



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 8 Number 12

www.ntskeptics.org

December 1994

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U.S. was founded on natural law *not as a Christian nation*

By Joe Voelkering

I'd like to make it clear that, in this essay: I'm not contesting *anyone's* religious views, integrity or intent, but countering what I feel is a pseudo-historic myth, plus showing how such historical flaws can be corrected with the methods employed in forensic science. (In essence, I used a "convergence of the evidence" protocol, rather than relying on limited, isolated data.)

This is the summary of a lecture that consumes well over 30 pages when transcribed (and could easily be expanded by a factor of about 10). Thus, the brevity of this piece is due to editorial space, *not* a lack of data. Also, it's definitely *not* a "hip-shot" opinion, so I'll bore you with some background data and methodology before giving my findings.

I used copies of documents from the relevant periods when I could find them, instead of interpretations by authors. I continue to find new data, but it invariably corrects errors in dates, fills voids, etc. To date, the new data *has* not changed the substance of earlier findings. As *real* scientists and historians *should*, I merely claim a high degree of confidence in its validity. I openly invite critique of the material, providing it's *objective*.

One incentive for this effort came from personal experience: attempting to do objective analyses of aircraft accidents in fundamentalist states. I feel many in the "Christian Right" are unaware of the "can of worms" they're about to open with their "revisionist" claims of the United States being "founded as a Christian nation."

I'll concede most early settlers in the original states *were* Christian, but two points are *very* relevant:

- Most came here to escape religious persecution from other (Christian) religions supported by government. They almost *had* to be "free-thinkers," at least to the degree their views differed from state-supported dogma strongly enough to journey here to be able to follow their convictions. *Why* would they form *another* government supporting specific religious views, as opposed to one that guaranteed religious tolerance?

- Further, many (non-Anglican) Christians left the British Isles to escape religious persecution from the government of King James, *the* same King James that commissioned the version of the Bible so highly revered by the "Christian right." Thus, the idea of founding a new government on the biblical views of a system our forefathers fled is totally bizarre!

Early Theocratic Flops

The Jamestown, Pilgrim and Puritan experiments in theocracy were dismal failures. The Puritan example was typical: Their compact had fallen apart by 1700, largely due to the *Salem witchcraft*-type fiascos.

Roger Williams was forced to leave those colonies for, among other things, pointing out that ". . . forced worship stinks in God's nostril's." He moved to Rhode Island, founded the first Baptist church in this country, *and* wrote the first recorded document mandating the separation of church and state!

William Penn's Pennsylvania was a "safe haven" for anyone that simply believed in one God (Jews, for example). Penn's own Quaker sect, likewise, avoided intermingling church and state.

A second incentive for this work was an assertion about the logic our forefathers used to "reinvent government" made by Nobel laureate Richard Feynman, backed by the works of Clarence Carson, George Roche III, and Henry Grady Weaver. (The latter three are devout Christians, by the way.) Their contentions overlap, to provide a superb over-view, but none appear to conflict, in substance, with the others. Those assertions were cross-compared with the many writings left by Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, Paine, etc. (The "period" documents seemed to make a *stronger* case for the contentions than the "current" authors did!) I also consulted an expert on, and teacher of, Christian history. He not only confirmed my findings; he provided *more* validating data.

Our *real* start goes back to the Greek philosophers, the "lovers of wisdom," who, in essence, came up with "whole new ways of thinking"; the concepts that: The universe can be understood by rational analysis without "supernatural" explanations; objective questioning can *not* injure *real* truth, only verify it, and; belief to the level of *absolute certainty* "mentally paints you in a corner."

Aristotle was one of the first recorded proponents of Natural Law, the idea that some things "simply are," such as: gravity and inertia (in the physical realm); the balance between predators and prey (in nature); and the concept that people would rather deal with honest persons than dishonest ones (in human relationships). He also devised syllogisms; deductive reasoning.

The Romans added the concept of "natural justice"; Bacon contributed "inductive reasoning"; Locke appended "natural rights"; and Newton, etc. validated the natural law concept, in general, with scientific advances.

Awakening to Secularism

The evangelical movement (a.k.a. "The Great Awakening") that started around 1740, and grew through about 1800, was an additional strong driving force behind the separation of church and state precepts. James Madison reportedly was so repulsed by the harsh treatment of such factions by state-supported Anglicans in Virginia that he abandoned plans to become an Anglican minister.

Bolstered by the scientific verification of natural law, our founders formulated a government based on natural law and rights. They recognized the possibility of error and devised a system where ideas could be tried out, revised or discarded (which we did, with Prohibition) via constitutional changes, etc.

The Declaration of Independence was a political argument using the logic of science, with: Aristotle's natural law (" . . . laws of nature and nature's God . . ."); Bacon's inductive reason (" . . . truths to be self-evident . . ."); Locke's natural rights (" . . . endowed . . . with certain inalienable rights . . ."); Newton's deductive logic, based on syllogisms (" . . . powers from the consent of the governed . . ."); and options for revision (" . . . right . . . to alter or abolish it . . .").

The Declaration was almost entirely the work of Thomas Jefferson, with some minor (verbal) advice from Benjamin Franklin and John Adams. Congress changed very few words or phrases, but *did* make a number of major deletions to Jefferson's final draft including a section that would have abolished slavery.

Jefferson characterized his religious beliefs as ones that would ". . . displease neither the rational Christian nor Deists." He defined a "rational Christian" as one that believed in God and liked the philosophies of Jesus, but did not believe in his divinity, the Trinity, or that the Bible was literally true. Unitarians have basically the same views as rational Christians, but their first U.S. church didn't form until around 1785. Deists believe in a non-intervening Creator of the universe that simply lets it run under principles that were established as a part of the creation.

About two-thirds of the signers of the Declaration had views like Jefferson's. Rational Christians, Deists, and Unitarians commonly attended Christian services during that period, which has precipitated both confusion and false claims about the convictions of many individuals. Franklin and Thomas Paine very clearly were Deists, as was George Washington (according to his biography by Woodrow Wilson). Adams and James Madison, "architect of the Bill of Rights" (if not the entire Constitution), apparently were rational Christians (or Unitarians).

Madison was a close friend of Jefferson, put Jefferson's "Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom" through the legislature while Jefferson was in Europe, and appears to have used it as a "prototype" for the First Amendment.

Jefferson's Triumphs

A proposal to insert a clause supporting Christianity in the Virginia statute failed by a large majority, prompting Jefferson to note that it ". . . was proof they meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan [sic], the Hindoo [sic], and Infidel of every denomination." Jefferson was very proud of the "Virginia Statute"; it is one of the accomplishments he had engraved on his tombstone, along with his authoring of the Declaration of Independence and his founding of the University of Virginia. He did not request any mention that he was the third President of the United States, though!

It's interesting to note that during Jefferson's presidential campaigns, he was widely and viciously attacked by the "religious right" of the period for, among other things, his friendship with Thomas Paine, who was typically characterized as an atheist, despite his many declarations of his belief in a Deity. Paine is recorded as a self-described "skeptical Deist" in an excerpt from *The Age of Reason*. His response to a charge of infidelity because he didn't believe in prayer is a classic. He opined that the practice, including the hiring or paying of others to pray, in his view, indicated a *lack* of faith, since a benevolent, omnipotent Deity did not need (and should not be given) instructions ". . . as if [one] *distrusted* him."

Needless to say, that conviction, while stated as an opinion, didn't endear Paine to the professional clergy of the period, and one can easily see why he and his friends were so strongly opposed by them. Paine's writings certainly memorialized many strong personal viewpoints, including the absolute right of others to have convictions completely different from his. However they were typically stated in a non-dogmatic, opinion-type manner which was a subtle "trademark" he seemed to share with Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, etc. (That style is definitely in strong contrast with the writings of the "religious right" of both that period and today.) Currently, the "fundamentalist" faction commonly cites a number of other popular semi-myths as though they were "part and parcel" of the founding of the United States; in reality, however, historical research shows that:

- "In God we Trust" was minted on currency for the first time in 1864, apparently to get "God on both sides" in the Civil War, since the Confederate States of America Declaration of Independence included the clause ". . . with God on our side in the defense of slavery."
- The phrase "under God" was added to the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance in 1954. (Please note the word used is "God," [not "Christ"] as in a "generic" God. Paine's Deistic God, Jefferson's "nature's God," Allah, Buddha, Yahweh, or "Almighty Bob," per science fiction author Douglas Adams' prophet "old Trashbarg" on the planet Lamuella — take your pick.)

One can go through both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution without encountering a reference to Christ. God is noted only once, as "nature's God," and religion is noted but twice, both mandating complete religious freedom (Article VI, Section 3, prohibiting any religious test for public office, and Amendment I, prohibiting Congress from making laws respecting religion). In addition to the previously noted fact that most of the signers of the Declaration of Independence held Deistic or Unitarian type beliefs, our first three Presidents *also* had such views.

Further, one of our first international treaties, negotiated with Tripoli by Paine's close friend, Joel Barlow, under then-

President Washington, and signed by then-President Adams in 1797, states clearly: "[T]he government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

What religious doctrine was the U.S. founded on? My research discloses: "An extremely broad tolerance of any and all beliefs."

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Franklin's transformation into a "cautious diest"

By Joe Voelkering

Benjamin Franklin's family history is somewhat typical of those that had very good reasons for seeking complete religious freedom. Franklin noted that his ancestors were ". . . early in the Reformation." His great- great-grandfather reportedly read from a state-prohibited (Christian) bible he'd taped into a compartment within a special stool that could be quickly hidden by the simple act of placing the stool upright, while one child typically "stood watch" at the door for unexpected visitors.

Franklin's father, similarly, was a religious "outlaw." He attended private meetings for worship, which were officially prohibited in 1664 (even if they were, in essence, Anglican). Fearing prosecution, he moved his immediate family to New England about 1682, where Benjamin Franklin was born in 1706.

Franklin, himself, was initially destined to be "tithed to the (Christian) ministry," as the family's tenth son. At about the age of 15, he read some books that contained the substance of sermons against the concept of Deism. The books had quite opposite the intended effect on him, however, since Franklin felt the arguments cited for the Deistic view were, by far, the more persuasive.

That, of course, put an end to his proposed career as a minister. He obviously adhered to a family tradition of pursuing religious freedom, though, an option he strongly felt should be the right of any and all, and his father could hardly object to Benjamin's choice to follow his conscience.

Franklin apparently remained quite open-minded about the subject but seldom attended public religious services, preferring private meditation. He did, however, assist a fair number of churches and clergy with various projects he felt were worthwhile.

(Franklin's cleverness and sense of humor were demonstrated in one of his more notorious such "assists": He suggested that a certain military chaplain get himself designated as the Sunday "rum steward" and then dole out the men's daily quarter-pint ration immediately after services. The chaplain did, and increased his attendance rather markedly!)

— J.V.

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A "check-it-out-yourself" guide

By Joe Voelkering

If any readers would like to verify my findings, I highly recommend starting with *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (edited by Koch and Peden, New York, 1993, Random House). It contains nearly 700 pages of Jefferson's own writings ranging from formal public papers to personal letters. It's outstanding, and costs all of \$12.00 retail! *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography* (edited by LeMay and Zall, New York, 1986, W. W. Norton) is also exceptional. Franklin's wit is quite obvious, which helped it become the only enduring best-seller written in the U.S. before 1800. *Thomas Jefferson: Scientist* (regretfully, out of print) and *REBEL!: A Biography of Tom Paine* (also out of print) are likewise, excellent, with many verbatim "full context" (or nearly so) copies of their original writings.
— J.V.

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Traveling creationism

By John Blanton

This is a follow-up to last month's piece on local creationism. We will try to present these examinations of the "creation science" philosophy from time to time in order to inform our readers of current trends and to increase awareness of the subject for those who don't regularly follow these issues.

The flier from the Canyon Creek Baptist Church (Richardson, Texas) advertised, "Creation-Science Conference." It further proclaimed, "Dr. Kent Hovind is one of the foremost authorities on 'science and the Bible.' He has debated evolutionists at many universities across the United States. Dr. Hovind is dedicated to the proclamation of factual, scientific evidence supporting the biblical record of creation and history of the world." That's one way to put it.

Important questions posed on the flier were:

- Are dinosaurs alive today?
- How old is the Earth?
- Are dinosaurs mentioned in the Bible?
- What about carbon dating?
- How old is the Grand Canyon?

Kent Hovind seems to operate a traveling creation science lecture service. He came prepared with a van load of exhibit material and presented a program at the church that spread over four sessions during a three day period in October. Followers of the local creationism movement would already be familiar with some of the material he exhibited at the front of the auditorium during his talks. He not only had one of the "hammer in the rock" replicas that Carl Baugh sells out at Glen Rose, but he had a metal casting of the "Burdick print," a supposed human foot print found in Cretaceous limestone near Glen Rose. The Burdick print is supposed to be oversized, but it was even larger than life in the form of the metal cast. Hovind's talk on the first night seemed to dwell mostly on issues of the scientific validity of creationism, which were really just assaults on the scientific validity of anything in mainstream science that supported evolution of species and the age of the Earth. As in the case of my previous report on the video presentation of Russell Humphreys' talk at the MIOS meeting, I will outline some of the arguments Kent Hovind presented and will provide what background I can on the issues from mainstream science. In preparing this I relied heavily on Arthur N. Strahler's *Science and Earth History - the Evolution/Creation Controversy*¹:

1. Carbon dating

In 1960 Willard F. Libby was awarded the Nobel prize in chemistry for having developed the carbon-14 dating method while at the Institute for Nuclear Studies of the University of Chicago in 1947. This technique has since proved to be a powerful tool for dating biological samples up to 100,000 years old, and the young Earth creationists hate it for this reason and use every method they can to try to refute it. Hovind did not speak about it that first night, but a large placard among his exhibits presented several of the most famous creationist arguments, and radioactive carbon dating was easy

to pick out and note for future reference. Before I go over Hovind's argument, here is a little background on carbon-14 dating.

Radioactive carbon-14 atoms are produced when cosmic ray particles strike nitrogen nuclei in the atmosphere. Since the radioactive carbon is constantly being depleted through decay a typical balance of one atom of carbon-14 to 1 trillion atoms of carbon-12 was maintained in the atmosphere before testing of nuclear weapons began in the 1940s. The carbon atoms of both kinds are incorporated into the carbon-dioxide in the air and are assimilated by plants in the same ratios they exist in the air. Once the carbon is assimilated by plants, the ratio of C-14 to C-12 begins to drop (even lower than the original 1 in 1 trillion), because C-14 is produced only in the atmosphere. Carbon-14 has a half-life of about 5730 years, so it is possible to compute the date of an organic sample by comparing the present ratio in the sample with the assumed ratio in the atmosphere at the time of organic assimilation. Given that there were past, natural fluctuations in the C-14/C-12 ratio in the atmosphere, it is still possible to compute the time of formation of the organic sample within a few percent of its real age, provided the current ratio can be measured accurately and the original ratio can be determined to a reasonable accuracy.

Now Hovind's argument: Radioactivity is measured using a radiation counter, such as a Geiger-Müller counter, which produces a count every time it detects the decay debris from one of the unstable nuclei. With such a small ratio to begin with, and since we are measuring an amount of C-14 that only decreases by one half every 5730 years, it's ridiculous to assert that any reasonable measure of age can be made using this process. Now here is the amazing part. I agree completely. In fact, I have seldom heard of anything so ridiculous. Kent Hovind is absolutely right in this conclusion.

There is one small problem, however. Contrary to what Mr. Hovind might think, that is not how the carbon ratios are measured. In the actual practice of carbon-14 dating a small sample of the material is used, and the ionized carbon atoms from that sample are shot through the field of some deflection magnets. The heavier C-14 ions are deflected less than the C-12 ions and enter one detector. The C-12 ions enter another detector. Practically every carbon atom is counted, and the incredibly small ratio of C-14 to C-12 is measured to great precision. Upon this process the reliability of carbon-14 dating is based. It's interesting that Kent Hovind missed this minor point during the fifteen years he taught science (as he claimed in his talk).

2. Conservation of angular momentum

Kent Hovind's explanation is that (according to mainstream science) the Big Bang hypothesis has the universe starting out as a dense, spinning mass containing all its matter, which then expanded due to this spinning. Now, that's a lot of spin, and it ought to be conserved in compliance with the principle of conservation of angular momentum. Present day observations contradict that, says Hovind. He particularly points out that in the universe there are galaxies spinning every which way, and even within our solar system there are bodies with retrograde spin. For example, the Earth, viewed from above the North Pole spins counter clockwise, and the Moon also circles the planet in this direction. Further, the Earth circles the Sun in this same counter clockwise direction, as do all the planets. But there are breaks in this regularity. Uranus does not spin in the same direction as the other planets, its axis of rotation lies almost in the plane of the planetary orbits. Additionally, Triton, the giant satellite of Neptune, circles its planet in the opposite direction, clockwise as viewed from above Earth's North Pole. How can this be if angular momentum is to be conserved?

Hovind's argument that these anomalies are violations of angular momentum conservation is probably too simple-minded to be taken seriously. First, he states that the Big Bang cosmogony includes some initial, non-zero angular momentum. He then uses this to argue that all things must now retain some of this residual spin. First of all demonstrate to yourself that this is not so. Take a coin and spin it on a table top. Then stop the coin and spin it in the opposite direction. During all of this the total angular momentum of the universe has been conserved. So we see that conservation of angular momentum does not mean conservation of spin or conservation of rotation. All that is required now is to demonstrate that similar sequences of events can occur in the nearly frictionless motion of astronomical bodies. Fairly simple computer simulations can demonstrate how the chaotic interaction of many bodies moving under mutual gravitational attraction can transform a system of bodies moving in unison into a turbulent swarm.

3. The missing second

One of the most bizarre arguments from the creationists involves the case of the missing second. Its statement may vary somewhat at times, so I may not have it exactly as Hovind put it. Recently at the end of the year the timekeepers of the

world found it necessary to add an additional second to make clock time agree with solar time. It took the earth a little longer to circle the sun than a year's worth of seconds, so one was added to even things up. What's more, this has been done before and needs to be done frequently. Hovind stated (and this is the creationists' standard argument) that this means the Earth is slowing down, losing about a second a year. It's not too hard to see that the Earth must have been spinning too rapidly to hang together in the distant past. Certainly the Earth can't be billions of years old.

One wonders at a science teacher who misses the point of this apparent paradox. Look at it this way: Suppose the Earth rotated at an absolutely constant rate, but not quite fast enough to keep up with our super precision atomic clocks. Suppose this difference amounted to one second in a year. Then we would have to add a second to the clocks every year to keep clock time and solar time straight. This has all been explained before, but you will hear this missing second argument again at creationism lectures.

4. The oil pressure problem

Others besides Hovind have presented this argument. To visualize it look at Figure 1. The diagram shows oil and some gas trapped at great depth in porous stone. The trap is a layer of impermeable shale, which keeps the oil and gas from bubbling up toward the surface. At this depth, the pressure is tremendous, tens of thousands of pounds per square inch and up. Creationists such as Hovind argue that this sort of pressure will soon force the trapped fluids through the stone cap to freedom. Why then, they ask, is the oil still there after millions of years? Their answer is that it has been there only a few thousand years.

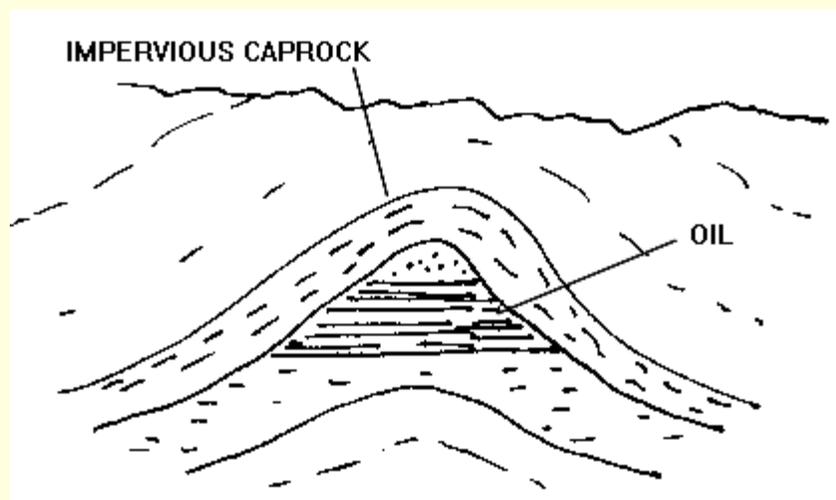


Figure 1 showing oil trapped within a formation

Once again a simple physical analysis provides a better insight into what's going on here, and the answer is as old as Archimedes. It is not absolute pressure that determines the rate at which the oil will flow through the shale cap, but it is pressure gradient — the change in pressure per unit distance. Although the pressure of the oil against the rock is tons per square inch, the pressure on the other side of the rock layer is also tons per square inch — but somewhat less. The gradient will be the same no matter at what depth the oil deposit is located.

5. Population growth

Plot the world's human population for the last thousand years or so since we have been keeping records. You will get an exponential growth curve. Extrapolate this curve back, according to Hovind and others using this argument, and you find that it grounds out about the time of the Great Flood described in the Bible. The young Earth creationists will tell you the present human population descended from just a handful of people who survived the flood.

All of this makes a little sense until you notice that if the growth curve is literally correct then there were less than a thousand people in the world at the time the Great Pyramids of Egypt were built. Then you begin to wonder who built them and all the other stuff that was constructed about that time in Egypt and other distant places.

Hovind presented approximately fourteen of the standard creationists' arguments for a young Earth. Then, following a short break, he touched on an additional nineteen arguments that were either for creationism (e.g., the vapor canopy model of the Earth before The Flood) or else were merely attacks on mainstream science (e.g., the Piltdown man fossil

fraud case). Then he wrapped up the evening with a subject that was surely as disturbing to the congregation as it was to me. I present it here without comment:

Vitamin B-17 is found in the seeds of fruits, such as peaches. The Bible exhorts us to eat the seeds of our fruits (the nut, not hull and all). If you do this, you will never get cancer, according to Hovind.

References:

1. Strahler, Arthur N., *Science and Earth History - the Evolution/Creation Controversy*, (Prometheus Books, buffalo, NY).

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The third eye

By Pat Reeder

If this column seems a bit slapdash, it's because I didn't think I'd be writing one at all this month, what with the Thanksgiving holiday and all. But then, I got an urgent note from the editors, who, in a great tradition of journalism, desperately needed to fill space. So if this is the Thanksgiving issue, just think of this column as the stuffing.

Speaking of turkeys, did you catch John Criswell's three-part series on KDFW-TV Channel 4 News, "Believing In Angels?" I think I speak for millions . . . okay, dozens . . . of skeptical viewers when I ask rhetorically: "What the Hell was THAT?!!"

Granted, America's epidemic angel obsession is a perfectly good topic for examination. But one would expect that a seasoned reporter might include the views of psychiatrists, who could explain the possible psychological origins of angel sightings and the need for some people to believe in such things. He might also get an historian to talk about how such sightings tend to flare up around major calendar events, such as the end of a century or a new millennium, both of which apply to today.

Instead, John Criswell presented us with something truly rare: a three-part news series that contained not one single fact . . . nor even a legitimate reason for existing beyond urging viewers to accept unsubstantiated anecdotes as evidence.

An example of the crackerjack reporting: a man recalled that fifty years ago, when he was eight, he fell into a river. Someone jumped off the bridge and rescued him. When he revived, the rescuer was gone. Conclusion: it must've been an angel! Did this man never consider the much more likely possibility that it was a space alien?!

More examples of the worthless tripe with which this report was packed: a man pulled at random from a State Fair crowd said he feels someone is watching him, but when he turns around, there's nobody there. So it must an angel! . . . although it sounds more to me like the CIA. Or this: a woman opened a store selling ceramic angels, and business is booming. It's obviously proof that angels are leading people into her store! . . . although to me, it just seems to be proof that some people have really, really bad taste in home decor.

And to make matters worse, this series was hyped all week long with promos promising, a la the movie "Ghost," that "you WILL believe!" How's that for journalistic objectivity? Well, I believe all right. I believe that KDFW needs to send John Criswell back to journalism school for a refresher course before he embarrasses himself and his station again. What's next? A five-part series on the Tooth Fairy?



Speaking of lousy journalism, *Hard Copy* recently tried to pump new hot air into the deflated crop circle story. This time, they had "startling video footage" of an unidentified object skittering over British wheat fields, where later on, a crop circle appeared! What was it?! A flying saucer?! A being from another dimension?! A ghost?!

Well, God only knows, because the shaky, out of focus, far-away video image was utterly impossible to identify. The way it tossed and tumbled, it could've been anything from a low-flying sea gull to an old newspaper to an aluminum pizza pan caught in the wind. *Hard Copy* thinks this proves that crop circles are an attempt by extraterrestrials to communicate with humans, although they did not explain why a race of technologically advanced aliens would travel millions of light years in a space ship, then attempt to communicate with us by stomping squiggles from Led Zeppelin album covers into a wheat field. Hey, ET: use the phone! Just don't call collect.

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Speaking of hoaxes, the *Harvard Lampoon* has a very funny parody of *Entertainment Weekly* out on the stands. The best thing about it is the way they have captured *EW*'s annoyingly smug tone of left-coast political correctness.

My favorite example is on page 10, which features a mock news report about a group of activist Hollywood stars (Susan Sarandon, Richard Gere, Jackson Browne, the usual suspects) holding a big fund-raising dinner at Spago for a new animal rights group called "The Loch Ness Animal Fund," which is dedicated to saving animals that don't exist. The various stars are quoted making self-righteously idiotic pronouncements on how arrogant man is for denying the existence of a species simply because it's a hoax. They also attack the late David Simpson, who revealed that he and some friends started the Nessie hoax by faking that famous photo back in the 1930s. Daryl Hannah simpers, "I mean, that picture of Oswald with the rifle was fake, but does that make President Kennedy alive? Please, let's not make the same mistake twice!" The story concludes by noting that Tim Robbins is "planning future benefits for the Colossus of Rhodes, the bacteria that causes typhus, and TV's 'Manimal.'" This story alone is worth the cover price.

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The November 19 "Religion Notes" column of *The Dallas Morning News* informs us that with the new century approaching, there is an upsurge of interest in Christian Science as an alternative to modern medicine (I would describe it as an alternative to health, but never mind). In this truly frightening article, Virginia S. Harris, head of the Christian Science board of directors and loyal disciple of notorious quack Mary Baker Eddy, informs us that there have only been 12 "confirmed" deaths of children in the past 10 years due to their parents denying them medical treatment, and "that's not a lot" (this reminds me of the Chicago gangster who protested that he had a perfectly clean record: 120 indictments, and no convictions). She added that that's dwarfed by the number of deaths in traditional medicine, although she failed to add that you would expect to find terminally ill children in a hospital, but rational people don't take them to church.

Her final quote: "It is natural and normal to heal by turning to God. And it's not a blind faith . . . It's like mathematical laws. They don't change. It's the same laws Jesus healed with."

Give this woman an F in math. By the way, since this is the holiday season, and I don't want to offend anyone, I'd like to say a couple of good things about the upsurge of interest in Christian Science as an alternative to medicine:

- It could single-handedly stem the population explosion.
- If enough baby boomers convert, we won't have to worry anymore about depleting Social Security.

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And now, a round-up of odd news stories to digest along with your pumpkin pie . . .

A pastor in Hillsboro, Illinois, has been sentenced to 200 hours of community service, after he grabbed an eight-year-old boy from his congregation and threw him six feet to demonstrate how God will pitch Satan into Hell on Judgment Day . . . that is, if Satan doesn't get community service. My advice to his flock: next time he preaches a sermon about the Crucifixion, don't sit in the front row!

If you're planning a Christmas vacation to jolly old England, you might want to drop in on Tony Sarumi, a 24-year old religious fanatic who thinks he's the Son of God. To prove it, he climbed into the lion's cage at the London Zoo a couple of months ago and was badly mauled before zoo keepers managed to pull him out. Upon being released from the hospital (guess not even Christ is a Christian Scientist), he went straight back to the zoo, to "apologize to the lion." He was promptly ejected and banned from the zoo for life. He told reporters, "People can do what they like to me, but I know now I am indestructible." Same thing Gary Hart told reporters.

While visiting with Tony, you might ask him for divine guidance in picking lottery numbers. Britain recently held its first multi-million pound lottery, and lotto fever was so intense, all the tabloids were offering sure ways to pick the winning numbers. *The Star* hired a clairvoyant to help readers, and another tabloid hired a psychic who advised filling in your ticket upside down (what about the many tabloid readers who are too fat to stand on their heads?). But the dottiest of all was *The Sun*, which printed a large, "psychically charged" red dot, and told readers that if they rubbed their ticket over it, it would increase their chances of winning. After reading all these tabloids, I now know how for sure to become an instant millionaire: go into the psychic business.

Also, while in England, be sure to see the spooky town of Exeter, which is offering a package tour of haunted sites. Tours are conducted every Tuesday, and the visitor can enjoy such attractions as the centuries-old site where John the monk and Mary the nun committed suicide by jumping down a well together (alas, no angels jumped in to save them). The tour winds up at a pub where a ghostly Roman legion reportedly marches through a wall, but probably only after quite a few drinks.

Finally, a blatant plug: on Thanksgiving weekend and the first two weekends of December, Waxahachie is hosting its 8th annual Christmas tour of historic homes, and our house is on the tour December 3-4. Tickets are available at the courthouse square, so come down and see us. Who knows, maybe you'll spot a ghost in one of our old Victorian houses!

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