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## Show Me God

By John Blanton

Our friends at the North Texas Church of Free Thought clued us in. Skeptic Bernard Leikind would be debating neo-creationist Fred Heeren on the *McCuistion* show on KDTN-TV. We were invited to the taping.

Leikind, of course, is the California skeptic famous for debunking the fire-walk motivational speakers. Heeren is the author of "Show Me God," ostensibly an explanation of modern science for pedestrians, but actually a promotion for the his own creationist views. The *McCuistion* show is sort of like *Jerry Springer* but several levels up the food chain. It comes on once a week on PBS and is hosted by Dennis McCuistion.

Two of us from the NTS showed up, hoping we could learn something and perhaps answer some of Heeren's wilder claims. Turns out we weren't needed.

Mike Sullivan had turned out the NTCOF in force for the Tuesday taping, and it was not a safe night out for creationists. I expected to see a few fundamentalists (this *is* Dallas, right?), and there were some for sure. But talk about a *silent* majority! Heeren got barely a whisper of support from the largely hostile studio audience when McCuistion started calling for questions. One particularly incensed clergyman noted that he had been around more than fifty years and had been a preacher much of that time, and he did not need any phony scientist trying to justify *his* Christian faith (healthy round of applause).

Heeren is a queer bird, even for a creationist. He flatly states that the Big Bang really happened, and that it attests to the existence of God, plus the two contradictory accounts of creation in Genesis, plus The Flood, plus the Resurrection, and maybe even justification for the Protestant movement in the Christian church. He stated he had no trouble with the confused order of events in the first story of creation in Genesis. That is what one would expect from science(?). That's my interpretation of what he said. I hope he really didn't say that.

At one point the debaters challenged each other over who was most true to science. The debate got down to "What evidence would you require to renounce your beliefs and to accept the other side?" Leikind allowed that it would take

something extraordinary for him. He didn't mention my favorite—to see Heeren walk on water. In turn Heeren did not concede there was anything he could accept. No surprises there.

Dennis McCuiston is a breath of fresh air here in Dallas, and I hope he stays around. His show tackles many thorny issues head on without flinching. In Dallas his show comes on Channel 2 at 1 p.m. on Sundays (maybe other times as well). Check it out.

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## The third eye

By Pat Reeder

It's Friday the third of July, it's the first day of my vacation, and I'm expected to write a column that I'm not being paid for. So here it is, and don't expect much:

You'll be happy to hear that skeptics are now as bad as Nazis, for just as Adolph Hitler wanted to kill the Jews, so skeptics want to kill the fairies (that's not a derogatory term for homosexuals; I mean little elfin beings with wings).

This bit of wisdom comes to us courtesy of tremulous rock singer Tori Amos, who told *Rolling Stone* magazine that she communicates with her imaginary fairy pals while driving around in her 4-Runner, and that people who don't believe in the "imaginary world" are as bad as Hitler because they kill the "little people's dreams." I can find only one flaw in her analogy: the last time I checked, Jews actually existed.

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A radio DJ acquaintance in Australia sent me a story from the *Sydney Morning Herald* about a 1981 book called *The Book of Predictions*. According to various Australian psychics, by 1998, we should all be wearing clothes that can change color, pattern or shape at the push of a button. Also, soldiers will be wearing shiny armor with built-in lasers that fire by merely pointing a finger, although that outfit sounds more practical for the city than the pattern-changing polyester. Well, there are still five months left in 1998, so all you clothing designers get cracking!

You'll also be interested to hear that in 2001, Earth will be admitted to the Interstellar Federation. By 2310 humans will land on the Planet Yom and meet the local inhabitants, known as Trups. Who, I hear, worship Tori Amos.

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By now, I'm sure you've heard that the *Washington Post* broke a front page story about a group of scientists, "The Society for Scientific Exploration," announcing that some evidence for UFOs was so baffling and compelling that it demanded serious study. This was immediately ballyhooed by UFO believers as a long-sought stamp of scientific legitimacy and an admission that there's "something out there" science cannot explain. Fortunately, one thing that really is out there is the *New York Post*, which responded to the story with a blistering editorial in which they charged that the *Washington Post* had been "taken for a good long ride by one of the superficially respectable organizations on the lunatic fringe."

The *NY Post* editors noted some of the other scientific papers generated in the past by the SSE, including such intriguing titles as "Atlantis and the Earth's Shifting Crust," "The Message of the Sphinx," "Reincarnation and...Birthmarks" and "Severe Birth Defects Possibly Due to Cursing." They also declared that the SSE's pronouncement was based on "a big lie" — that reputable investigators were frightened away from investigating UFO sightings by fear of ridicule or an "X-Files" type conspiracy — when in fact, these sightings had been exhaustively investigated over and over again by genuinely open-minded people. Yet, to quote at length, "despite the successful efforts of the UFO industry to convince millions of people otherwise, there is no — repeat no — credible evidence of

space aliens visiting the Earth in suspiciously Hollywoodesque flying saucers. And the case for little green men making landings all over the farm belt in order to kidnap and then have unusual sex with random hicks in pickup trucks is even more ridiculous."

That's why I like New Yorkers: they're so refreshingly blunt. Plus, they managed to work in two of my favorite Mencken era terms: "snake oil" and "claptrap." Now, THAT'S an editorial!



Now that the Clinton administration seems to be bending over backwards (or possibly forwards) to promote Scientology as a genuine religion, and using my tax dollars to force our allies to do likewise, it was a welcome sight to see *Dateline NBC* finally show America what we're really dealing with.

A recent episode profiled Bob Minton, a wealthy philanthropist who has given \$1.7 million of his own money to people and groups who he says were destroyed by Scientology. For instance, there was a couple named Vaughn who left the "Church" and spoke out against it. Soon, an anonymous "newsletter" appeared all over their neighborhood, falsely accusing them of promiscuity, criminal activities, and harboring diseased cats in the animal shelter they ran. Just as the city was about to close them down, Minton bought them a \$200,000 house to use as a new shelter.

Naturally, this sort of rescue does not go over well with followers of L. Ron Hubbard. Reptilian Scientology official Mike Rinder compared Minton to anti-Semites and to terrorist bomber Timothy McVeigh, and echoed Hubbard's pronouncement that anyone who opposes Scientology must have a criminal background, so it's perfectly all right to inform the public about it.

Bob Minton soon learned that a mysterious "private investigator" was showing up at his relatives' and ex-wives' houses, telling them terrible things about him, and trying to get them to say damaging things about him. He says they upset his mother, who is elderly and ill, and put words in her mouth. Anonymous leaflets began appearing in his neighborhood, accusing him of being in the KKK, beating his wife, supporting a ring of wife-beaters and exploiting Third World labor. When he went on vacation in Hawaii, the leaflets mysteriously appeared there as well. The propaganda campaign caused a rift between him and his son that continues to this day, but Minton refuses to back down. He declared, "This organization is not invulnerable to criticism. They can't destroy everybody."

By this point, you might be heading to your computer to e-mail Washington and demand to know why our State Department is going out of its way to help protect this group, and why our government granted them tax-free religious status. Me, I'm e-mailing the White House to ask why President Clinton is lecturing Jiang Zemin on the meaning of human rights when he should be having that same conversation with John Travolta.



We caught the "X-Files" movie, and it's a pretty good movie with some exciting scenes and some very lovely plot holes, but let me reiterate for those of you unclear on the concept: it's ONLY a movie! It's necessary to emphasize this because in the media hype surrounding the premiere, a news wire feature story noted that in an ABC News survey last year, 72 percent of those polled believed the government was keeping secrets about alien visitations. Another recent poll by Yankelovich Partners found that belief in spiritualism, faith healing, reincarnation, and fortune-telling has more than doubled since the mid-1970s. All of these topics have been depicted repeatedly on *The X-Files* and on scads of other TV shows and movies in the past 10 years.

Purdue University professor Glen Sparks thinks there's a connection. He questions test subjects on their beliefs in the paranormal before and after they watch TV shows dealing with the subject, and he says that watching the shows does have an impact on what people end up believing when it's over (unlike the reading of this column). So you might want to cut out the following list and tape it to your TV screen to inoculate yourself and your family:

1. *The X-Files* is fiction.
2. The people on *Star Trek* shows are actors.
3. Yoda is a Muppet.



Finally, my wife Laura has ended her four-week run as Emily Dickinson in Susan Sontag's play, *Alice in Bed*. I'm pleased to report that the Dallas Observer raved that she was "physically and temperamentally perfect" in the part. It was an intelligent and challenging play with much that skeptics would have found of interest, and we want to thank all the skeptics who accepted our repeated invitations to come see it. We really enjoyed visiting with both of you.

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## Creation Science Education

By John Blanton

Creationists have long proclaimed that creation science should be taught in the public schools whenever evolution is taught. They say that it's only fair play that other "origin models" receive "equal time." In reality, it would appear that creationists don't want to teach creationism or anything else in the public schools. They don't like the public schools and tend not to send their children to them when they have alternatives. This I get from nearly ten years of attending creationists' lectures.

Still, one wonders, "What would the creationists teach if they did teach creation science in the schools?" What the creationists teach their own children about science gives some idea what a full-blown creation science education would be like. In the MIOS lectures comparatively little is actually said about creationism. Instead the speakers tend to concentrate on evolution and other aspects of mainstream science. They usually talk about what is wrong with both, and they often have unpleasant things to say about prominent scientists. It is not a pleasant picture.

MIOS, the Metroplex Institute of Origin Science, is a local creationist organization that holds monthly meetings. These meetings usually consist of a lecture on creationism, although the subject is seldom creationism. They like to talk about evolution, instead. That and other aspects of mainstream science that contradict their own narrow view of origins.

Don Patton of MIOS usually heads up the meetings. He has a business card that reads, something like "Don Patton, Ph.D., Geologist." More on that later. Don does most of the presentations but there are occasionally guest speakers. Wayne Spencer gave one of the recent talks.

Wayne Spencer has an MS in physics from Wichita State University and has published at least one paper in *Physical Review B*, a legitimate scientific journal by the American Physical Society. He also produces a line of teaching literature, most likely for the home school and church school markets. A favorite theme of Spencer's is astronomy and cosmology.

Spencer's Web site [<http://www.eaze.net/~wspencer/VITAEERP.HTM>] provides some insight into his perceptions about science. His Web site fairly well reinforces my original impression from his MIOS appearances. Spencer is well grounded in the facts about the Solar System, and a person can learn much about the Solar System from his page on the subject. Also he doesn't take off on a wild tangent as, for example, Velikovski. There are some odd twists, however. I quote from Spencer:

A number of observations of different kinds can be explained in a simpler and more convincing way if 1) the Solar System is young, not 4.6 billion years in age, 2) there has been some major catastrophe that occurred some time in the past, and 3) some features are not due to natural processes but have been designed by a Creator-God. "Design" usually means God intelligently planned things to be a certain way, for a purpose. It also means that supernatural processes

dominated when God was actually creating in the beginning, then the orderly natural processes He made "took over" after that. Natural processes, like gravity or magnetism, preserve the order that God created in the beginning. This doesn't mean God is not in control or that He cannot do miracles today.

Spencer also explains one aspect of the Solar System he believes shows the work of a benevolent creator:

If the inclination angles of the planet orbits were not small we would not be able to see the planets well from earth. The angle one must look at in the sky to see a planet, such as Mars for instance, depends on the inclination of Mar's orbit and on the latitude on earth at which the person is standing. Since the earth is tilted it also depends on where the earth is in its orbit at the time. All this means that if the planet orbits were inclined at high angles, the planets would only be visible to us rarely and perhaps only for people at certain latitudes on earth. Individuals living near the equator might seldom or never see a planet if it's orbit were inclined a great deal. It would not serve God's purpose for it to be so hard to see the planets, because Genesis 1:14-18 says the lights we see in the sky are to mark seasons and days. The light of the stars and planets give order and beauty to the night and twilight times. Since the planet orbits are inclined small angles, most people, wherever they live are able to see the planets much of the year, each planet at its own times and dates.

I have to say that Wayne Spencer is the best creation science lecturer I have encountered so far.

Another case is David Bassett. I reported previously on Bassett's take on modern dinosaurs.[1] David heads up the science department at the Ovilla Christian School south of Dallas. His talk on the night I was there centered on recent or even living dinosaurs.

If it can be demonstrated that dinosaurs existed recently or still exist today, then that fairly much blows away the contention by mainstream science that the Earth is billions of years old and that dinosaurs vanished millions of years before our own species populated the planet. David's argument seemed to derive more from literature than from real science. Quoting from [The Skeptic](#):

David Bassett presented a number of cases he said argued for the existence of dinosaurs in recent times. Winged dinosaurs, he said, are evidenced by many instances in literature. He exhibited an illustration of the hilt of Beowulf's sword, which showed a winged serpent-like critter, an obvious reference to a pterodactyl or a pterosaur. Beowulf, who lived from 495 slew Grendel, who was likely a modern dinosaur-like beast. He also cited many references to "flying snakes," which were surely sightings of the same animals. Further, the February 8, 1856 Illustrated London News showed a live pterodactyl found in France, and 1886 and 1890 issues of the Tombstone Epitaph contained a photo of a pterosaur and told of some local riders who encountered and killed a pterosaur that had an 8-foot long head.

He has some strange concepts about science, as well:

Additionally, there is the remarkable evidence of living dinosaurs in the Congo region. ... The high atmospheric pressure in this region accounts for the viability of these ancient species. The pressure there is 1.3 to 1.5 times normal atmospheric pressure. This is because of the dense vegetation, which keeps the air quite humid. Of course, water vapor is denser than dry air, David Bassett told the audience.

Carl Baugh's Creation Evidence Museum is another matter. This showplace for young-Earth creationism is located near Glen Rose, Texas, just a few meters from the entrance to Texas' Dinosaur Valley State Park. Carl Baugh set up operation here back in the 1980s to capitalize on what creationists then claimed were human prints adjacent to dinosaur prints in the limestone bed of the nearby Paluxy River. The idea, once again, is that if it can be demonstrated that dinosaurs and people lived contemporaneously, then the preachings of the evolutionists must be all wet. Baugh takes the matter a little further than that. His museum exhibit details the story of genesis in a series of wall panels illuminated by spotlights in turn as his recorded voice tells the story. It goes something like this:

Day 1: Electrolysis by the spirit of God moving on the waters separates water into its components, oxygen and hydrogen.

Day 2: Oxygen and hydrogen crystallize into a spherical "canopy" around the Earth. The canopy glows a magenta color under sunlight [producing a light that is very beneficial to things living on the planet].

Day 3: Robert Gentry has previously demonstrated that granite was created in about 0.164 seconds. The evidence for this is the presence of pleochroic halos [which indicate the prior existence of short-lived radioactive isotopes in the stone at the time it was formed].

Day 4: God stretched out the heavens. The fabric of the universe was stretched out in a manner which, according to Einstein's equations and the equations of quantum mechanics, caused a few hours time to give the appearance of millions of years. Russell Humphreys, a Ph.D. physicist working at Sandia National Laboratory has published equations that demonstrate that if the dimensions of the universe were stretched in this manner, then millions of years in outer space would be equivalent to only thousands of years on Earth.

Day 5: There is still a pinkish glow on the Earth. The canopy 10 miles above the Earth's surface has compressed the air to produce this effect. Also, the Earth's electromagnetic energy is stronger and there is no UV radiation [because of the canopy] to cause free radical damage, allowing living organisms to express their optimal genetic information.

Day 6: The fabric of the universe continued to stretch out.

Hundreds of years later: From science we know that the thought processes of man in discord can affect nuclear decay. The discord and violence in man during this time would disrupt the nuclear reactions within the Earth, causing enormous heating and causing 70-mile-high fountains of water to burst through the granite crust and to penetrate and disrupt the canopy above the Earth. This would result in the rain that drowned all but Noah's family and the animals on his ark. Also during this time the Creator bowed the heavens, further stretching the fabric of the universe. [There is some mention of the Moon bringing the waters into resonance, but I could not follow the explanation.] Baugh also reminds the audience of the quantum interconnection between all parts of the universe.

About 200 years after the flood was the Peleg episode during which the Earth expanded and divided. There was a 10% expansion in the Earth's radius due to internal thermonuclear reactions. During the original creation and during the Peleg episode the continental land masses were thrust upon each other producing the ice ages, which lasted hundreds of years instead of thousands. This and the previous episode of thermonuclear expansion are confirmed by geophysicists. Since the canopy was gone, the Earth's electromagnetic field could not be contained, and it dissipated into space. Likewise a portion of the Earth's gravitational attraction was lost, and there was [and has been since] a smaller oxygen ratio resulting in compromised and shorter-lived life forms. Also, the spring 1995 issue of Scientific American contains a report that in 1500 years all of the Earth's electromagnetic field will be lost unless there is a return of the Creator.

Finally, there will be in the future a millennial sphere in which people will live in utopia. Music will play in the heads of the inhabitants.

Baugh claims to have a Ph.D., and bills himself as Dr. Carl Baugh whenever he appears on various network TV pseudoscience programs. More on this later.

No, actually, let's deal with evolutionists' degrees right now.

Although many real scientists are religious and some believe in the literal truth of Genesis, there are others. The problem is that in the last 200 years real science has obtained such a good reputation due in part to the benefits we have obtained from scientific discoveries and also due to the recognition that science is producing a factual account of how the universe works. Some of the creationists we studied tend to inflate their real academic achievements, and there are others who, lacking any formal training in science, still feel the need to bask in the glow of legitimate scientists. When you are spinning tall tales it helps if you have a Ph.D. after your name.

Patton and Baugh are our own local examples. The Skeptic has previously published research into Baugh's "Ph.D" and others.[2][3][4] Originally Baugh appeared to have given himself a Ph.D., since the "school" that awarded it was a religious school in which Baugh was involved in the management. Actually, the address given to the school mapped to a frame house on a street in Irving, Texas. Read the original articles for more on this. Now Baugh claims to have a Ph.D. from Pacific College Incorporated, an Australian diploma mill. This appears to be the same as the origin for Don Patton's Ph.D. The last time we checked, Patton did not appear to have any real college degrees.

Harold Slusher, Ph.D., is one of the authors of Schaum's Outline on Physics. I have the book, and it is a well-written study guide in classical physics. Slusher's Ph.D. is listed in the book by publisher McGraw-Hill. Slusher has a real MS in physics but his Ph.D. is not in physics; it came from Columbia Pacific University, another creationist diploma mill. The course catalog from the University of Texas at El Paso, where Mr. Slusher teaches, does not list his Ph.D.

Thomas G. Barnes is another creationist who flaunts a Ph.D. when arguing his young-Earth views. The record shows that Barnes earned an A.B. degree in physics from Hardin-Simmons College, Abilene, Texas, in 1933, and an MS degree from Brown University in 1936. In 1950, the re-named Hardin-Simmons University awarded Barnes the honorary D.Sc. He is emeritus professor of physics at UTEP, where he joined the faculty in 1936.

Dr. Kent Hovind spoke a few years back at a local church. He is a former science teacher who has some unusual perceptions of science. I previously reported on Hovind's talk and will only recap his explanation of carbon-14 dating. [5] Keep in mind that archeologists use carbon-14 dating extensively to determine the age of artifacts up to 100,000 years old. What Hovind had to say about the process was startling:

Radioactive carbon-14 is initially a small portion of the carbon in an organic sample [true]. Radiation counters are used to measure the amount of C-14 remaining and thus to deduce the age of the sample. Totally a ridiculous concept, according to Hovind, and unfortunately for him he is right. The problem is that the C-14 dating process does not use the process Hovind described. It really uses a method that counts individual C-14 and C-12 atoms, allowing the precise ratio to be determined.

How come Dr. Hovind does not know this?

Three years ago local creationists tried to introduce the book *Of Pandas and People* into the Plano, Texas, science curriculum. Although this book does not advocate a strict interpretation of Genesis, it does push some shoddy science in the pursuit of a religious agenda. At the time the issue came up the book was in its second edition, and it was still making some of the same invalid arguments as the first edition. For example, there is the cytochrome c argument. The book seems to want to show that mainstream science is out of line with its argument for the common ancestry of species. The authors cite the known differences in the protein cytochrome c between different species, as shown in the table below. These are the quantitative differences between cytochrome c in silkworms and other modern species:

Human	29
Pig	25
Turtle	26
Carp	25
Wheat	40

The usual line of this argument is that the differences between silkworms and pigs through carps are essentially the same, even though carps are "lower" on the evolutionary scale than pigs. The problem with the argument is that the differences in the table are much what would be expected from evolution. Since silkworms are invertebrates, their line of decent branched off from all the vertebrates at the same time. Note that the difference for wheat are large, as one might expect, since wheat is a plant. I can't account for the extra differences with human cytochrome c unless that's within the natural spread.

Of course there is no guarantee that creationists will try to teach this kind of stuff in public schools if they ever manage to convince the voters, and the Supreme Court, that they should be allowed to. In his decision on the *McLean vs Board of Education* trial in Arkansas Judge, William Overton noted that teachers who had been ordered to teach creationism in the science classes had been unable to find anything to teach.

The real issue seems to be that creationists don't want to teach creationism. They just don't want evolution to be taught.

## References

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2. Hastings, Ronnie, Rick Neeley, and John Thomas, "A Critical Look at Creationist Credentials" in *The Skeptic*, July-August 1989.
  3. Kuban, Glen J., "A Follow-Up on Carl Baugh's Science Degrees" in *The Skeptic*, September-October 1989.
  4. Glen Kuban's Web page on creationists' degrees is at <http://members.aol.com/Paluxy2/degrees.htm>.
  5. Blanton, John, "Traveling Creationism" in *The Skeptic*, December 1994.
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## What's New

By Robert L. Park

### 1. UFOS: CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE WORST KIND.

Caution! If you're the sort who lies awake at night worrying about whether you might be whisked away by an alien spaceship for an examination of your erogenous zones, read no further! Things "out there" have gotten so bad that Lawrence S. Rockefeller funded a group of scientific experts in alien abductions, psychokinesis, remote viewing, zero-point energy and other advanced concepts to examine the evidence and tell us what should be done. The panel boldly concluded that "At least some of these phenomena are not easily explainable.... there always exists the possibility that investigation of an unexplained phenomenon may lead to an advance in scientific knowledge." That is, if the government would provide research funds for serious-minded scientists—like those on the panel.

### 2. EMF: HEALTH PANEL EXHUMES REMAINS OF POWER-LINE CONTROVERSY.

Exactly one year ago the National Cancer Institute released the results of an exhaustive seven-year study that found no link between exposure to EMF and childhood leukemia (WN 4 Jul 97). An editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* declared, "It is time to stop wasting our research resources." Most government agencies agreed, and cut funding for research. Last week, a group of scientific experts, most of whom had staked their reputations on such a link, sorted through the detritus and announced they had detected signs of life. The panel, assembled by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, voted 19-9 to class EMF as "a possible carcinogen." While acknowledging the risk to be "quite small compared to many other public health risks," the panel chair declared that the government should provide research funds for serious-minded scientists—like those on the panel.

### 3. SCIENCE LITERACY: NOT SURE ABOUT THE HELIOCENTRIC MODEL?

Well, you're not alone. According to the 1998 Science and Engineering Indicators, released this week by NSF, 27% of adults surveyed believe the sun goes around the earth, and more than half believe atoms are smaller than electrons. The WN staff tried to contact Copernicus and Rutherford for comment, but James Van Praagh was not available — he may have been on the UFO panel. The good news is that, although we still have Ptolemaics, understanding of basic scientific concepts is higher among Americans than it is in other industrialized nations. Interest in science and belief in its promise is also higher among Americans: 79% of those surveyed agreed that scientific research is necessary and should be funded by the Government, even if it brings no immediate benefits.

*THE AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY (Note: Opinions are the author's and are not necessarily shared by the APS, but they should be.)*