



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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The third eye

By Pat Reeder

I must apologize for missing last month's issue. It was caused by a scheduling conflict with the editor and my own personal family crisis. Just a few weeks ago, my mother passed away after a long fight against cancer. The events of the past month have been very hard on my family and me ... but oddly enough, they have also given me some insight on a current news story and strengthened even more my commitment to the North Texas Skeptics and CSICOP. Allow me to explain ...

Almost every day, the local newspapers print letters defending Robert Tilton against Attorney General Dan Morales. I quote from a letter to the Dallas Morning News by Leo Marzoni of Dallas: "Where is the crime? ... Our government should not be in the business of protecting us from bad decisions or from losing money to slicktalking evangelists. ... This total misuse of funds is a far grander harm to the citizens than the Word of Faith."

Meanwhile, Bob Ray Sanders repeatedly defends Tilton on his KLIF-AM radio show, saying that he should not be prosecuted, he's committed no crime, he's just practicing freedom of religion, Dan Morales is on a vendetta against him, etc., etc., ad nauseam.

I hear very little comment from these compassionate folk on the new lawsuits Tilton is facing from people who were rippedoff by him. One of these is 67-year old widow Mary Elizabeth Turk of Oak Cliff. Several years ago, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. But because of her strong faith in Robert Tilton's promises to heal her via television, she did not go to a doctor. Instead she sent whatever pitiful amounts of money she could scrape up to the Prophet of Farmers Branch. Now, at long last, she realizes that his promises were nothing more than a ploy to get people to send him money. But alas, it's too late.

Doctors told her that if she had let them treat her at the outset, she would most likely be healthy today. Instead, she is dying. And her death, and God only knows how many others, can be laid squarely on the expensive doorstep of Robert Tilton.

To Bob Ray Sanders and to all the radio callers and letter writers who defend Tilton as a harmless preacher practicing

freedom of religion, I want to ask one question:

"What if this woman were YOUR mother?"

My mother suffered much pain and discomfort, and died much too young. But because she did get the best medical care from the outset, at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, she had five years of life she otherwise would never have had. I wouldn't trade those five years of her life for all the ill-gotten riches of Robert Tilton. Too bad he doesn't feel the same way.

As to the question of why Dan Morales should prosecute, ask yourself, "What if this man claimed to be a doctor instead of a preacher, told a sick person to throw away her medicine, and she died as a result?" And what if he pulled this little stunt in massive numbers, leading to countless deaths and illnesses? The public would demand that the perpetrator be prosecuted, for everything from murder or manslaughter to practicing medicine without a license. What is the Attorney General for if not to protect the public from charlatans who enrich themselves by preying on the innocent?

To Leo Marzoni, to Bob Ray Sanders, and to all those who continue to defend this man and others like him, and question the motives of those who try to stop him, I ask again:

"What if he did this to YOUR mother?"

Because I know that if some "slicktalking evangelist" had done it to my mother, and the Attorney General refused to prosecute, I'd go after him personally with fifty feet of rope, a gallon of gasoline, and a Bic lighter.

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Speaking of Bob Ray Sanders, he recently had "prominent UFO researcher" Stanton Friedman as a guest. Friedman was in town to play a MUFON meeting. He held forth for an hour on a variety of nonsensical topics, mostly centered around his new book, which is yet another rehash of the discredited Roswell, New Mexico, saucer crash yarn. But this time, he has an eyewitness! True, the witness was only five at the time he saw the saucer people ... he never mentioned it to anyone for forty years ... he apparently forgot all about it until a "dramatic reenactment" on NBC's Unsolved Mysteries jogged his memory ... but nevertheless, he's an eyewitness!! And you can't argue with that. At least Bob Ray couldn't: he said Friedman was so fascinating, he wished he could talk to him "for eight more hours."

Well, if he'd had twelve bucks, he could've gone to the MUFON meeting. They are a "scientific research group," you know. At least that's what they say in their new radio spot, running in pretty heavy rotation on KUII (1190 AM). In the spot, MUFON is described as America's largest group dedicated to researching UFOs through "the scientific method." Gee, I thought that was CSICOP.

Apparently, "the scientific method" is to fire your own researchers when they declare something to be a hoax, as MUFON did in the case of the Gulf Breeze photos. The spot also says MUFON is a nonprofit group, so I guess they spent all those \$12 admissions on the radio schedule.

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CBS recently broadcast Grave Secrets, a made-for-TV movie "based on a true story" of a haunted house built on a graveyard in Houston. Naturally, the movie showed all sorts of ghostly things happening right on camera, although none of the "actual" incidents, which allegedly occurred repeatedly over a long period of time, were ever captured on film.

Both the movie and an Inside Edition feature on the story behind it implied that the daughter of the home's owners died of a heart attack induced by ghosts. Now it's always been my theory that even if there were such things as ghosts, they certainly wouldn't want to kill you ... because then you'd be a ghost, too, and you could kick 'em in the sheets. Both the movie and the news story mentioned that the daughter was taking chemotherapy for cancer, but neither made clear what

I learned from my own mother's experience: that prolonged chemotherapy can do severe damage to the heart.

Incidentally, just like the Amityville house, all the alleged ghostly doings abruptly ceased when the people who sold the story moved away. The people who have lived there since have noticed nothing out of the ordinary. Perhaps the movie would have been more appropriately titled Grave Doubts.

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Well, the Academy Awards were not good to JFK, but they did stir up even more publicity for Kennedy conspiracy Trekkies. On a preOscar edition of Entertainment Tonight, Oliver Stone used the phrase "historians like myself," and I spit a drink across the room. On Oscar night, as JFK's editor accepted one of the film's few awards, for "Best Editing," he praised Stone's "dedication to a higher truth." Guess all the lower, more mundane truths were edited out.

Then, after the Awards were over, Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America and former aide to Lyndon Johnson, denounced JFK to the New York Times. Valenti called the film a "hoax" and a "smear" plucked from "a slag heap of loony theories" in Jim Garrison's book, which he described as "hallucinatory bleatings." He compared the film to Nazi propaganda and said "Does any sane human being truly believe that President Johnson, the Warren Commission members, law enforcement officers, CIA, FBI, White House aides, and assorted thugs, weirdos and Frisbeethrowers all conspired together as plotters in Garrison's wacky sightings? And then for almost 29 years, nothing leaked? But you have to believe it if you think well of any part of this accusatory lunacy."

This colorfully-phrased question naturally leads us to the April issue of Film Threat magazine. It contains an article in which two irreverent reporters spend three days in Dallas at the Kennedy conspiracy symposium. It's a very funny look at a group of guys who "for once in their lives ... can talk about the assassination all they want without someone saying, 'Shut the hell up already about that crap, will ya?!'" The symposium is described as being a lot like a Star Trek convention, "but without the lame nylon uniforms." And the sidebar of "Things Actually Overheard at The Symposium" is worth the price of the magazine. A couple of samples: "Oh boy, the guy who drove the ambulance is here!" and "I know a guy who saw LBJ jump out of his car and take a shot at JFK."

And finally, James Earl Jones recently embarrassed himself by hosting yet another "blow the lid off JFK" (so to speak) TV special. This one promised to show the previously unknown link between the "three great mysteries" of our time: the JFK assassination, the Bay of Pigs, and Watergate (Watergate? A secret? Is there anyone out there who doesn't know more about Watergate than you ever wanted to know?). Ed Bark's review in the Dallas Morning News summed the show up in one word: "Appalling."

Enough on this tired subject. Next month: Dr. Crenshaw!!

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And now, since I've missed a month, let's catch up on some of the top news stories from around the world:

ABC recently aired a Happy Days reunion special. All the original cast appeared, except for Erin Moran, who played the daughter, Joanie. According to Inside Edition, Moran was invited to appear, but she replied that all the other cast members were "evil," and she "prayed for them." Guess she'll never forgive them for making her do Joanie Loves Chachi.

A Russian reporter recently investigated villagers' reports of an "abominable snowman monster." He found the remains of the animal, determined that it lived on bark, and declared that it should more properly be called "a forest monster." I suspect that the more accurate, technical term might be "a beaver."

Jim Rodenburg of the Omaha Stock Yards has made a job offer to Elvis Presley. He wants Elvis to reappear and become a spokesman for the pork industry, because Elvis was known to have loved pork chops and could eat four pounds of

bacon at a sitting. He neglected to mention Elvis' greatest qualification: he keeled over dead from a heart attack.

At a recent meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Chicago, a survey was read which shows that more than one-third of American adults believe astrology has some scientific merit, and nearly one in seven reads horoscope columns. Despite this widespread support for astrology, a judge in Detroit has dismissed a lawsuit filed by a disgruntled horoscope reader. James Blakely sued for \$9 million, claiming that following Sydney Omarr's astrological advice had caused him "an enormous amount of problems" including his failed marriage. Omarr claims he knew in January that nothing would come of the lawsuit. His Magic Eight-Ball told him so.

A Salem, Massachusetts, man was recently convicted of using witchcraft to bilk an heiress out of more than \$500,000. The prosecutor described the heiress as "innocent and vulnerable" (a.k.a. "stupid"), and said the man took advantage of her belief in the occult to extort money from her. He apparently convinced her of his strange powers by pulling a series of bizarre stunts, such as branding his name on her breast. He ended up rich, and she ended up looking like Laverne DeFazio. No word yet on whether the jury has voted to burn him at the stake.

A group of meteorologists claims that the Biblical account of the parting of the Red Sea could have been accomplished by wind. They say that a steady wind of 45 miles per hour, blowing for 10 straight hours, could have moved the shallow waters enough to create a path for the Israelites. Wonder if they'd be interested in my theory that just before Jesus walked on the water, there was a sudden freeze.

And finally, in Irvington, New Jersey, a substitute teacher from the Caribbean became so upset with her roomful of rowdy seventh-graders that she performed a voodoo ritual in class. She began shaking and chanting, waved a cross at them, threw some kind of powder, and told them their souls were going to the Lord. Police charged her with endangering the welfare of a child and making terrorist threats.

Rumor is that she asked the arresting officer, "You mean this isn't the Voodoo Economics class?"

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An Ageless Story

By John Blanton and Jeff Umbarger

Part II

In last month's issue we started our discussion of MIOS chairman Don Patton's arguments for a young Earth. In his talk at the February MIOS meeting Don cited numerous references to legitimate scientists, references that he indicated would prove that the methods of mainstream science were useless in estimating the age of the earth.

Last month we detailed the context of one of Don's citations and showed how the meaning of the original article had been seriously misrepresented in the MIOS lecture. This month we complete our analysis by examining another of the citations used in the MIOS lecture.

The second and last of the MIOS citations we will describe here deals with dating of moon rocks. Here is the text from the handout under the heading "DATING OF MOON SAMPLES: PITFALLS AND PARADOXES."

What complicates things for the uranium-lead method is that non-radiogenic lead 204, 206, 207 and 208 also exist naturally, and scientists are not sure what ratios of non-radiogenic to radiogenic lead were early in the moon's history. ... The problem of how much lead was around to begin with still remains. ... If all of the age-dating methods (rubidium-strontium, uranium-lead and potassium-argon) had yielded the same ages, the picture would be neat. But they haven't.

Looks like a bad day for science, doesn't it. It turns out to be a bad day for creation science. Note the ellipses (...) that

appear in the MIOS text. Now this may sound naive, but to most of us this means that irrelevant or redundant text has been omitted. See how wrong we can be? Here is the text from the article by Everly Driscoll in *Science News*. [Editor's note: I have bolded the text below that appears in the quoted sections above.]

*Trying to unravel lunar history by long distance, or even by sampling six or seven areas of the surface, is a precarious job and subject to much interpretation. Much controversy during the past two years has centered around the interpretation that should be given to the ages of the lunar material -- ages yielded by studying its radioactive history. **If all of the age-dating methods (rubidium-strontium, uranium-lead and potassium-argon) had yielded the same ages, the picture would be neat. But they haven't.** The lead ages, for example, have been consistently older.*

...

In addition to uranium 238 converting to lead 206, uranium 235, with a half-life of 713 million years, decays to form lead 207, and thorium 232, with a half-life of 14 billion years, decays to form lead 208.

***What complicates things for the uranium-lead method is that nonradiogenic lead 204, 206, 207 and 208 also exist naturally, and scientists are not sure what the ratios of nonradiogenic to radiogenic lead were early in the moon's history.** Wherever there is nonradiogenic lead 204, however, there is usually nonradiogenic lead 206, 207 and 208.*

To arrive at the percentage of nonradiogenic lead present on the early moon, one can take the ratios of nonradiogenic lead 206 to 204, 207 to 204 and 208 to 204 found in meteorites (these ratios are 9.5, 10.5 and 20 respectively); but the question unanswered is, are these meteoric lead ratios the same as those that existed on the moon? Those scientists who are willing to accept the 4.6-billion-year-old age of meteorites and apply that to the moon are often not willing to apply the lead ratios found in meteorites to the moon.

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Another example is with sample 14163. This sample, says Silver, has already shown that some parts of the lead could not have formed more recently than 4 billion years ago, and it probably includes some components considerably older than 4.0 billion years. Silver heated the sample. At 550 degrees C. the lead that came off had very high lead 207 to 206 ratios. One would have expected to see a ratio of 0.6 lead 207 to 206 for lead that had been forming continuously since 4.5 billion years ago. But what he saw were ratios of 1.2 or 1.3. "This isotopic composition has never been observed anywhere in the material of the solar system," says Silver.

If these lead ratios were interpreted as other ratios, the lead would have apparent ages as high as 5.5 billion years. But, says Silver, "We are probably looking at lead 207 made very early in the solar system before it could be diluted with lead 206, and this large amount of lead 207 has had more time to move around." Lead that is similarly bound comes off at the same temperatures. There is usually a correlation with the age of the lead, but the implications of this are not fully understood.

Tatsumoto and Doe have been working with lead at different temperatures (1,000 to 1,350 degrees C.), and they are getting similar results. The most significant has been isolating lead that consistently dates at 4.6 billion years old (SN: 12/18/71, p. 423).

***The Problem of how much lead was around to begin with still remains.** This could be partially solved by dating all of the soil samples from the moon, determining the over-all effects on each soil sample and getting a convergence point.*

The broader implications of the history of volatile metals are apparent even if not all of the results and answers are yet. Volatile metals such as mercury, lead, zinc, cadmium, bismuth, rubidium and potassium are important to man. If scientists could unlock the history of these chemical reservoirs -- what the chemical pot started from, how it evolved and what makes it work -- says Silver, and if they could understand these processes on the moon, they might know how to use them today on earth and predict for tomorrow. "We don't know the total chemistry for the earth, but our best chance of understanding it is on the moon."

Obviously the forgoing does not make as interesting reading as the MIOS text, especially since Driscoll did not see fit to

arrange the original text in an order that would later be useful to the creationists. What the complete text shows is scientists working without the master blueprint (as they often do) and trying to make something useful of the information they have at hand. What the complete text does not show is scientists expressing doubts that the moon is billions of years old, as was implied during the lecture. Also, we plead guilty of using the notorious ellipses to shorten the extracted text and to avoid completely reprinting Driscoll's article.

Perhaps it was our mistake but on listening to the MIOS presentation, we felt the speaker was telling us that a representative of mainstream science was reporting in a reputable journal that radiometric dating in general and the uranium-lead analysis in particular is fraught with such perilous assumptions as to render it completely unreliable.

We were further led to believe that we should conclude that all claims of a 4-billion plus year-old earth (that goes for the moon, too) were false, based on this line of reasoning (Don ended up stating his belief that the earth is less than 10,000 years old). It appeared to us that the MIOS audience generally reached this conclusion. Perhaps they would have reached this conclusion even if the full text been presented. Perhaps they would have been bored to tears.

Don's lecture consisted of a slide presentation that closely paralleled the material handed out at the conclusion, and he additionally presented some slides that represented his ideas photographically. The greatest difficulty the two of us had was with the quotes extracted from texts and journals and presented as supporting the invalidity of scientific aging methods. In all, there were seventeen citations in the handouts from various journals and texts, including *Science*, *Science News*, *Scientific American*, *Nature* and *Journal of Geology*.

Additionally, the handouts included citations from William D. Stansfield's *Science of Evolution*. An entire page printed front and back consisted mainly of quotations from the book. There were other citations from the slide presentation that were not available in the handouts. Jeff managed to track down seven citations in the library at first pass, and in general, while they may contain phrases critical of certain aspects of various age dating techniques, the entire texts of the citations do not support the conjecture of the MIOS presentation -- that claims of an earth over four billion years old are invalid. Where we have been able to crosscheck the citations against the actual text, we have noted that the classic out-of-context stunt is being pulled to make it appear that mainstream science supports the MIOS view.

In a phone interview later in the month, Don Patton claimed authorship of all the materials presented at the lecture. This dispels our idea that MIOS gets all of its literature from the Institute for Creation Research. Don says he does his own research, mostly at local libraries, and prepares the presentation materials himself. He announced that the next MIOS lecture, on the first Tuesday in March, would continue the same theme to the scientific evidence for the age of the universe.

MIOS holds monthly meetings with talks by Don Patton and other prominent MIOS members as well as by outside lecturers. The meetings have traditionally been held on the first Tuesday of each month at the Ridgewood Recreation Center on Fisher Road in Dallas. They start about 7:30 PM and are open to the public. I urge NTS members and others interested in the issue to attend one or more of the MIOS lectures to get a firsthand experience with the local version of "creation science." Call John Blanton at (214) 416-8038 [**now 972-306-3187**] in advance of the meeting to confirm the schedule and current topic.

Notes:

E. Driscoll, *Science News* **101**, 12.

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More From Pat Reeder

(What follows was edited out of Pat's March column due to space considerations, but I think it's important enough to publish even at this late date. --K. Blanton)

It's been a big news month for money-making enterprises disguised as religions. ABC's *Nightline* recently devoted over an hour to an interview with David Miscavige, the head of the Church of Scientology. Most of the time was spent denying widespread and well-documented charges that Scientology is a cult which relentlessly squeezes money out of its members and attempts to destroy anyone who tries to leave or expose it.

Forrest Sawyer began the show with a ten minute filmed report, which included most of the familiar charges of intimidation by church members: attempts to destroy their enemies' credit ratings, get them arrested, etc. The segment featured both former church members and reporters who had dared to cross Hubbard's militia.

Then, it was on to a disappointing one-on-one interview between Ted Koppel and Miscavige. Koppel, who is known for asking the tough questions, seemed uncharacteristically soft on Scientology. He let Miscavige accuse Forest Sawyer of accepting bogus information from lying enemies of the church, and of not being interested in interviewing people who had offered to testify to the positive benefits of "auditing" and "E-meters." It seemed odd that Sawyer was not present to answer these charges, and Koppel made little effort to refute them on behalf of ABC News.

Miscavige then went on to call the Cult Awareness Network a "hate group" out to destroy Scientology, and to explain, at excruciating length, why Scientology is a legitimate religion. Koppel was reduced to nodding and tossing in the occasional interjection.

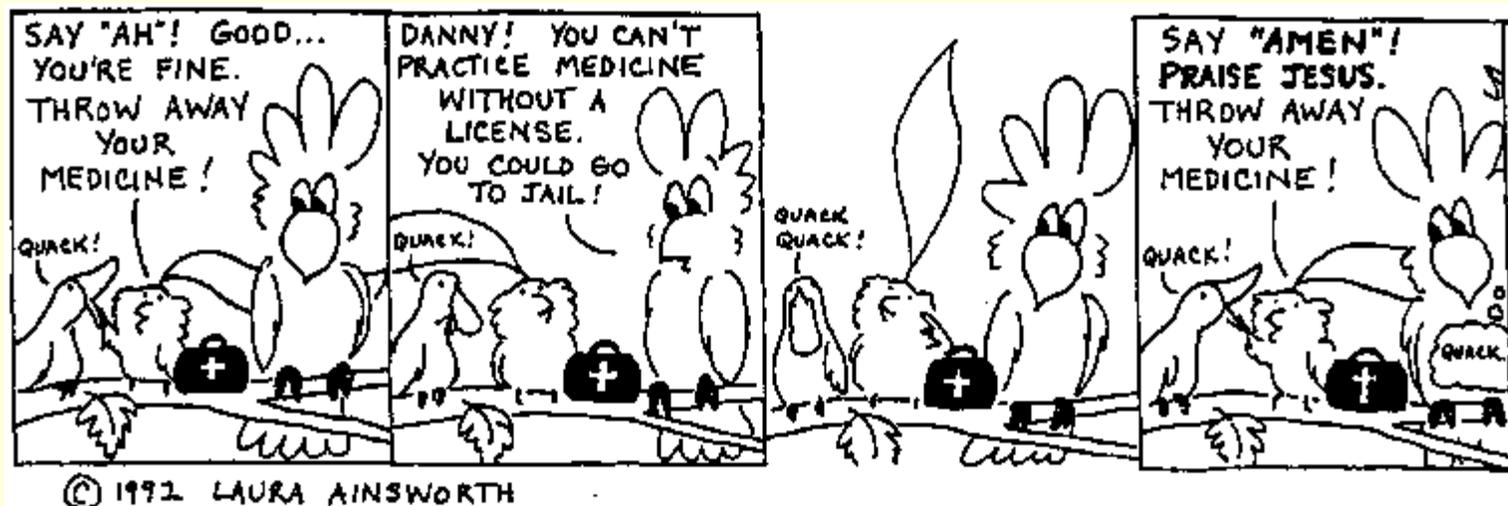
To be fair, it must be tough to interview Miscavige. With his perfectly moussed hair, expensive suit, and relentless Type A personality, interviewing him is like being locked in a room for an hour with a time-share condo salesman on commission. After awhile, you're willing to agree to anything, no matter how expensive, just so you can go home.

Let's hope that the next time a network news program takes on this subject, they allow the reporter who actually covered the story to conduct the interview. Maybe then we'll get more than a sales talk for L. Ron Hubbard's greed-induced fantasies.

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Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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