana" debate in February. -- W.B.]

While trying to substantiate his absurd claim that humans and the ancient dinosaurs once coexisted, and that the dragons of legend were in fact dinosaurs, John Morris stated matter-of-factly, during our debate, that "Alexander the Great has a very sober history of an encounter with a dragon, and most of the historians of the day list dragons as if they were real."

Unfortunately for Morris, no writings of Alexander have survived. The historians Plutarch and Arrian quote from alleged letters of Alexander, but the letters do not tell of any meeting with a dragon.

In an effort to discredit radiometric dating, Morris said: "In the Grand Canyon there are two different lava flows that can be dated by the radiometric dating methods. The one is at the very bottom, one of the oldest rocks, and is probably, you know, one of the very earliest rocks down at the way bottom of the canyon. And the other lava flow is on the very plateau, . . . And it is thought by normal dating methods that that should be just a couple million years old. But with the dating methods, down at the bottom, we've got a whole slew of dates, but basically they -- now, by using the best methods of geology today, the rubidium-strontium method, they dated that at 1.1 billion years. Using that same method, the very same method, the same technique, same accuracy, they dated the one at the top at 2.6 billion years."

Later, in a telephone conversation with me on May 10, 1989, Morris gave the age of the upper lava as 2.5 (not 2.6) billion years. After considerable prompting to give a reference for this astonishing item, he said that the "Arizona Geological Survey" had published a list of all rubidium-strontium dates for Arizona.

As nearly as I could determine, Morris had in mind the "Compilation of Radiometric Age Determination in Arizona," by S.J. Reynolds and colleagues (Bulletin 197; 1986; Arizona Bureau of Geology and Mineral Technology). When I checked that source, I found no date of 2.5 (or 2.6) billion years -- by any method of dating -- for any formation in the entire state of Arizona. The lavas in question date from 0.01 million to 1.18 million years ago; and these are potassium-argon dates, not rubidium-strontium dates.

(Morris is not the only ICR faker who distorts information about Grand Canyon lavas. In the April 1989 issue of the ICR's pamphlet "Impact", Steven A. Austin implies that radiometric dating has shown the upper lavas to be 1.5 (not 2.5) billion years old; and he cites data published by W.P. Leeman, in 1974, in the "Bulletin"

of the Geological Society of America. In fact, however, Leeman reported no such finding.

The false age of 1.5 billion years has been calculated by Austin and is based on only six of the twenty data-points that Leeman showed on a graph. Worse yet, the six points picked by Austin represent samples for which Leeman presented conclusive evidence of contamination!)

Early in our "AM Indiana" debate, I asked Morris for details about the fossiliferous sedimentary rocks which, in his book "The Ark on Ararat", he had falsely claimed were to be found near the top of Mt. Ararat and were proof that this volcanic peak had once been under water. To my great astonishment, Morris denied that he had ever written such a thing:

"I have never said that those fossils were on top of Mt. Ararat," he declared. "Those fossils are IN SIGHT OF Mt. Ararat." When I disputed his denial, he continued: "I reported that in 1969 a glaciologist claimed he found a fossil layer about the 14,000-foot level. The fossil layers that I'VE studied are some ten miles away."

Morris's denial was false. On pages 10 and 11 of "The Ark on Ararat" -- written by Morris and the preacher Tim LaHaye, and issued in 1976 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. -- we find:

A great deal of evidence exists indicating that not only was Mt. Ararat once covered by water, but it even erupted while submerged under great depths of water. In common with many mountains around the world, Mt. Ararat exhibits fossil-bearing strata. Sedimentary rock (by definition laid down by flood [sic] waters) containing the fossilized remains of ocean creatures has been found as high as the snow line, approximately a 14,000-foot elevation. Furthermore, on the exposed northeastern face, layers of lava are intermingled with layers of sediments.

I copied that passage, sent it to Morris, and asked again for documentation. He replied, in a letter sent on March 15, that the supposed discovery was the work of the creationist Clifford Burdick and had been described in the "Creation Research Society Quarterly."

According to Morris, Burdick "conducted a rather extensive geologic survey over the space of several summers. He not only has written that he discovered fossil-bearing strata, on the west flank of Mt. Ararat, but he has told me so personally. . . . The discovery was included not only in Burdick's CRSQ articles, but also in the official report by the Archaeological Research Foundation to the Turkish Government, resulting from their expeditions in the 1960's."

Because creationist journals are not carried by legitimate science

libraries, I sent Morris a \$5 bill and a request for a photocopy of Burdick's report. (I did not mention the fact that Morris, in his letter to me of March 15, had tacitly admitted that he HAD written about fossils on Mt. Ararat.) Morris returned my \$5, on May 4, 1989, with a rude note: "Keep your money. The materials you requested are part of the public record and available in many places. I have no intention of doing your work for you."

Suspecting that Morris was trying to hide something, I eventually obtained a copy of the Burdick article to which Morris evidently was referring: "Ararat -- the Mother of Mountains," which had appeared not in the "Creation Research Society Quarterly" but in the Society's "1967 Annual". As I read it, I saw why Morris had not wanted me to get a look at it. Nowhere in the article did Burdick claim that there were fossiliferous, sedimentary layers on Mt. Ararat! He simply gave a list of fossils found in 1845, by one H. Abich, in sedimentary rocks that were at least ten miles from Ararat.

To sum up: John Morris falsely wrote, in "The Ark on Ararat," that Mt. Ararat exhibited fossiliferous rocks. Then he falsely said, during our debate, that he had not written that. Then he falsely claimed that fossiliferous rocks on Mt. Ararat had been reported in an article by Clifford Burdick. If Morris were limited to telling the truth, how far would he get in his efforts to gull unsuspecting people with his pseudoscience?

## DEGREES OF FOLLY: PART VII

by William Bennetta

The first six parts of this article ran in earlier issues of "BASIS", starting in February. Here is a summary:

By law, no unaccredited postsecondary school in California can issue degrees unless the school has been approved by the superintendent of public instruction -- the chief of the State Department of Education. In August 1988, the Department's Private Postsecondary Education Division (PPED) staged an "assessment" of the ICR Graduate School (ICRGS).

The ICRGS is an arm of the Institute for Creation Research, a fundamentalist ministry that promotes the religious pseudoscience called "creation-science." The assessment was made by a five-man committee that had been chosen, and was managed, by a PPED officer named Roy W. Steeves. The committee included two ringers who had been linked closely to the ICR or to the ICR's president, Henry Morris.

The committee produced a false, misleading report that hid the real nature of the ICR, promoted the ICR's scientific pretensions, and said that Bill Honig, the superintendent of public instruction, should approve the ICR as a source of masters' degrees in biology,

geology, "astro/geophysics" and science education. But two of the committee's legitimate members then sent separate reports to Honig, telling the truth about the ICR.

Roy Steeves, in memoranda to the PPED's director, Joseph P. Barankin, endorsed the ICR and urged that it should be approved.

Honig, in statements that he gave to the press in December 1988, refused the approval. In January, however, the Department drew back from that decision and began to negotiate with the ICR. On 3 March, Joseph Barankin and the ICR reached an agreement. The ICR would revise its curriculum, purging "ICRGS's interpretations" from courses that would count toward degrees. To learn whether the ICR had made the revisions, the Department would send a new examining committee; one member would be selected by the ICR.

The new committee visited the ICR in the second week of August 1989 and now is writing its report. Four of its five members are scientists from campuses of the University of California or the California State University. The fifth, evidently the one chosen by the ICR, is from an Ohio Bible college. The committee is being managed not by Roy Steeves but by another PPED officer, Jeanne Bird.

The ICR men, as I now shall tell, have publicly predicted that the committee's report will be damning and that Honig again will deny approval.

In writing here, I assume that my readers have seen the earlier parts of this article. -- W.B., 13 September

#### A LETTER FROM PROF. JOHN

The new committee's visit consternated the ICR men, for the Department had taken important steps to ensure that the new examination of the ICRGS would be legitimate. The ICR's sweetheart, Roy Steeves, was no longer in the picture; the new committee was dominated by respectable, perceptive scientists; and the committee would have abundant time for writing a respectable, perceptive report.

All this was different from the cozy proceeding that Steeves had conducted a year earlier, and it left the ICR men dismayed. They foresaw that the committee would report that their school was defective and unworthy of approval, and that Bill Honig would follow the committee's judgment.

With this vision of doom before them, they began an effort to win the sympathy of the press and the public, presumably in the hope that a rash of newspaper articles and letters would sway the committee or Honig.

Late in August, news organizations in southern California got a notice of an ICR "news conference" that would be held on the 31st.

The ICR, said the notice, would "respond to the imminent State decision to shut down ICR's graduate school of science."

The notice was accompanied by two other items: a letter from John Morris, the ICR's administrative vice-president and "full professor of geology"; and a handout, headlined "Basic Freedoms Under Attack at ICR," that offered a fiercely misleading account of the ICR case. These items merit attention, for they seem to foretell the tactics that the ICR will use if Honig does indeed deny approval, and if the ICR appeals his decision.

The heart of John Morris's letter was in three paragraphs. Here they are; the superscript numerals refer to my comments, which will follow:

Enclosed is evidence<sup>(1)</sup> of improper action of a particularly disturbing sort, that of an adversarial attitude on the part of the State toward an approved<sup>(2)</sup> school in good standing, which has led to the threat of immediate closure, all the while ignoring our fully qualified faculty,<sup>(3)</sup> the excellent records or our graduates and our large and concerned constituency.<sup>(4)</sup>

The underlying reason for the action is that our small graduate school in the sciences<sup>(5)</sup> holds a perspective on science<sup>(6)</sup> different from that of Honig. He claims that allowing our perspective to exist in California is tantamount to state agreement with our position.<sup>(7)</sup> However, censoring minority opinions<sup>(8)</sup> violates academic<sup>(9)</sup> and religious freedoms,<sup>(10)</sup> and in effect establishes a state religion, with no dissenting voice allowed.

If Honig is allowed to silence our minority views on controversial scientific concepts,<sup>(11)</sup> what is to keep him from decreeing that only certain political views can be taught in California or a certain philosophy of economics, or religion, or psychology, or journalism? Will accounts of historical events be revised next? Remember, this is America, a pluralistic society, . . .

I comment on Prof. John's text:

(1). The enclosed item was not evidence at all; it was merely the "Basic Freedoms" handout. (2). In calling the ICRGS "approved," Prof. John begs the question: Whether the ICRGS should be approved is the very thing that the Department is investigating. Prof. John also omits that the proceeding by which the ICRGS first got its "approved" status, in 1981, was a sham. (3). I'll be surprised if the committee's report ignores the ICRGS's faculty or fails to tell how qualified they are. (4). The law governing approvals does not tell the Department to assess the size or emotional state of a school's "constituency."

(5). This is more question-begging: Whether the ICRGS is really a "graduate school in the sciences" is one of the things that the Department must judge. (6). This would have meaning if it were illustrated by some examples of the ICR's "perspective" -- a Noah's-ark story, for instance, or some proprietary raving about organic evolution, Marxism and satanism. (7). Whether the ICR's "perspective" should exist is not in question. The only issue is whether the ICR should pass out degrees in science and in education. And if the Department were to say YES, the Department surely WOULD be lending the state's imprimatur to the ICR's pseudoscientific rubbish.

(8). The proceeding at hand has nothing to do with censorship. It is concerned only with academic quality and with the legitimacy of degrees. Honig has said often that the ICR can run its programs, teach its beliefs and issue degrees, as long as it does not mislabel them as scientific. (9). What can "academic freedom" possibly mean to men who each year, lest they be sacked, must swear their overriding devotion to Bible stories and their concomitant rejection of basic principles of modern science? (10). "Religious" freedoms? Prof. John forgets that the ICR claims to be teaching science, denies that it is teaching religion, and refuses to be certified as a religious school. (11). Again, examples would help. Reporters surely would enjoy learning about such "scientific concepts" as imaginary fossils on Mt. Ararat, or visions of dinosaurs roaming the Garden of Eden with Adam.

#### A CONSPICUOUS HEDGE

The other document that the ICR distributed to news organizations - the "Basic Freedoms" handout -- was comparable to Prof. John's letter in both falsity and hysteria. Its most significant paragraph was its last:

Does the state have the power to tell a private Christian school such as the ICR (which has never accepted a penny of state or federal money)\* that it cannot teach as its conscience dictates? Is this the beginning of the end of our cherished American freedoms? Will all Christian education soon come under similar attack if this precedent is allowed? Maybe so, but please be aware that ICR will not accept these rulings without exhausting every reasonable and feasible avenue of appeal. We hope concerned individuals everywhere will realize the serious implications of this precedent. . . .

The signal phrase here is "every REASONABLE AND FEASIBLE avenue of appeal." If Honig denies approval, the ICR presumably will invoke the administrative appeal processes provided by law. (The first would be a plea to the state's Council on Private Postsecondary Educational Institutions, which has no power over approvals and can merely advise Honig.) But what if the administrative appeals were to be unsuccessful? Would the ICR men take Honig and his Department to court?

I do not think so. I think that they recognize that a lawsuit, too, would fail and would also engender a new, ruinous expose of creationism and "creation-science." And I think that this recognition is reflected in their hedge about "reasonable and feasible" avenues.

The ICR's effort to gain attention from news organizations achieved only modest success -- perhaps because the ICR men's only "news" was their desperation.

The "San Diego Union" for 31 August offered a report by Michael Scott-Blair, who had skipped the "news conference" but had conducted interviews on the preceding day. He recounted various statements by John Morris and the corresponding comments by Bill Honig. For example:

John D. Morris . . . yesterday accused state Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig of intervening in one evaluation [of the ICRGS] and of "stifling academic freedom." Morris said the state had used "dirty tricks" in an attempt to force the institute out of business.

"Nonsense," said Honig, reached by phone at his Sacramento office yesterday.

"I gave them a full year to prove they are offering acceptable quality science courses toward their master's degree. But a preliminary indication from a team of scientists that visited the campus earlier this month suggests the institute comes up short by a long way." .

. . .

Honig said he has no wish to close the institute, but disagrees with "teaching creationism and calling it a science degree. . . ."

Similar stories ran on 1 September in "The Tribune" (another San Diego paper) and in the San Diego edition of the "Los Angeles Times".

Several papers (e.g., the "San Jose Mercury News" for 1 September) ran foolish puff-pieces that simply promoted the ICR's views. They were based on an Associated Press story that evidently had consisted wholly of assertions by the ICR men, with nothing from anyone else. On 8 and 11 September I called David Seden, the correspondent in charge of the AP's San Diego bureau, to ask about the defective dispatch. He said that he would review his files and then call me, but I heard no more from him.

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\*The ICR advertises that its students can get educational benefits from the Veterans Administration. But the matter of government

money is really irrelevant: The law governing approvals applies equally to schools that get such money and schools that do not.

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## BUSTING GHOSTS

Loyd Auerbach is an active parapsychologist who teaches and does research at JFK University. He will be the featured speaker at our October meeting.

Loyd is not a stranger to skeptics. He has always attempted to build and maintain a bridge between people on both sides of paranormal questions. It would behoove every skeptic to keep as current on parapsychology literature as Loyd is on skeptical

literature. Most -- on either side -- prefer not to read what does not conform to their thinking.

We will be able to see what is happening inside parapsychology laboratories from inside a parapsychologist's head. Loyd does not shrink from the most penetrating questions posed by hardened skeptics, so get your best ones ready and bounce them off a man whom most of us consider a friend.

There is something else important about this meeting: it will be co-sponsored by the Berkeley Skeptics, a student skeptic group organized on the Berkeley campus. The organization and operation of university student groups has long been a goal of BAS, so we are happy to see this fledgling organization prosper.

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Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

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