



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 4 Number 5

www.ntskeptics.org

September/October 1990

In this month's issue:

- [The Foundation for Thought and Ethics](#)
- [The Shroud Comes to Plano](#)
- [SUPPING WITH THE SPECTERS](#)
- [1990 International Conference on Creationism](#)
- [Update On Texas Biology Textbook Adoptions](#)
- [Noteworthy](#)

The Foundation for Thought and Ethics

by John A. Thomas

(This article appears in the July-August 1990 issue of NCSE Reports, the newsletter of the National Center for Science Education, and is reprinted with permission.)

Readers of *NCSE Reports* are aware that a new creationist organization is making its influence felt. Scott Brande has described the efforts of Haughton Publishing Co. to get the book *Pandas and People* adopted as a supplementary text in Alabama. (*NCSE Reports* 9(6):5 and 10(1):8). *Pandas* presents the "intelligent design" version of the origin of species in an attractive wrapper without any explicit sign of religious creationism. (See the review in *NCSE Reports* 10(1):16.) Those curious about the origin of *Pandas* itself might wonder why the book's copyright is held not by the publisher, but by the Foundation for Thought and Ethics of Richardson, Texas. "Haughton Publishing Co." is the assumed name of Horticultural Printers, Inc., a large Dallas printing firm mainly serving the agriculture industry. Haughton has no other books in print, nor does it have in-house writers or science advisors. *Pandas* is entirely the creation of the Foundation for Thought and Ethics (FTE).

Officials at FTE refused my requests for an interview, but there is enough evidence in the public record and the Foundation's publications to give an adequate sketch of its goals and methods. FTE was formed in 1980 as a tax-exempt charitable and educational organization. The incorporator and current president is Jon Buell, an ordained minister. Buell earlier served on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ, and in 1972, formed Probe Ministries with evangelist Jim Williams.

The other major figure in FTE is Charles Thaxton, its "Director of Curriculum Research." Thaxton holds a Ph.D. in chemistry, and co-authored an earlier FTE-sponsored book, *The Mystery of Life's Origin*. *Mystery* offered a skeptical look at current theories of abiogenesis and closed with a chapter advocating a hypothesis of special creation to explain the origin of life. Thaxton is also a Fellow of the American Scientific Affiliation, an organization of theistic scientists which requires assent from its members to a statement of Christian principles. (You may remember the ASA for its publication a few years ago of *Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy*, a nice packaging of old-earth

creationism.)

Although FTE claims to be publishing science books, it obviously has a religious agenda. Buell refers to FTE as a "Christian think-tank" in the original application for recognition as a tax-exempt organization. FTE's articles of incorporation state that its purpose is both religious and educational, and includes "...proclaiming, publishing, preaching [and] teaching ... the Christian Gospel and understanding of the Bible and the light it sheds on the academic and social issues of the day." The application referred to says the organization's first activity would be the editing of a book "...showing the scientific evidence for creation."

FTE publishes an occasional newsletter, and in 1985 it commissioned a poll of high-school science teachers to show potential publishers that a market existed for a book on intelligent design. FTE has also sponsored at least one seminar on the creation/evolution debate, but most of its income has been absorbed by the production and marketing of its two books. Its contributors have obviously been willing to put their money up for the long run, hoping for the eventual success of *Mystery* and *Pandas*.

Federal tax records also show that FTE's money-raising efforts are effective. This is clearly not a group run out of a church basement by inexperienced volunteers. From its formation until late 1988, FTE has raised some \$828,220, almost all of it from donations. About one-fourth of this money has come from eight individuals, churches and businesses. One Dallas-area church has donated more than \$14,000, and one individual, \$57,920. The current budget is about \$15,000 a month. Buell is the only salaried employee.

Recently, FTE's letters have included pleas for donations to cover budget shortfalls. One letter says the Foundation expects *Pandas* to be a significant financial resource eventually, but presently donations have dropped off while FTE has devoted most of its fund-raising time to getting the book into the market.

FTE has also been successful in collecting prominent names for its letterhead, many with Ph.D.'s following. Besides the officers and directors, FTE's letterhead includes a "Board of Reference," to provide occasional advice. Some persons listed, such as Norm Sonju and Bob Breunig, are prominent Dallas residents. Others are local business leaders. Michael J. Woodruff is director of the Center for Law and Religious Freedom, a group which filed an amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court supporting the Louisiana "equal-time" act. Francis H. Hare, Jr., a prominent Birmingham attorney, represented Haughton at the Alabama textbook hearings. FTE also boasts a "Council of Academic and Educational Advisors." These include, besides Thaxton and the authors of *Pandas*, Joseph Sobran, an editor of *National Review*, Charles M. Duke Jr., an Apollo astronaut, and Lois Harbaugh, Secretary of the National Science Supervisors Association. Others hold positions at major universities around the country.

An interesting question is the relationship of FTE to other more mainstream creationist organizations. Apparently, Buell and Thaxton accept the scientific account of the earth's age; their quarrel is with naturalistic theories of the origin of life, and with the Darwinian view that new species (particularly humans) can arise from the operation of natural selection upon genetic variation. They can accept "microevolution," or changes within species, but not "macroevolution," defined as the change of one species into another. Although FTE completely avoids any young-earth material in its publications, it never explicitly criticizes such theories either, and it seeks support wherever it may be found. It has used the mailing list of the *Bible Science Newsletter*, a hard-line creationist publication, to offer *The Mystery of Life's Origin* for sale. Another strict creationist, J. Kerby Anderson, wrote a favorable review of *Mystery*, which was included in the same mailing. Representatives of FTE have spoken before the Metroplex Institute of Origin Science in Dallas; again, a strict creationist group more likely to hear man-trackers Carl Baugh or Don Patton. One of the authors of *Pandas*, Percival Davis (the same person as P. William Davis on FTE letterhead), co-authored *A Case for Creation*, with Wayne Friar in 1983, a standard creationist work with frequent religious references.

What will the Foundation do with *Pandas* now that it has been effectively rejected in Alabama? Apparently FTE has decided against further attempts at state textbook approval, at least for the present. Henry Skrabanek, the president of Haughton, told me that Haughton and FTE intended to change course and direct their efforts "outside the schools" to the grass-roots level. Skrabanek said sales of *Pandas* so far have been single-copy, and he needed to get the book into the schools to have significant sales. He said local school boards, teacher's groups and parents were the likely targets of the new effort. A May 1990 letter from the Foundation confirms this new strategy. It says "...we are finding that the best

approach to the local school system is through the biology teacher. ... Experience has indicated that they are comfortable in making a decision to introduce a supplemental text with the review and approval of the school curriculum committee." The Foundation already has a packet of material and an 18-minute video to assist parents who approach teachers. I would not be surprised to see copies of *Pandas* appearing in some classrooms this fall.

[\[Back to top\]](#)

The Shroud Comes to Plano

by John Blanton

On a Saturday in August a friend of mine who is an ardent creationist phoned me to tell me about an exhibit he had just attended. A shopping mall in Plano was featuring a rather impressive display of photos and history of the famous "Shroud of Turin," said by its proponents to have been the burial cloth of Jesus, and said by its detractors to be a fourteenth century artifact. The evidence, I was told, was impressive. I took this as some testimonial by someone who was not a Catholic and resolved to take in the exhibit before it closed.

The display lived up to all of its billing. The centerpiece consisted of three large color transparencies fitted together to form a life-size photo of the cloth (which usually is kept in a silver case at a church in Turin, Italy). Mounted display panels told the story of the Shroud and vouched for its authenticity. Furthermore, two highly articulate speakers lectured at length to a very attentive crowd.

The two speakers (who later introduced themselves as Larry and Chuck) were with the Shroud Society of Texas, which may or may not have some association with STURP (the Shroud of Turin Research Project). After Larry had talked mainly about the historical and the religious significance of the shroud, Chuck got into the meatier aspects.

Allowing the carbon 14 dating tests to be performed, Chuck told his listeners, was a big mistake. Proponents had miscalculated gravely in letting a single test determine the shroud's authenticity. The tests, he announced, had been badly botched in a number of ways: 1) The chain of custody of the samples had been broken (they had been left unattended for some time in a room). 2) The samples had been taken from a region where reweaving indicates some repairs have been made using newer material. 3) Besides that, carbon 14 dating is old hat. The uranium-thorium process has superseded the C-14 process. Chuck further related how the results of the tests had been unscrupulously leaked to the press in October of 1988, prior to publication in a legitimate scientific journal. Fortunately, Chuck explained, an unauthorized test (that presumably did not have all of these problems) had dated the fabric at AD 200, which, apparently, was close enough.

Chuck saved his best for last. He told of STURP scientist John Jackson's "vertical mapping" process which led him to conclude that the image on the cloth had been imprinted as the cloth (previously resting on the supine body of Jesus) fell straight down through the body to the table below. This, we were told, was an example of a new kind of physics. This was the physics of miracles. An event that happens once and cannot be repeated is not natural, but is miraculous. When I later asked Larry about this analysis, he referred me to Jackson's published work. He told me to check *Applied Optics*, 1982 and 1984 for particulars, and he went on to say that Jackson will publish his actual calculations in the future (where, we were not told). NTS Secretary Mark Meyer was able find "Correlation of image intensity on the Turin Shroud with the 3-D structure of a human body shape" in *Applied Optics*, Vol. 23, No. 14 (pp 2244 - 2270). It is a very detailed article, with charts, photos and computer-generated images. I have not had the time to read it.

After Larry's talk, and before Chuck got up to speak, I went up and introduced myself to Larry. He saw that I was taking notes and asked me if I was an interviewer. By way of introduction, I gave him a copy of *The North Texas Skeptic* (a mistake, as it turned out) and allowed him to read it while I listened to Chuck. When Chuck was finished I once again conversed with Larry, and he began by stating that he hated to offend me by accusing me of being non-objective (I told him to go right ahead).

Relations between Larry and me seemed to go down hill from there, and he later came up to me a couple of times to tell me he did not have time to talk to me. The speakers had previously announced that the SST held regular meetings in this area and that the public was welcome to attend. When I indicated to Larry that I was interested in attending, he declined to reveal anything about meeting times or places, and he said that I (and the rest of us Skeptics) would not be welcome there. I was crushed. He said they only wanted believers at their meetings. He asked how would I like it if he came to one of our meetings and asked a lot of embarrassing questions (I told him to go right ahead). He said he didn't think he would do that, because in his line of work he saw a lot of human injuries. I couldn't make any sense out of that line of talk, but Larry was so pleasant about it that we went on to other issues. He says that the SST provides objective information and makes no attempts at conversion. He, Larry, presents his own opinion.

So there you have it. If we were to rely on what we read in *Scientific American* or *Newsweek* for our information we might go on thinking the shroud was manufactured in the fourteenth century so that someone could charge admission for its exhibit. We might not know how faulty the C-14 dating process is (especially when mishandled by a bunch of skeptical scientists). And we would probably not know about the physics of miracles.

At one point during our conversation, Larry accused me of planning to write a biased article, but I promised him that I would be completely objective. How am I doing so far, Larry? Lest readers think this is a one-sided testimonial for the authenticity of the shroud, allow me to present a few words from the other side. Readers will have to follow up on these leads for themselves. You are not going to hear anything derisive from me.

CSICOP Fellow, Joe Nickell, has written a book entitled *Inquest on the Shroud of Turin*, and excerpts have been printed in "Unshrouding a Mystery: Science, Pseudoscience, and the Cloth of Turin", appearing in the spring issue of the *Skeptical Inquirer*. Joe Nickell's article lists several references, pro and con. Here are some of them:

Heller, John. 1983. *Report on the Shroud of Turin*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Schlafly, Phyllis. 1979. Proven by Shroud of Turin "The Most Remarkable Miracle in History." *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, December 13. Stevenson, Kenneth E., and Gary R Habermas. *Verdict on the Shroud*. 1981. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books. Wilson, Ian. 1979. *The Shroud of Turin*, revised edition. Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books.

Also, in *Science Confronts the Paranormal*, edited by *Skeptical Inquirer* editor Kendrick Frazier and consisting of excerpts from *S.I.*, is an article by Marvin M. Mueller entitled "The Shroud of Turin: a critical appraisal." In the same volume is "Shroud image is the work of an artist" by forensic microanalyst Walter McCrone.

[\[Back to top\]](#)

SUPPING WITH THE SPECTERS

by Mark Meyer

I first heard about the Catfish Plantation restaurant from a little 1-inch article in *USA Today* while on vacation. I noticed that the story was from Waxahachie, Texas, within easy driving distance. The story said that a ghost hunter (who, it turns out, was misidentified in *USA Today*) would visit the restaurant on Saturday, July 21. I've heard stories of ghosts in and around the Metroplex before, but this was the first time that I found out exactly where one was supposed to be. I decided to pay a visit on the 21st, and maybe see the ghost hunter, or even find a ghost.

Even without ghosts, the restaurant, a converted house originally built in 1895, is a nice enough place. The food is good, though I thought the portions were a bit small. I picked up two fliers to read while I waited for my lunch. One was a reprint from the February issue of *The Antique Traveler Newspaper*, telling the basic story of the restaurant.

Soon after opening for business in 1984, strange events reportedly began happening. Clean coffee cups were stacked in a large tea urn on the floor, baskets levitated out of the deep fryer, that sort of thing. In 1987, as a result of a call to KLIF's Kevin McCarthy show, the owners, Melissa and Tom Baker, were contacted by parapsychologist Dwanna Paul,

who convinced the Bakers to have the place tested at no charge. A team of "businessmen, engineers, scientists, photographers, and two representatives from the University of Texas at Austin" identified three spirits, named Elizabeth, Caroline, and Will.

The other flier advertised a regular event, debuting that day. Each Friday and Saturday night, one can "have dinner with a ghost!" By reservation only, one gets a complete meal, followed by a visit by "resident Ghost Hunter T. Everett Bookings III." (This was the ghost hunter that *USA Today* misidentified. I guessed I wasn't going to see him that afternoon after all.) The total cost of the evening's entertainment? \$30. It's a long drive from North Dallas to Waxahachie, so I regretfully had to decide against returning that evening.

Coincidentally, I arrived at the restaurant at the same time as a news crew from Channel 4. This gave me the opportunity to watch and listen as Melissa Baker took the reporter, Fil Alvarado, and cameraman around the restaurant, and the reporter interviewed her and some of the staff and customers. While setting up, the reporter noticed me taking notes, and asked me if I was a journalist. I said that I wasn't, I was with the North Texas Skeptics, and I was just checking out the place. That seemed to be the extent of the reporter's interest, and I had to content myself with just getting a bit of my right shoulder in one scene on local TV.

The reporter was more interested in Mrs. Baker's tales of cold spots, mysterious scents of roses, stopped clocks that chime, swaying doors and ceiling fans, and even sightings of one of the ghosts, Elizabeth, in one of the restaurant's windows. (One more thing: Mrs. Baker told the reporter that, while she was doing her own research into the history of the house, the two previous owners told her that they didn't have any unusual occurrences there.)

There was a commotion in the dining room between the one I was in (the restaurant has three) and the kitchen. The news reporter and cameraman were very excited about something. It turned out that the swinging door that led to the kitchen had swung *by itself* (so they said) about an inch. They told Mrs. Baker about it; to their credit, they both suspected it was nothing more than a brief air current, but Mrs. Baker said that most of the time that door was quite still. For me, on the other hand, there were to be no unusual experiences, except being briefly interviewed by a woman from a Beaumont newspaper.

Instead of going to the dinner with Bookings, I was home taping the story that played on the Channel 4 Evening News. It was a cute story, with about the critical attitude one would expect from local television (very little). There was one brief shot, however, that I consider misleading. It was a shot of a swaying ceiling fan, shown with Alvarado's voice-over recounting such strange happenings as the stopped clocks that chime *and swaying chandeliers*. It might leave one with the impression that the camera had actually caught a paranormal event! I doubt it very much, mainly because that fan (in the third dining room) was swaying every time I looked at it. It's probably just not fastened tightly, that's all.

I didn't attend the dinner, but *Dallas Morning News* columnist MaryIn Schwartz did. In her column appearing July 24, she referred to the evening as "sort of the adult version of kids sitting around the campfire telling tales and trying to scare each other." Several of the guests reported feeling something brush against them. Some guests say they briefly smelled roses, others didn't. There was a loud crash in the kitchen; the cook told the group that a clock in the kitchen had just flown off the wall, but none of the guests had actually seen it happen.

For me, however, the most interesting part of the column was when Schwartz told how Bookings pulled "a few tricks such as producing a ghostly message on a card and making flash bulbs go off," but *no one felt that it really came from the ghosts*. Why then did Bookings include them in the show?

What can the honest skeptic conclude from my experience and Schwartz's, or even the experiences of the Bakers and their staff (a quarter of whom, by the way, have not had anything strange happen to them, according to the *Traveler Newspaper*) compared to the non-experiences of the two previous owners? Nothing, really. A few data points do not constitute an investigation, but my experience was yet another instance of something *not* happening to a skeptic when he least expects it. In any case, whether the ghosts at the Catfish Plantation exist or not, they can't be bad for business. They got my business, didn't they?

[\[Back to top\]](#)

1990 International Conference on Creationism

by Ron Hastings

Having attended in the past only relatively small creationist gatherings, I looked forward to attending my first large one, the Second International Conference on Creationism (ICC) held at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, July 29 through August 4, 1990. Sponsored by the Creation Science Fellowship (CSF) of Pittsburgh, ICC had, as the theme of its technical track of presented papers, the age of the earth -- the same as it was in 1986 for the first ICC.

Commitment to a young earth and its attendant flood geology is characteristic of the CSF, and such a commitment predictably dominated the 1990 ICC. However, the presence of the old earth creationists allowed interesting comparisons and assessments. Some comparison was very public, such as when Steve Austin of the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) (young earth) and Gregg Wilkerson of Students for Origins Research (SOR) (old earth) gave their respective evidence in an evening forum. Other comparisons came with just chatting, discussing, and listening informally. One might expect that the creationist movement would continue to split along the young earth--old earth line, but ICC 90 indicated another line.

Assisting me in my evaluations was a group of other "good guys," to use a "Schadewaldian" term, including Bob Schadewald, Frank Lovell, Robert Dietz, Manny Sillman, Tom McIver, Glen Kuban, and Victor Berkman. Often during ICC 90 we felt like a bunch of "lions in a den full of Daniels."

Occasional papers delivered at ICC 90 stood out from the usual run of creationist papers usually fraught with unsound techniques, inadequate or incomplete analysis, and an amazing lack of critical scrutiny. Kurt Wise (young earth) applied modern evolutionary tools (cladistics and cladograms) and statistics in a rigorous way to begin piecing together a creationist model that refreshingly avoids anti-evolutionary components. Many papers were followed by reviewers of pre-prints who critiqued them in a refreshingly rigorous way. The source of these truly scientific elements came from a younger group of creationists containing both young earthers and old earthers. The line of demarcation is appearing, it seems, between young creationists and old creationists.

There were definite indications of a generation gap between not only ages of the earth but between levels of competency. The "new generation" of creationists is breaking out of the mold of the older generation to chart a new course with positive goals (e.g., building a scientific model instead of blasting evolution) and with a healthy criticism of their predecessors. The "new generation" demands scientific rigor both in themselves and others rather than conversion to their brand of Christianity; they recheck their work instead of thump their bibles.

Among this "new generation" are Kurt Wise (paleontologist and young earther), Paul Nelson (philosopher of science and young earther), Gregg Wilkerson (geologist and old earther), Mark Hartwig (science educator and old earther), and John Reynolds (philosopher and old earther). They were a far cry from more expected components of ICC 90, such as the preaching of Henry Morris and D. James Kennedy, the hocus-pocus hand-waving of some of the ICC creationists purporting to be doing science, and the straw man building and dead horse beating of the anti-evolutionary diatribe characteristic of creationist gatherings large or small (e.g., Duane Gish's presentations).

Whether this young group will become the new leadership of the creationist movement remains to be seen. One common denominator among them seems to be an affiliation with SOR. Seeing how SOR fares as opposed to ICR, the Bible Science Association (BSA), or the Creation Research Society (CRS) might be a good way to monitor their effectiveness.

Perhaps the worst of ICC 90 was represented by Hugh Miller's presentation on Thursday, August 2 of his team's latest work along the Paluxy River in Texas looking for "mantracks" alongside those of dinosaurs. Though a dead issue among the minds of even many creationists since the mid 1980's, the ICC allowed this presentation perhaps in deference to Miller, a long-time CSF member. On the coattails of Miller's presentation in the form of a poster session was Don Patton's repeated claim that a man walked inside dinosaur tracks (presented also at the Dayton Creationist Conference in

1989) and his new claim that the excavated Burdick track (one of the original obvious carvings that "set off" the mantrack enthusiasm among creationists decades ago) was genuine due to features shown by recent sectioning of the track.

Clearly the presentations of Miller and Patton were planned to be presented with as little opportunity for criticism as possible, for when my colleague Glen Kuban applied for a display table and poster session at ICC 90, he was met by bureaucratic obstacles designed to discourage him at every opportunity. At first Kuban was told his work would not be acceptable because of its old earth implications. Kuban's and my work debunking the mantrack claims bears no necessary connotations about the age of the earth, and, moreover, the presence of old earthers in the conference program seemed to belie the conference's objection to materials thought anti-young earth. In any case, the treatment of Kuban was incongruous to the stated purpose of ICC 90's choice of speakers, described in their program booklet as "... deliberately eclectic, reflecting the broad sweep of scientific and spiritual backgrounds of its participants."

Kuban's persistence and patience paid off, and he was allowed to present his poster session the next day following Miller and Patton. Miller's presentation was a hodge-podge of claims similar to Carl Baugh's in 1982-83, a rather strange appeal to carbon 14 dates which totally disregard the obvious opportunities for contamination of the samples, and a glowing coverage of Baugh's dinosaur bones find in 1984 overlooking the damage done in their amateurish removal. Patton's presentation was an appeal to line drawings and obscurantist water puddles (supposedly showing "mantracks" inside the Taylor trail dinosaur tracks) and to subsurface features below the "toe" depressions of the sectioned Burdick track.

As I helped Kuban prepare for his rebuttal the next day (Friday the 3rd), conference officials gave him confusing information that could have delayed the start of his poster session. Hurried by the session's moderator, Kuban began his presentation dealing with Miller's depressions as many of us have done with Baugh's (emphasizing that there are no depressions with human features and none in a pace/stride geometry as are the dinosaur tracks). He also injected for the uninformed of the audience the background of such claims that had brought so much embarrassment to creationist mantrack enthusiasts already. He then dealt with Patton's claims by showing his (Kuban's) unrivaled historical documentation of the Taylor trail dinosaur tracks, showing the alleged "human tracks" inside them to be as real as the emperor's new clothes. Geologists at the conference had correctly identified the features in the Burdick track sections as stromatolitic features having no correlation with depressions carved on the surface.

The moderator of Kuban's session tried to cut off his allowed time, but the audience called for equal time for Kuban as had been given Patton the day before. Very few left with the moderator, so most stayed to hear Kuban's wrap-up on the Burdick track.

Incredibly, Patton was given a second opportunity the next day (Saturday) to rebut Kuban, and only an alert insistence on Kuban's part allowed him the same opportunity. Clearly, the ICC officials wanted Patton to have the last word (earlier they had tried to get Kuban to present Wednesday instead of Friday). Unfortunately for such plans, a coin flip at the beginning of these second presentations (to a smaller audience this time) determined that Kuban would go last. The only thing new Patton had was to say that the patterns in the Burdick track section were like pressure patterns from an engineering reference, but Kuban simply showed that they were not like such patterns and added some more history about the Taylor tracks that questioners had prompted from him. About the only thing Patton had left was to insinuate privately that Kuban and I had deliberately altered some of the Taylor site tracks, and Miller was reduced to name calling directed at those of us who have interacted with Kuban.

One ICC 90 official was overheard saying that this was the last time they will have anything on the program to do with the Paluxy "mantrack" claims. Hopefully this will prove to be true. A lighthearted indicator that such hope might be justified was the labeling of an oval depression on an asphalt manhole cover on a campus street along and on which conference participants walked. This depression had dimensions remarkably similar to some of the obscure depressions Miller had been calling human in his Paluxy paper. The label identified the asphalt depression as an isolated track of "Homo asphaltus," mimicking some of the ridiculous names used by mantrack enthusiasts in the past. Almost every observer of "Homo asphaltus" at the conference thought it humorous; no one seemed to take offense.

Another "lowlight" was a Tuesday presentation of a flood canopy model by an engineer-turned-creationist, Greg

Jorgensen from Canada. Jorgensen was but another case in point that engineers are susceptible to creationism, possibly because of their relative lack of understanding about how scientific theory works. After presenting a lot of mathematics on visuals which he pointed out needed correcting here and there, Jorgensen then appeared oblivious to the main problem among many with serious attempts to uphold (figuratively and literally) a canopy model -- the latent heat released upon condensation of the canopy at flood time, enough to fry the entire surface of the earth. He seemed not to even understand a reference to the problem made by a critical reviewer of his pre-print, and he did not even appear to understand my question about the latent heat at the end of his talk.

If anyone had doubts about from whence the old generation creationists are coming, attending the keynote address by Henry Morris, President of ICR and the "guru" of many modern creationists, on Wednesday evening would have dispelled those doubts. Visions of being once again in an old-time Baptist revival meeting came to me as Morris followed his assessment of creationism in general with a sermon utilizing verses from I Timothy exhorting the faithful to be straight, strong, studious, and steadfast in Morris-brand creationism. Clearly the old generation only gives lip service to being scientific and behaves very differently. Along with the passing of the collection plates (which was done), an alter call for decision making would also have been appropriate.

One disappointment at ICC 90 was the absence of Richard Wakefield at his joint paper co-authored by old earth creationist and geologist Gregg Wilkerson. Had Wakefield been able to also present with Wilkerson, it would have marked the first time a non-creationist presented at a creationist conference. As it is, Wakefield is the first non-creationist to appear in an ICC printed program. Wakefield and Wilkerson collaborated in presenting the geological context of Robert Gentry's pleochroic polonium halos, showing that these halos could not have appeared in young "created" granite as Gentry's "signature of God" hypothesis demands. Wilkerson did a masterful job the first day of ICC 90 (Monday) dispelling Gentry's claims. No one, including any rabid Gentry supporters present, disputed the geological context argument. Only questions concerning how the halos could have been brought about by natural processes remained, which Wilkerson handled admirably, suggesting some mechanism that could account for the now-not-so-enigmatic halos.

Most interesting to me at the conference was the new generation of creationists as represented by Kurt Wise. In one paper on Wednesday, Wise used data from cladograms and statistical analysis to show that at the level of phyla there seems to be no statistically significant order in the fossil record. (Wise concedes that he will get such order at the level of classes, orders, etc.) Denying that his purpose was anti-evolutionary, Wise then proceeded to address the question of what kind of young earth, universal flood model would be consistent with these results. On Thursday Wise presented an attempt to create a "creationist phylogenetic tree" using a more precise definition of "kinds" -- the "baramin" -- also developed by former BASer Walter Remine.

As indicated earlier, this work was remarkable for being in the main a positive attempt to construct creationist models that are also scientific (never mind if that sounds oxymoronic!) instead of blatantly anti-evolutionary. Wise was pro-creationist, for he knows that a problem for evolution is not the same thing as a point for creation. Also the tools used are sound and logical (e.g., cladistics, statistics) instead of twisted applications replete with misuse and misunderstanding so common in "scientific" creationism. Such work from creationists is refreshing and should be encouraged if for no reason but to contrast it with the trash that has been done in the creationist camp in the past; the methodology and the posture of the work of Wise and others like him cannot be faulted, in my opinion.

But this is not to say that Wise is in any way successful in his goal of producing a really scientific young earth creationist model. Though he is just getting started, so to speak, it is nonetheless clear to me that he is encountering increasing difficulty already that is going to become more and more impalpable to someone with Wise's scientific integrity. I predict that the results of his sound work will demand a model of such increasing fancifulness (e.g., what accounts for the post-flood variety of flora and fauna -- super-evolution and/or mega-miracles?) that the intellectual tension resulting will cause a catastrophic change in his overall position sometime in the future. I am not enough of a prophet to say what the new position will be or when it will change.

Attending my first ICC was indeed worth the time and money, for it afforded a unique opportunity to feel the present pulse of a group of people who have admittedly been for me a sociological curiosity since I first met some of them along the banks of the Paluxy in the early 80's. Overall, it was a mixed bag of the good, the bad, and the ugly -- the

Wises and Wilkersons, the Millers, Pattons, and Jorgensons, and the Morrises, Gishes, and Kennedys.

Perhaps a personal incident at ICC 90 said it all: I carried with me a bag full of information from the NCSE and other sources featuring the results of the Paluxy work that Kuban and I have done. This material was given individually to anyone requesting it, though I could not display it until Kuban arrived at midweek and set up his table. Outside one of the main lecture rooms in between papers I had this stuff spread out to give copies to an interested conference participant. One of the ICC staff members, perhaps a member of the "ideological police," walked over, took a look at the titles of the material, and asked me to get all of it out of sight when I told him the stuff was "unapproved." I slowly complied, emphasizing to him to send anyone requesting this material to me (no response, only a glare). Unknown to me at the time, a friend of mine had witnessed the whole encounter and related the incident to a conference official. During the next paper that I was attending this official quietly sat down beside me and whispered sincere apologies to me, emphasizing that it never should have happened. I assured him no offense was taken and thanked him. The contrast within this incident, like that throughout ICC 90, was stark indeed.

[\[Back to top\]](#)

Update On Texas Biology Textbook Adoptions

By Scott Faust

In earlier editions of this newsletter I reported on the adoption of last year's textbook proclamation and the controversy generated by its requirements for the coverage of evolution in biology textbooks.

In late August the State Textbook Secondary Science Committee voted on textbooks submitted for adoption by the state, having held hearings in June (publishers) and July (public).

Their list will be considered by the State Board of Education, which holds its own hearings and makes final selections in November. The Commissioner and the board can also require changes to texts to correct errors, and to bring them into conformity with the textbook proclamation and other regulations.

I will report only the essentials. NTS member Ronnie Hastings, who was a member of the above committee, may wish to give us an insider's account.

In a dramatic improvement over texts submitted in 1984, all of this year's biology texts dealt with evolution in a straightforward, substantive and accurate manner. The committee adopted eight texts for Biology I, the maximum number allowed. One of these even used "creation science" as an example of pseudoscience!

Nearly all of the many anti-evolutionists who testified in July recommended that the committee adopt **none** of the texts. The Gablers, citing some of the language discussed in my article on Proclamation 66, claimed that the texts "violate Texas law."

They were so considerate as to identify the necessary deletions, and supplied substitute anti-evolution passages for each text in their written comments. The Gablers' target is now the more politically motivated State Board of Education. It may have the power to require such changes. Stay tuned.

[\[Back to top\]](#)

Noteworthy

"I think you can get yourself wrapped up into believing that you've got a certain gift. I've used psychics so much and have never had one of them produce anything other than, 'The body's by the water,' or, 'I see a pond.' I've never in 30 years had a psychic say, 'This is where the body is, this is who killed him.'"

---Famous Texas private investigator Bill Dear, quoted in the January 1990 *American Way*, American Airlines' in-flight magazine.

[\[Back to top\]](#)
