

Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet
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Editor: Kent Harker

PSYCHICS' 1989 PREDICTIONS FIZZLE by Robert Sheaffer

[When psychics make predictions, especially at the beginning of a New Year, they count heavily upon our short memories for the howlers they habitually commit. Experience teaches that they are safe in that reliance. Except for BAS.

Much to the consternation of the psychics, Robert Sheaffer, past Chair of BAS, keeps the predictions of the more notable practitioners, blows the cobwebs off with the dawn of the New Year, and tots up the score for us in this, BAS's annual psychic review. If one claims to be psychic, his or her predictions ought to be correct. If the predictions are NOT correct, well. . . .

Robert is a software engineer and author of "The UFO Verdict" and "Resentment Against Achievement". These annual predictions go out to many other publications nationwide.]

Northern Californians were told not to worry about a major earthquake in 1989. Fidel Castro did not die in a savage hurricane, a UFO did not crash in a Kansas tornado. Ted Kennedy did not marry Donna Rice, nor did Prince Charles suffer a nervous breakdown. These were just a few of many predictions that had been made for 1989 by famous psychics, but were dead wrong, as chronicled by Bay Area Skeptics.

At the end of each year, many well-known psychics issue predictions for the coming year. Twelve months later, they issue another set of predictions, conveniently forgetting those made the year before, which are always nearly 100% wrong.

Many of the psychic predictions are so vague that it is impossible to say if they came true or not. For example, Jeanne Dixon's prediction that Senator Edward Kennedy "will have a hard spring and summer" dealing with doctors and lawyers is not clearly true or false. Many other "predictions" involve things that happen every year, or else are not difficult to guess, such as hurricanes in Florida, marital strife for Charles and Diana, or terrorist incidents. Many "predictions" simply state that ongoing events and trends will continue, such rising house prices, or conflict in Central America.

Other supposed "predictions" are not really predictions at all, but

are actually disclosures of little-known events which are already under way, such as movie productions, business ventures, or developing scandals. Because questionable claims of having made an amazing prediction frequently are made in the wake of major news stories, Bay Area Skeptics only evaluates predictions that were widely known before the events they claimed to foretell. While some predictions did of course come true, especially those that were nonspecific, or not at all difficult to guess, not ONE prediction which was both specific AND surprising came true.

The famous Washington, D.C. psychic Jeanne Dixon, who supposedly has a "gift of prophecy," predicted that Prince Albert of Monaco would announce his engagement, as would his son Prince Albert, that "Egypt's government will totter," that Eddie Murphy would get married, and that war would break out again in Korea. "The world will be rocked by a major earthquake during the first week of April." Some hospitals, she predicted, will start scheduling surgeries according to the phases of the moon.

Televangelist Jimmy Baker would face "a short jail sentence": Baker actually received 45 years! Jeanne Dixon did indeed predict that the Berlin Wall would be coming down -- but not until the 21st Century!

New York psychic Shawn Robbins predicted that Fidel Castro would die when "a Havana building collapses during a savage hurricane." She also predicted that Michael Jackson would become romantically involved with Robin Givens, resulting in Jackson being K.O.'d by Mike Tyson.

Denver psychic Lou Wright predicted that Prince Charles would suffer a nervous breakdown, that Charles Manson would escape from prison, and that Barbara Walters would successfully negotiate the release of an American hostage in the Middle East.

St. Louis psychic Beverly Jaegers, who claims to be able to make accurate stock market prophecies, predicted that a UFO would crash during a Kansas tornado, resulting in three dazed aliens being taken into custody by National Guardsmen. She also predicted a major riot in Washington, DC between pro and anti-smoking forces, resulting in several buildings being burned down.

New York psychic John Monti predicted that Ted Kennedy would - announce plans to marry Donna Rice, and that televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart would meet, and get into a bloody fistfight.

Here in Northern California, Psychic Astrologer Terrie Brill made a reassuring prediction that she repeated several times. She told the "San Francisco Chronicle" in August, "I predicted last year before the New Year on KGO radio and TV and KCBS that there would be a 5.2 earthquake this year with some aftershocks, but that I didn't see a major 7-pointer destroying the Bay Area."

Exactly two months and three days later, the Bay Area was struck by a magnitude 7.1 earthquake, causing great devastation. Brill had also predicted in December, 1985 that Reagan would not finish his term in office, a prediction that became false on January 20, 1989.

Based on the continuing failure of the psychics to make accurate predictions over the years, Bay Area Skeptics urges everyone -- including the media -- to exercise some healthy skepticism when psychics and other purveyors of the paranormal make extra-ordinary claims or predictions. Anyone who swallows the psychics' claims year after year without checking the record is setting a bad example for students and for the public.

It is important to note that no psychic succeeded in predicting the genuinely SURPRISING news stories of 1989: the Berlin Wall coming down, and the unraveling of Communist power throughout Eastern Europe; a major destructive earthquake with its epicenter in Santa Cruz County, closing the Bay Bridge; and the sudden death of Andrei Sakharov. These major news stories were so unanticipated that someone would have had to be truly psychic to have predicted them! Given the number of so-called psychics out there, one would expect that at least a few of them would have correctly predicted these -- unless, of course, all such claims of psychic powers are without foundation.

Bay Area Skeptics is a group of people from all walks of life who support the critical examination of paranormal claims, such as psychic powers, UFOs, astrology, Bigfoot, biorhythms, etc. Similar skeptics' organizations are active in many other areas of the country, including southern California, New York, Colorado, Illinois, Arizona, Texas, and Ohio. The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) is an international skeptics' organization, made up of many famous writers, scientists, and investigators, such as Martin Gardner, Stephen Jay Gould, James "The Amazing" Randi, Isaac Asimov, and many others. Similar skeptics' groups have also formed in many foreign countries, including Australia, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and India. All of these groups cooperate in making their findings available to other researchers, and to the public.

TREASURER'S REPORT

BAS has realized one of the more prosperous years of its history in 1989. Our subscription base and contributions have been stronger than ever. While most small organizations teeter on the financial brink and are therefore forced to use far too much time and energy chasing badly needed funds, we have enjoyed the benefits of relative financial security. The freedom that gives us to concentrate effort where it is more effective is powerful and deeply appreciated.

We extend special thanks to those who have made contributions above the regular subscription rate. These extra funds have made it

possible to pay for enhancements to the newsletter that would not otherwise have been possible. We have been able to replace an aging phone recorder and pay for simple office supplies.

The energy of a lot of very dedicated people, too many to name, have helped us achieve some significant goals. Thank you everyone. We look forward to a banner 1990.

Income:

Beginning balance \$1,559.84
Contributions \$1,153.50
Subscriptions \$6,544.75

Total \$9,258.09
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Expenses:

Bank fees \$37.65
Printing \$2,909.79
Postage \$1,741.86
Phone \$300.57
Hall rental & equipment \$592.35

Total \$5,582.22
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Year-end balance: \$3,675.87
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FRAKNOI ON KGO

[The following is an excerpt of the KGO (San Francisco) radio Jim Eason program of Nov. 9, 1989 with guest BAS board member Andy Fraknoi. Andy is a frequent and very popular guest. He is the director of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. (John Taube recorded and transcribed this portion of the show).]

Eason: One more quick question and we will get back on the phone. This may not be a quick answer but it is a quick question. Can you tell me, definitely, once and for all, exactly how this was all created?

Fraknoi: In 25 words or less?

E: Can you give me a definite answer as to how this all can about?

F: No. And I think you would be very disappointed if I could.

E. All right. Then why do you get so upset when somebody says they have a theory called "creation"?

F. Well, very carefully. I think most astronomers DON'T feel uncomfortable at all with the idea of creation. The "big bang"

which we talk about, is this big explosion which we think made the universe as it is today, is a creation event. There is nothing really incompatible with ideas of creation and evolution.

Where scientists get [upset] is the idea that it all happened 6,000 years ago, that life did not evolve, but life was placed here, one-by-one, carefully as in a jigsaw puzzle. That is the sort of thing where we are absolutely contravening all the evidence of hundreds of years of investigation. That's what the creationists want. They want to go back to a very strict fundamentalist view of religion, supplanting what we teach in science. I think that is where the disagreement is. The disagreement is not between creation and evolution: it's between this narrow fundamentalist view that says the world was created in seven days, in 4004 B.C., on October 23, which in fact is their date. That sort of narrow view is what we disagree with, but that is what they want us to teach.

E: When I was a young fellow back in North Carolina going to Sunday School, I used to hear about the creation of the universe and the world and so forth. It was explained then -- and this goes back years and years ago -- as the Bible says, a day is to God as a 1,000 years. So a day is a relative term and nobody nailed down that 4,000 years. It happened for about 100 years. I think you guys are way out of date.

F: No that's not true. You just have to go to San Diego and go to this place called the Institute for Creation Research and they are writing about dates like 6,000 years ago, 10,000 years ago. You just have to read their literature. Now you are right -- the kind of intelligent people who think carefully about religion and science don't find much problem there. For most people the Bible is allegorical. It is not a science text book -- that almost is an insult to the Bible to call it a science text book. It is a great work about morality, about history, about spirituality. It is not a word-for-word description of scientific events. And to take when you say seven days and make it literally seven [twenty-four-hour] days or say that it happened so few years ago is a tremendous disservice to religion as well as to science.

E: But the people who say that the world was created 4, 5, or 6 thousand years ago, and insist on that, I think are a definite minority. I don't know too many people who believe that.

F: That's right. And the interesting thing -- if you think God in all of her wisdom could have created the world four thousand year ago, why not two minutes ago, right in middle of Jim Eason show? The world was created with all the memories of the past put in our heads to begin with?

SPEAK UP!

There is a "flood of occult nonsense", says Hal Draper from Berkeley. He recognizes the monumental task of counteracting it and

suggests we expand our outreach. Limited resources are, of course, the primary problem: time, money and bodies. Still, he suggests that we might be able to avail ourselves of some free air time through "free speech" slots offered by some local TV stations. Our \$11,000 challenge is a catchy item, one that could stir media interest and give us an opportunity.

We need two things to do this: (1) a spokesperson, and (2) a statement. If YOU would like to get involved, write a free-speech statement that could be delivered in 60 seconds or less. Send your suggestion to the Editor, Box 32451, San Jose, CA 95152. We will choose the best one, or make something of a composite from several to come up with what we think would be an exceptional bit and then try to schedule some air time. If you or someone you know has outstanding delivery and credible self-presentation, include his or her name with your submission.

Do it now or you'll forget it.

RANDOM WISDOM

by Bob Steiner

Sorting through the accumulated papers on my desk, I fell to musing about the enormous amount of wisdom contained therein. I will give you just a sampling.

Ready?

-- "SUPPRESSED C.I.A. DOCUMENTS PROVE U.S. POSSESSES REMAINS OF U.F.O.'S & ALIEN BEINGS"

Our last 8 Presidents have been in on "The Ultimate Cover-up"

Now for the first time, all the facts about this "cosmic Watergate" are being released to the public because you have a right to know the truth!

This was an ad for "MJ-12 & THE RIDDLE OF HANGAR 18", on the back cover of the Winter 1989-90 issue of "Caveat Emptor".

-- "Section 5702: Trade or Business Property. The phrase `property used in the trade or business' means (1) property used in a trade or business." (Commerce Clearing House: "Federal Tax Guide 1990". Chicago: Commerce Clearing House. 1989, 2128.)

This gives great clarity to an otherwise confusing term in the - Internal Revenue Code.

-- "Just as there are not atheists in foxholes, there are no skeptics of big government in the wake of an earthquake or hurricane. They all fall to their knees before the Federal Emergency Management Agency and shout, `I believe!'" (Jacob Sullum: "Disastrous Relief." "Reason". January 1990, 6.)

-- "Miss, n. A title with which we brand unmarried women to indicate that they are in the market. Miss, Misses (Mrs.) and Mister (Mr.) are the three most distinctly disagreeable words in the language, in sound and sense. Two are corruptions of Mistress, the other of Master. In the general abolition of social titles in this our country they miraculously escaped to plague us. If we must have them let us be consistent and give one to the unmarried man. I venture to suggest Mush, abbreviated to Mh." (Ambrose Bierce: "The Devil's Dictionary". New York: Dover Publications, Inc. [1911] 1958, 88.)

"Palmistry, n. The 947th method (according to Mimbleshaw's classification) of obtaining money by false pretences. It consists in `reading character' in the wrinkles made by closing the hand. The pretence is not altogether false; character can really be read very accurately in this way, for the wrinkles in every hand submitted plainly spell the word `dupe.'"

The imposture consists in not reading it aloud.

RAMPARTS

[(Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and we welcome your participation. 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.)]

Bill Hoch clipped from the S.F. "Chronicle" a tidbit about a Tahitian spiritual healer who killed a patient while healing her. His cure, worse than anything the poor woman could ever have had, consisted of "walking on her, beating her and jumping up and down on her stomach."

So much for the notion that faith healers can't make you any WORSE.

If some Christians are in the lion's den lately, they only have themselves to blame. The spectacle of Oral, the two Jims (who give new meaning to our word "jimmy"), and Tammy sobbing rivers of mascara have almost been surreal. As they trucked Bakker off to prison, his ever-credulous followers prayed, believing that there would be divine intervention, loosing him from the manacles in a dramatic, supernatural reprieve.

As painful as it is to be witness to this circus, only money and credulity suffered the worst trampling in the abuses of those charlatans. "BASIS" has reported some real heart-rending tragedies that are permanent: the victims of the faith-healing cults.

The Christian Scientists -- who are anything but scientists, and less than Christian in the way they treat their sick children -- are finally getting their just desserts. California is in the

vanguard of the nation in setting aside notions that somehow Christian Science could be exempted from the responsibility of parents to attend to the health and well-being of their children under the theory that state intervention is restraint of the free exercise of religious liberty. If parents fail to take prudent, tested measures for the care of a child, they may be judged liable if harm comes despite the banner in which the negligence is wrapped.

BAS secretary Rick Moen clipped a piece from the S. F. "Examiner" that related some testimony in a State Assembly hearing on the practice of faith healing. Stunned committee members listened -- actually, watched -- to a woman communicate by sign language how she lost her hearing at age seven because her "Christian Science parents [refused] to seek medical help." She "explained how the pain in her ears had grown day by day, but her parents had told her it was a lack of faith that had led to her illness."

The 37-year-old woman was part of a group called to testify in hearings before the Assembly vote on AB2325, a measure introduced by Assemblyman Nolan Frizzelle. The measure would "prohibit prosecution of parents whose children die of illnesses or injuries treatable with modern medicine, and exempts faith healers from reporting cases of suspected child abuse." The bill didn't pass in the first half of the session and was up for reconsideration when the second session convened in January.

Frizzelle urged that religious freedom is at issue in the measure - - the precious freedom that is part of the foundation of American democracy.

In reply, Rita Swan, a former member of the cult who had lost a child to meningitis, said, "Does the committee really believe that Christian Science can heal bacterial meningitis? Some of us would rather have our children back than all the religious freedom in the world."

The "San Francisco Chronicle" ran a report about financial advisor Alan Feinstein who turned to the subscribers of his own financial newsletter to solicit "participants in a project 'Operation Indigo'."

He said that over 5,000 people paid \$10 (and two stamped, self-addressed envelopes) to get a "three-page letter marked 'confidential' that tells them to look up at the sky at precisely at 10 p.m. EDT on June 29 and spend a full minute repeating the questions: 'Is there any way we can communicate? Can you send me a sign of your existence?'"

For the next couple of weeks the participants were to write down any "unusual events, thoughts or dreams" and send their accounts to Feinstein who would then send the result to all the other participants.

What this was to accomplish was not revealed.

Feinstein would probably send them the results from the veranda of his new condo on Aruba, from where he is sipping mint juleps.

From the pages of the "Contra Costa Times" (11-24-89) comes another article sent by Rick Moen. This one is a book review. We could hardly have prepared ourselves for this, although we can suppose it was inevitable: "Astrological Gardening".

Then again, it is no more a shredding irrationality to suppose that the compulsions of the heavens have their sway on the flora than it is alleged they do on the fauna. Originally, only the fate of Homo sapiens fell under the purview of the zodiac. After some centuries, confederations of humans -- kingdoms -- were adjudged to have a starry destiny. In our own time other select members of vertebrate taxa have become the focus of oracles trying to widen the scope of their clientele with pet astrology. Rover could be a lion, or a fish, or a sheep.

The author of the book, Louise Riotte, whom the "Times" characterizes as "off the beaten path," assures readers that "her method is legitimate."

". . . every detail of a plant's and animal's development is guided by the zodiac," she advises. "Aquarius, for example, rules the base of the plant stem, while Virgo oversees the process of digestion in the plant." If it is legitimate, one will surely find the evidence in any college-level botany text.

By the time our table has been set with crops farmed organically and tuned through propitious aspects we won't need any chiropractic, holistic medicine, or acupuncture.

EDITOR'S CORNER

Psychics are notorious for explaining away their failures. This problem often exists with those who claim they are doing legitimate scientific research in parapsychology laboratories. When replication attempts by skeptics fail they have excuses. They cry conspiracy and claim they have a new paradigm. But they have failed, in over 100 years of concentrated study, to produce a workable theory of "psi".

A man gave me the "arm test" when I volunteered in a paranormal "experiment" to show the weakness caused by having my "aura" cut. He began by pushing down at the wrist of my horizontally outstretched arm. Then he "sliced" my aura with a sweeping vertical movement of his hand. The arm test was again administered and he asked me if it had not been easier for him to push my arm down after he whacked up my aura. My negative reply drew this

observation made to the rest of the participants: "The test was inconclusive."

He then gave the same test to a female subject. She concurred that, yes, it had been easier for him to push her arm down after he cut her aura, to which he proclaimed the test a success and the result confirmed.

Heads I lose, tails he wins.

Open mindedness

Many of those swept up in the anti-intellectualism of the past fifteen years talk as if science, with a capital "S," is some monster. Our challengers often accuse us of being narrow minded to the point that the only thing that matters to us is science, or that we behave as if there is no validity to non-scientific questions. Science recognizes that only material questions can be tested in a scientific way. This simply puts metaphysical things outside the venue of science. The very nature of science forces the focus on the material. Love, devotion, ethics, art appreciation, etc. are all immaterial, and science recognizes the validity of these areas of human concern and interest. Life would be dreary if there was only science.

Those who are not familiar with skeptical literature often challenge: "Well, if there really is nothing to this psychic business, where does it all come from? There are so many people who have had extraordinary experiences that there just has to be SOMETHING to it."

This is the where-there's-smoke-there's-fire argument. Psychic ideas arise in the same way any others do. Anything that is imaginable has its purveyors, no matter how asinine. There is no limit to the audacity of human concoctions. Critical thinking skills are scarcely taught in our schools. Few people are interested in looking at what they think and how they think it.

Unaided, we are poor at finding cause-effect relationships. Herein lies the power of the scientific method -- it gives procedures by which we can OBJECTIVELY establish careful links between cause and effect.

Supernatural causes

The ancients had gods to explain nature -- gods for everything. When something went awry, it was because they had failed in some propitiatory offering, or they had neglected some ritual, or any of a myriad of complex reasons they had to make sense out of the senseless. It is much easier to postulate some mysterious force than to search for the real cause. Atlas is easier to understand than gravity. (Most of those gods have succumbed to a disease that is always fatal to deities: uselessness.) The psychic is a dressed-up-in-modern, 5th-century shaman, with the same

prescientific mysterious forces, energies, and emanations.

Since the scientific approach to a question seeks to eliminate clouding emotion, people sense the scientific approach as cold and unfeeling. From the viewpoint of those not disposed to a scientific way of examination, the emotional component of a question is likely to be as important as reality itself. An example of this came to me as I listened on my car radio to a man from the Southwest Radio Bible Church. He said that if evolution is correct, there is no value to anything -- as if human value judgments bore the greatest weight upon truth. He said that if he were to "believe in evolution, you'd better watch out. I would steal all your money, rape your daughters when I felt the whim, and kill anyone who got in my way." I felt happy that he is a Christian.

Many require some institution or extrinsic motivation to control their behavior -- a lamentable mortal trait. Love, kindness, gentility, and honesty in dealing with others are moral attributes independent of any institution or philosophic persuasion. Skeptics want to know the truth. If the truth is harsh, do we want a glitzy veneer to insulate us from it? Isn't harsh truth better than sweet sophistry? We want hard answers to hard questions. We demand evidence more compelling than ones wishing and hoping.

Is skepticism negative?

Another common criticism is that skepticism is negative. Some have commented that "BASIS" is negative. This is quite wrong. Voicing an objection or a critique can be a very positive thing. Often, the easiest way to attack error is from the "negative." It is usually much easier to prove that a statement is false than true: a single negative example can suffice to disprove, whereas no finite number of positive examples can serve to prove.

An important function of BAS is our work in combating fraud, a kind of consumer protectionism. It was not too long ago when we read that faith healer Peter Popoff has filed for bankruptcy in federal court. We did something very positive: saved many people from his fraud. I am delighted to hear him rage against the "secular humanists that use Satan's power to thwart God's purposes." Pointing out what is wrong can be a useful metier.

It is a red herring to charge that if one hasn't a solution to a problem he or she must not talk about it. One doesn't have to be a surgeon to know that something, maybe life-threatening, is wrong. We may not know how to fix the serious fiscal problems in the country, but that should not stop us from railing against fiscal irresponsibility in government. It is a cop-out to sit back and say nothing until we have a proposal to fix things. Besides, if everyone screamed that something is wrong and we want some expert to do something, it might get done.

We must accentuate the positive, but that doesn't mean we should ignore the negative. Error, if blissfully ignored, will run

roughshod over the positive. There is a kind of entropic principle here that says error, left to its own, will increase and swallow - everything. False concepts must be resisted at every turn or the world will drown in the darkness of error.

Conclusion

The history of human intellectual achievement is one of violent struggle against the inertia of intellectual sloth. We are more given to feelings than to thought. If something affects our well being and sense of security it will have a much better chance of succeeding in the marketplace of ideas than what may be hard reality.

We mortals are no different from an electric current: most will take the path of least resistance.

SAME OLD SHROUD, SAME OLD TRICKS

by William Bennetta

In the December 1988 issue of "BASIS" I described a shrine, at the Corpus Christi Roman Catholic church in Port Chester, New York, that was dedicated to veneration of the Shroud of Turin. The shrine had been created by Father Peter M. Rinaldi, who was the pastor of Corpus Christi from 1950 to 1977.

Rinaldi is one of the most conspicuous devotees of the shroud in the United States, and he has been promoting it vigorously for several decades. He has declared unequivocally that it is the cloth in which the corpse of Jesus was wrapped for burial, and he has insisted that the images on the shroud must have originated supernaturally. He also has tried to further those beliefs by writing several booklets that enlist pseudoscientific claims and severely misrepresent legitimate scientific work. Rinaldi's booklets carry such titles as "When Millions Saw the Shroud" (1979) and "I Saw the Holy Shroud: A Study of the Shroud of Christ" (1983). They rely heavily on false or distorted information and on the Top-Scientists-Stumped approach to miracle-mongering.

As my readers may recall, I visited the shrine at Corpus Christi during the very week (in October 1988) when the national press reported that the shroud had been discredited by radiocarbon dating: Tests performed with the cooperation of Roman Catholic authorities had indicated that the cloth was no more than 750 years old.

About a year later, in November 1989, I returned to Corpus Christi to see how, if at all, the results of the radiocarbon work had been accommodated or had been conveyed to the faithful. I was accompanied, as I had been during my first visit, by my brother, Bob.

There had been no obvious changes in the shrine, nor had there been

any modification or moderation of the claims made on the placards that attested to the shroud's authenticity as a relic of Jesus's death and resurrection. A close inspection showed, however, that there was indeed something new: A new placard hung in a recess so dimly lighted that I used a flashlight to read and transcribe what the placard said. Here is the whole of it; the initials P.M.R. doubtless denote Rinaldi:

On the Shroud: Questions and Answers

Q: What is being planned for the Shroud?

A: A new series of tests is in the planning stage. The carbon-14 test, which recently dated the Shroud to the 14th century A.D., in no way solved the mystery of the astounding image of Christ on the cloth.

Q: What makes the image so mysterious?

A: It is the only such portrait of the dead Christ known to exist in the world, a portrait which by right should not as much as exist, since it is really not made of anything. No artist's brush has touched the Shroud. There is not the least trace of any coloring substance on the image of that battered, crucified body except where the open wounds left reddish dark stains which have positively been identified as blood stains. Even more extraordinary is the fact that the portrait, a shadow-like imprint over the entire length of the cloth, is a perfect photographic negative, and is three-dimensional. Experts claim that the image could only have been produced by a process akin to scorching.

Q: Does this mean that the image could be the result of a miracle, such as a sudden burst of light or radiant heat at the instant of the resurrection, as some people have theorised?

A: Scientists are not comfortable with miracles. What they look for is a natural, scientific explanation of the Shroud image. So far, none has been found.

Q: But if the recent carbon-14 test dated the Shroud to the 14th century A.D., then surely some medieval artist must have produced the portrait.

A: There are scientists who question the validity and the results of that test. They will undoubtedly call for a new carbon-14 test should the forthcoming research on the image prove in a positive way that no artist in the middle ages or at any time could produce such a portrait.

Q: Will the mystery of the Shroud ever be solved?

A: Scientists admit that they never will be able to prove the Shroud's authenticity in a definite, conclusive way. It is known that even the Church never officially stated that the Turin Shroud is Christ's actual burial cloth. There will always be a margin of doubt as to the origin and the nature of this mysterious object.

Actually, it is just as well that it be so. Our faith in the Lord Jesus does not depend on the Shroud's authenticity. At best, the Shroud is only a sign of our faith and hope in Christ. Pope Paul VI put it beautifully: "Aside from what scientists and researchers have said or may yet say about the Shroud, this incomparable portrait of the Man of Sorrows will continue to touch the minds and hearts of people for ages to come. It will speak to them of the boundless love of Christ for mankind, for 'He has loved us and sacrificed himself for us' (Eph. 5:2)."

In this is all the value, all the importance of the Turin Shroud. --- P.M.R.

So Rinaldi was still up to his old tricks, starting with that first, dramatic declaration: The radiocarbon tests had "in no way solved the mystery of the astounding image of Christ on the cloth."

What "mystery"? If the "mystery" was the question of how the images had been formed, then Rinaldi's declaration was both inane and misleading. The radiocarbon tests could not have elucidated that question, nor had anyone expected them to do so. The tests were intended merely to establish the age of some linen, and they showed that it had been made from flax that had grown in the 13th or 14th century.

But perhaps the "mystery" that Rinaldi had in mind was the question of whether the cloth was the shroud of Jesus? In that case, Rinaldi's declaration was simply false: The radiocarbon tests had dispelled that "mystery" by soundly precluding the possibility that the cloth and Jesus had existed at the same time.

Several other statements offered on Rinaldi's new placard were comparably misleading or false, and I decided to enlist the help of an expert in analyzing them. I sent Rinaldi's whole text to Joe Nickell, the author of "Inquest on the Shroud of Turin" (1983; Prometheus Books), and I asked for his comments. Here is an excerpt from Nickell's reply:

Father Rinaldi's statements are unfortunately rather typical of those of today's shroud devotees. They pay lip service to science while hinting at the miraculous and repeating half-truths. . . .

Rinaldi maintains that except for the "blood," the shroud lacks "the least trace of coloring substance," yet

[Walter C. McCrone Associates, a prestigious research company in Chicago] actually discovered artists' pigments -- notably red ocher and vermilion -- on the image. Indeed, McCrone conducted a "blind" study which showed the ocher was a significant component of image -- but not off-image -- areas.

Rinaldi further asserts that "reddish dark" stains "have positively been identified as blood stains." He doesn't mention that the identification resulted from questionable procedures or that the stains repeatedly failed the accepted, standard tests of internationally known forensic serologists. Real blood, of course, does not remain red for nearly two millennia, nor does it contain vermilion.

Neither is the shroud image "a perfect photographic negative"; instead it has only the quasi-negative qualities that could result from an artistic rubbing technique used in conjunction with a bas-relief sculpture. Nor is the "three-dimensional" quality quite what Rinaldi represents it to be. A microdensitometer plotting of its lights and darks actually reveals a grotesquely distorted profile, and it was only through a series of dubious "corrective" factors that visually pleasing results were obtained.

As to the radiation-scorch hypothesis for the image formation, that was discredited long ago. For one thing, real scorches exhibit reddish fluorescence, whereas the shroud images do not fluoresce at all.

In fact, the shroudologists are bereft of any viable hypothesis for the image formation, but by attempting to shift the burden of proof to skeptics -- who have repeatedly been refused access to the cloth -- they continue to foster the "mystery" of [this] medieval fake. Creating doubt about the radiocarbon dating is merely an additional part of that approach.

Rinaldi's final dodge -- in which he says that the religious value of the shroud does not depend on its being authentic -- seems to echo what the archbishop of Turin said in 1988, when he announced the results of the radiocarbon dating.

I cannot understand why Rinaldi, if he really shares the archbishop's view, feels compelled to mislead his followers and to misrepresent what scientists have done and what scientists have learned.

"I PREDICTED LAST YEAR [1988] BEFORE NEW YEARS ON KGO RADIO AND TV [SAN FRANCISCO] AND KCBS THAT THERE WOULD BE A 5.2 EARTHQUAKE THIS

YEAR WITH SOME AFTERSHOCKS, BUT THAT I DIDN'T SEE A MAJOR 7-POINTER DESTROYING THE BAY AREA."

-- Terri Brill, Psychic Astrologer,
"San Francisco Examiner", August 14, 1989 [sixty-three days before
the earthquake].)

FALSIFIABILITY CONTINUED

by Earl Hautala

[(A rebuttal of the "Editor's corner," Dec. "BASIS")]

Einstein had something to say about the validity of mathematics which relates to Euclid's axiom about "points": "As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality."

Whitehead and Russell in "Principia Mathematica" tried to derive mathematics from the canons of logic. It didn't succeed as well as they hoped. No less an authority than Irving Copi ("Symbolic Logic") says that the business of logic has to do with making VALID inferences, ASSUMING that the premises are true. We cannot deal with "formal" systems concerned with making inferences until we agree on the definitions of the subjects and predicates.

Definitions suffer from problems like the messier aspects of biological experimentation. We find that people have "individual variation" in their use of words. In order to close the "universe of discourse" relating to the terms "big" and "Mafioso," we have to reach agreements about who would qualify for either of these verbalisms. (Do "capos" count, or does a "big" mafiosi have to be the head of more than one family?)

Until such preliminaries are worked out in detail to the mutual satisfaction of the contending parties, the proposition "Most big Mafiosi are blood type O" is as non-falsifiable as "Most X's are Y's." Since I have no indication that such preliminary definitions have been reached, I would have to err on the side of skepticism. As I read the proposition, it stands as non-falsifiable.

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CALENDAR

February meeting . . .

Satanism, by Jim Peron
Wednesday, February 21, 7:30 pm
Free Forum Books

Free Forum Books is at 1800 Market Street, San Francisco. The 101 overpass to Franklin cannot be used (earthquake). Instead, go from City Hall west on Market to Octavia. From Divisadero, go east to Octavia. Street parking is simple at that time of evening. You may also park around the corner at the U. C. extension for a couple of bucks.

Watch for coming events in the BAS CALENDAR, or call 415-LA TRUTH for up-to-the-minute details on events. If you have ideas about topics or speakers leave a message on the hotline.

WARNING: We **STRONGLY URGE** that you call the hotline shortly before attending any Calendar activity to see if there have been any changes.

SATANISM AND CHILD ABUSE

Hardly a day goes by when we don't read of Satanic murders or the sexual abuse of children during a Satanic religious ritual. It is the staple of certain daytime talk shows and sells plenty of tabloids when they're not otherwise busy with end-of-the year predictions or libeling movie stars.

Jim Peron, who has long studied this phenomenon, suggests that there is something considerably more sinister than breakfast table titillation. It is a means to oppress minorities. Jews, during the Middle Ages, were often accused of ritual child sacrifices. Similarly, sexual minorities are being accused of the same violence today.

Are there REAL Satanic cults ready to do violence to our unsuspecting youth? Is it all a red herring? Is there a political agenda behind the accusations? Is it simply a commercial attention-getter by the unscrupulous?

Join fellow skeptics at Free Forum Books in San Francisco and hear Jim Peron expand on this important (and current) theme with examples from history and the modern world and judge for yourself. See the "Calendar" for directions to the meeting.

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

The above are selected articles from the February, 1990 issue of "BASIS", the monthly publication of Bay Area Skeptics. You can obtain a free sample copy by sending your name and address to BAY AREA SKEPTICS, 4030 Moraga, San Francisco, CA 94122-3928 or by leaving a message on "The Skeptic's Board" BBS (415-648-8944) or on the 415-LA-TRUTH (voice) hotline.

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