



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 5 Number 8

[www.ntskeptics.org](http://www.ntskeptics.org)

November 1991

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## IRS Current Target of Scientology Media Blitz

### Church Files \$120 Million Lawsuit

By Mike Sullivan

The Church of Scientology International has mounted a huge new ad campaign against the Internal Revenue Service, carried out in full-page, full-color ads in USA Today. The new ads follow the Church's blitz earlier this year against Time magazine which cost Church supporters over \$3 million (The Skeptic, July 1991). That campaign by the Church was in retaliation for Richard Behar's courageous May 6 Time cover story exposing the cult's money-grabbing, life-wrecking operations.

In some of the newest ads, the Church urges readers to send in a \$1 "membership fee" or call a toll-free number to get a booklet on becoming an IRS "whistleblower." Other ads proposed the idea of abolishing the income tax in favor of a flat 16% national sales tax. These ads ran over the name of "Citizens for an Alternative Tax System (CATS)," but were paid for by the Church.

The Church ads focus on IRS abuses of its unique power granted by Congress to investigate and collect taxes. The Church is not breaking any new ground with its campaign. The 1990 book A Law Unto Itself by David Burnham (New York: Random House) told of the sometimes harsh tactics used by the IRS in the agency's wide-ranging activities.

The Church ads purport an altruistic motive. In an epilogue to some ads, the Church ads say that it has been "a potent and vital force in the field of social reform, dedicated to the preservation of human rights and civil liberties." The ads go on to claim that because of its role as a "vanguard of IRS reform" that it has been targeted with "countless acts of retaliation and vengeance by an agency completely out of control."

The ads say that the Church is conducting this "public education campaign" to show that the IRS is "completely out of control." The ads also assure us that no matter what happens, "the Church of Scientology will fight for your rights all the way."

Why the sudden zeal by the cult in telling us about the IRS? Maybe it's to help win public opinion for a \$120-million federal lawsuit brought by the Church in August against the IRS claiming that the IRS has waged a 33-year-long war against the cult.

In the suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, the Church alleges that the IRS illegally conspired to deprive the cult of their First Amendment rights to practice religion. The suit names as defendants 17 IRS officials whom the Church claims used deceptive practices to build the government's case against the Church, including four who were featured in one of the USA Today ads. That ad described other cases handled by the four men, but did not mention that they are named as defendants in the Church's lawsuit.

The IRS has maintained that Scientology is a sham religion set up to financially benefit certain Church officials and that it has often operated as a business and not a religion, a charge that has been echoed by many former Church insiders. The IRS has revoked the tax exemption status of some Church operations and claims that the cult is hiding behind constitutional protections.

If there is any group that would know first-hand about IRS investigations, it is the Church of Scientology International. Several Church officials were found guilty of felonies in the past in connection with tax evasion and other crimes. In the late 1970's alone, 11 Scientologists were sent to prison after being convicted of bugging and burglarizing IRS offices in an attempt to ruin IRS evidence against the cult in criminal investigations.

It is interesting to note that the Church is suing the IRS for allegedly using tactics against the Church that ex-Scientologists say the Church uses regularly against its own foes. The use of mail covers, infiltration, informants and sham front organizations are well-documented Church practices, detailed in numerous books and articles about the cult, including Behar's Time story and Jon Atack's excellent book, A Piece of Blue Sky (reviewed in The Skeptic, May-June 1991).

The lawsuit may backfire on the Church if it is found that the IRS acted within its broad authority as the nation's bill collector. If so, court proceedings may bring to light more of the inner workings of the science-fiction-based cult that has ruined so many lives. Prozac Scare Leaves FDA Panel Unimpressed

In other Scientology news, a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel in September rejected by a 6-to-2 vote an attempt to require suicide warnings on prescriptions for the anti-depressant drug Prozac. Scientology and its anti-psychiatry front group, the Citizen's Commission on Human Rights, spearheaded a huge publicity campaign against the drug and its maker, Eli Lilly & Co (The Skeptic, July 1991).

Claiming that Prozac causes depressed patients to take their own life, the Church wanted Prozac banned outright despite the positive results it has delivered for over 5 million patients worldwide. Other activists not backed by the Church had asked FDA to require suicide warnings on Prozac packaging.

The FDA panel heard testimony in September from several relatives of depressed individuals who killed themselves while being treated with Prozac, as well as substantial scientific and professional testimony showing no established link between use of the drug and increased suicides.

"It's an unfortunate fact that suicidal thoughts are often part and parcel of ... depressive illness whether an individual is taking medication or not," said John Smith of the National Mental Health Association, in support of Prozac.

Although the final decision on the matter is up to FDA regulators, the panel's recommendations generally hold great sway with the FDA's top officials.

#### **Reader's Digest Next In Line For Cult's Wrath?**

Finally, we might look for the Church to mount another expensive "public education campaign," perhaps this time telling us about all the terrible things the folks at Reader's Digest have done over the years. Why? The October issue of the Digest carried a fairly complete reprint of Behar's Time cover story on the cult. One can only wonder what outlet the Church would have for their "education" messages if USA Today ever ran a negative story about the cult.

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## Healthy Skepticism

### **Health Fraud Messes with Texas**

#### **HEALTH SCAMS & PSEUDOSCIENCE COST TEXANS \$1 BILLION ANNUALLY**

**By Tim Gorski, M.D.**

Dallas -- One of the state's top law-enforcement officials estimated that health fraud costs Texans as much as \$1 billion annually. Robert E. Reyna, Assistant Attorney General of the State of Texas, made the estimate in response to a question at the annual meeting of the Greater Dallas/Ft. Worth Area's Council Against Health Fraud, in Dallas on September 16.

Health fraud, Mr. Reyna said, costs Texas a great deal. A billion dollars annually didn't seem too big an estimate, he said, adding that "I wouldn't be surprised if it was a good deal more."

He also cited the very large numbers of people hurt by misleading advertising and quack claims concerning vitamins, herbal products, homeopathy, "natural" healing methods and other forms of health fraud. Those who promote unproven claims for profit, he noted, complain of persecution by the medical establishment, yet in actuality it is their own activities that amount to a "conspiracy of profit."

Reyna said that because those victimized by health fraud can seek treble monetary damages through civil litigation, law enforcement bodies such as Texas' Consumer Protection Division often do not intervene. Limited prosecutorial resources, the higher standard of evidence required for criminal prosecutions, and the length of time necessary to develop a case are other factors that make government action difficult.

On the other hand, Mr. Reyna cited the number of Texas Department of Health investigators pursuing health fraud as up from only two to as many as six or eight. Prosecutions are vigorously pursued, he said, when judged appropriate.

Among such efforts, Mr. Reyna cited continued action to stop the sale of Chinese herbal remedies for arthritis that contain small amounts of diazepam, a sedative and a controlled drug. "When people take enough of these," he said, "they feel the effects of the drug and can become dependent."

#### **Rolling Rip-Offs**

Another example cited by Mr. Reyna was of health insurance fraud involving "rolling labs" which had been active in Odessa and Midland. This scheme, he explained, used telephone "boiler rooms" to call people and tell them of a "free medical checkup" when it was determined that the victims had health insurance.

The victims would be examined by an untrained chiropractor or physician's assistant who would schedule thousands of dollars worth of testing. "The insurance companies wouldn't be able to tell from the claim form that fraud was going on," Reyna said.

Mr. Reyna admitted to having had some criticism in pursuing these cases because of the feeling of some people that insurance companies have the resources to find this sort of fraud on their own and so could look after themselves. But the people preyed upon in such schemes fit a pattern, he found.

"Most of them had been to every doctor in town," he said, which made him realize that these were people who tended to be fearful of their health. Many had been told that their lives were in danger and had experienced a great deal of anguish, prompting them to write their wills and so on. Snake-Oil via Satellite

Mr. Reyna also cited successful prosecution of "info-mercial" health frauds involving the advertising of various remedies for weight loss, baldness and impotence disguised as program-length TV talk shows. These fraudulent schemes, he said, were taking in tens of millions of dollars.

Mr. Reyna added that these deceptive practices were first attacked when they appeared on English-language television. Subsequently, their perpetrators tried to continue them running the ads on Spanish-language television, apparently thinking that the authorities wouldn't notice.

Fraudulent cancer treatment has been another problem area, Mr. Reyna said. Many of the principals involved in these scams even have valid credentials, he noted.

Charges were filed in Houston on September 12 concerning one of the most egregious examples of health fraud he has seen in Texas, Mr. Reyna said. This scam involved "bounty hunting" of patients to fill beds in psychiatric and drug rehabilitation hospitals. "Hundreds of people were subjected to incarceration just because they had health insurance," Reyna said.

Mr. Reyna gave a number of examples, such as an individual leaving an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting being picked up, plied with drinks until intoxicated, and then left at an institution for "treatment." In other cases, people were committed on the word of an ex-spouse or even a total stranger. And as with the "rolling lab" scheme, Reyna said, "it is very hard for an insurance company to look at such a claim and know it's fraudulent."

Besides legal action, Mr. Reyna concluded, the primary means of combatting health fraud is a public that is aware and informed.

"People need to be educated that medical care doesn't work this way," he said, referring to such come-ons as "free checkups" and other elements of quackery. This can start with something as simple as skepticism in the grocery store. "Look at labeling. The word 'light' is a buying trigger," Reyna said, and may mean much less than a consumer may think.

In the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, the Council Against Health Fraud solicits reports of questionable and fraudulent practices and functions as a resource for the public, the media and health professionals on such matters. If you are interested in supporting the activities of the Council or in becoming a member, please contact Dr. Tim Gorski at 214/988-3000.

*Editor's note: Dr. Gorski is Chairman of the Dallas/Ft. Worth Area Council Against Health Fraud and a technical advisor for The North Texas Skeptics. He maintains a private obstetrics/gynecology practice in Arlington.*

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## Fool's Gold

### LOTS OF GLITTER IN ADS FOR HIGH-PRICED ARTHRITIS RUB

**By Mike Sullivan**

You may have seen the newspaper ads: ARTHRITIS PAIN RELIEF in huge type, followed by an advertisement for "Aurum-The Gold Lotion." The ads claim the lotion, made by Texas-based Au Pharmaceuticals, can provide "almost miraculous" relief from arthritis, bursitis, tendinitis and other soft-tissue ailments.

According to Tim Gorski, M.D., chairman of the Dallas/Ft. Worth Area Council Against Health Fraud, the marketers of Aurum seem to be appealing to a perceived connection of the inactive 24-karat gold ingredient in Aurum to medically proven gold injections administered by a physician.

Au is the chemical symbol for gold, and Dr. Gorski says that people who suffer from these ailments may be familiar with the term and the gold injection treatments given in some severe cases.

The 1991 Physician's Desk Reference lists the active ingredients in Aurum to be exactly the same as in other widely-sold nonprescription topical analgesic lotions: menthol, camphor, and methyl salicylate.

The amount of gold contained in the Aurum formulation is not specified, but it is listed by the manufacturer as an inactive ingredient. Dr. Joe Cole of the Division of Rheumatology at UT-Dallas Health Science Center confirms that the gold in Aurum "does nothing."

#### **24-Karat Price-Booster**

The only apparent effect of the gold content in Aurum is to substantially increase the price of the product compared to other equally-effective remedies.

A 2-oz. package of Aurum sells locally for \$9.02. A 2-oz. package of Absorbine lotion at the same Arlington pharmacy sells for just \$2.14, yet Absorbine contains more camphor and the same amount of methyl salicylate as Aurum.

Another nationally-known product, Ben-Gay, has nearly double the methyl salicylate and more than five times as much menthol as Aurum, yet sells for only \$1.66/oz. in a 3-oz. size, compared to \$4.51/oz. for Aurum.

In an October 1 news release, the Council stated that they do "not dispute the safety and effectiveness of this particular product as compared to similar nonprescription drugs. It is, however, concerned that the current promotion of Aurum in area newspapers may be deceptive." The Council advises all consumers to use common sense when making any health-care decision.

*Editor's note: I contacted the company's headquarters in Grand Saline, Texas, about 60 miles west of Dallas, and on October 10, I spoke to their representative, Michael Vick. I provided him with the Council's news release and a draft of this story and invited a response before our deadline of October 16. As of press time, no one from Au Pharmaceuticals had responded.*

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## The Third Eye

### News and Commentary from the Weird World of the Media

**By Pat Reeder**

As I write this column, the Clarence Thomas hearings have just ended, and the confirmation vote has yet to be taken. It's not my purpose to argue the merits of the charges against Thomas, nor the politics of the process. But after spending three loooooong days glued to the radio and TV (believe me, I'm as pooped as the Senators), I can testify that the hearings provided a much-needed lesson for Americans in the need for, and practical application of, skeptical thinking.

To begin with, Anita Hill made an extraordinary claim against Clarence Thomas, but offered no extraordinary proof ... in fact, no proof at all. Obviously, if his behavior took the form of speech, and the offenses were repeated with regularity over several years, it would seem to be a simple matter to put a small, voice-activated tape recorder in her purse and get some hard proof. Alas, the Yale Law graduate never thought of this, so hard proof of her claims proved as elusive as a lug nut from a UFO.

Instead of proof, she offered moving, emotional, and explicitly detailed personal testimony. It could certainly be that she was telling the truth, or the truth as she believes it. But Whitley Streiber has also given an emotional, explicitly detailed account of his abduction by aliens, and the debate has raged for years over whether he was lying, deranged, or, as his followers maintain, being sexually harassed by interdimensional Martians. The important point is, neither Anita Hill nor Whitley Streiber produced any proof to verify their extraordinary claims.

There are several other ways in which this case resembled the stuff we skeptics routinely dig into. For example, Anita Hill's story, like a good UFO report, seemed to gain details with every telling. This is odd, since most people tend to

forget details with the passing of time. In addition, her corroborating witnesses all testified that she had told them years before that she was being sexually harassed. But again, she offered them no details and no actual proof. They were not witnesses to the act, only to the telling of her story. So their testimony did not prove her story was true ... only that she, like Whitley Streiber, had told it several times before.

And finally, it was wonderful to hear polygraph evidence being intelligently discussed on nationwide television and radio. Anita Hill passed a polygraph test, and Sen. Patrick Lehey, an opponent of Thomas, was quick to call this "powerful evidence" of her credibility.

However, Committee Chairman Joseph Biden had done extensive research on polygraphs while co-authoring a bill forbidding their use as evidence in court. Sen. Biden explained that the results of polygraphs could be influenced by the phrasing of questions, the interpretation of the examiner, and other factors. He also made clear that when people honestly believe a story that isn't true, they can easily pass a polygraph test.

Finally, he reminded the committee that this polygraph (like [claimed UFO abductee] Travis Walton's) had come from the claimant herself and her supporters, and that polygraph tests are like political polls ... they can be made to show anything you want them to show. Now that's putting it into language a Senator can understand.

All in all, the Clarence Thomas hearings may have been a low point in American politics, and they have certainly started twenty million arguments between men and women, but in the long run, they have provided an extremely valuable public service ... they have served as a stunning lesson in the importance of applying skeptical standards in every aspect of daily life. For that, all Americans, particularly Clarence Thomas, can be grateful.

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All this talk of vile and perverted sex naturally brings up the subject of televangelists. The Associated Press reports that on October 11, Jimmy Swaggart was stopped in a red-light district of Indio, California, east of L.A., for driving on the wrong side of the road, among other violations. Swaggart was driving a white Jaguar which belonged to a board member of his ministry (apparently, selfless devotion to God has its material compensations). And on the passenger seat of his car was one Rosemary Garcia, a professional hooker.

Ms. Garcia told reporters Swaggart had picked her up and inquired whether there were any motels around that showed pornographic movies. When asked whether Swaggart had suggested any "laying on of hands," as it were, she replied, "He asked me for sex. I mean, that's why he stopped me. That's what I do. I'm a prostitute."

Oh well, at least someone in that Jaguar had a sense of professional ethics. At this writing, Swaggart is hiding from reporters, and his lawyer has flatly refused to make a statement. But their input is hardly necessary, since Ms. Garcia summed up the situation so eloquently without their help. She said, "He's the same guy who cries on TV for all these people to feel sorry for him ... to give him all their money. For what? So he can come give it to us. That's pretty good."

Of course, all this is merely the word of one woman against one man. But in this case, somehow, the claim doesn't seem quite so extraordinary ....

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I am indebted to John Blanton for passing along a press release concerning Jesus' new 900-number service. A man named Patrick Rollins claims to have had conversations with Jesus and tape recorded them. He has turned these Heavenly transcripts into a book, Jesus: The Most Beautiful Man I Have Ever Seen, and if you want to hear the voice of the Savior for yourself, the tapes can be heard twenty-four hours a day by calling 1-900-773-5378 (\$1.95 a minute ... kids, ask your parents first).

Jesus is getting a little competition, phonewise, from his friend, the Pope. Last month, the Vatican unveiled a new "Dial-A-Pope" line which offers callers tapes of recent sermons by Pope John Paul II. They said they were doing this to curb a rash of unauthorized Pope lines, "some featuring Popes not known to the Vatican." Like whom? Pope-Ulation Control, perhaps? Anyway, they guarantee you'll hear the genuine, certified Pope by calling 1-900-230-POPE. But I can't vouch for whether the Jesus on the Jesus line is the real Jesus or just a minimum wage part-timer.

...

Finally, are you, like me, weary of television's endless parade of credulous supernatural "docu-dramas," "tabloid journalism" (now there's a contradiction in terms), and "reality-based programs" (such as NBC's Unsolved Mysteries, a program with the most superfluous disclaimer on television ... "the following is not a news program")? Then I hope you were watching one recent Thursday, when two of the worst offenders among the networks finally brought a ray of hope to all us skeptics with a sense of humor.

The evening began with an episode of The Simpsons on the Fox network. The plot involved the disappearance of Bart's school principal. Police brought in a psychic to help them find the body. The psychic held the man's picture, closed her eyes ... then blurted out such extremely helpful psychic visions as "It's splitsville for Burt and Loni!"

Later that evening, NBC presented an episode of Cheers in which Carla the waitress became convinced, after years of consulting a psychic, that she was psychic herself. The psychic promised to reveal to her the secrets of the unknown. When they were alone, she revealed that she was a phony, and the whole business was a scam.

Carla turned to psychiatrist Frasier Crane, who explained that it was natural to be depressed and to feel lost when your belief system has been proven to be completely wrong, but she should learn from the experience and go on with life. As the show ended, Carla decided that she had learned something ... that she could claim to be a psychic, too, and bilk the suckers herself for fifty bucks apiece.

What the heck? It beats real work, like waitressing or prostitution ... even if it doesn't pay as well as televangelism.

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## President's Column

### Commentary

by NTS President John Blanton

The question has been put to me at least twice: "Shouldn't everybody be allowed to say what he wants?" I had, as usual, been running down some third-party's pet theory. The first time I was caught off guard by the question, because I never considered it an issue. The second time around I had a response ready.

"They have a right to say what they want, but you have a right to disbelieve."

I have considered this position further in recent times. In some cases, not only do I think the other party has a right to say what he is saying, I would like him to say it again, loudly, in public.

There are some notions that are cultured in warm places of the brain and reinforced in quiet conversations with others of like mind. Ideas that sound cute and correct when spoken within selected social groups may be revealed as misshapen and ill-constructed when cast into the cruel light of public scrutiny.

It is for this purpose we attempt, when possible, to draw out the creationists, the UFOlogists, the phony psychics and the faith healers when we can. Get them to state their case clearly and boldly in unambiguous terms, if you can, and their position will be more damaged than by all the barbs you can throw their way.

Fat chance. They won't fall for it. True believers (the most unfortunate) will try to promote their cause with the unbiased and with the skeptical, but the wise ones know to keep to the company of the uncritical.

Want a case in point? Here is one from history (I am told it is true). A young man once tried to publish Hitler's Mein Kampf in English in the United States. Hitler sued him and won. The master bigot knew (as did the young man) that his rantings would not wash with anyone but the malcontents of post-Great War Germany, and he bought himself a few more years of credibility by quashing the publication. (Hitler died in his fortified bunker, and that young man today is Senator Alan Cranston from California with his own troubles these days).

The Shroud Society toured their story at a shopping mall in Plano last year. "We'll come to your meeting and you can come to ours," I offered. No deal. Furthermore, no addresses, no meeting times or dates. Whatever it was we had, they did not want it brought to their meetings. While printing up some NTS literature at Bizmart I struck up a conversation with some MUFONs printing their literature. "I'm with the North Texas Skeptics." Conversation ended. No more names, no more information.

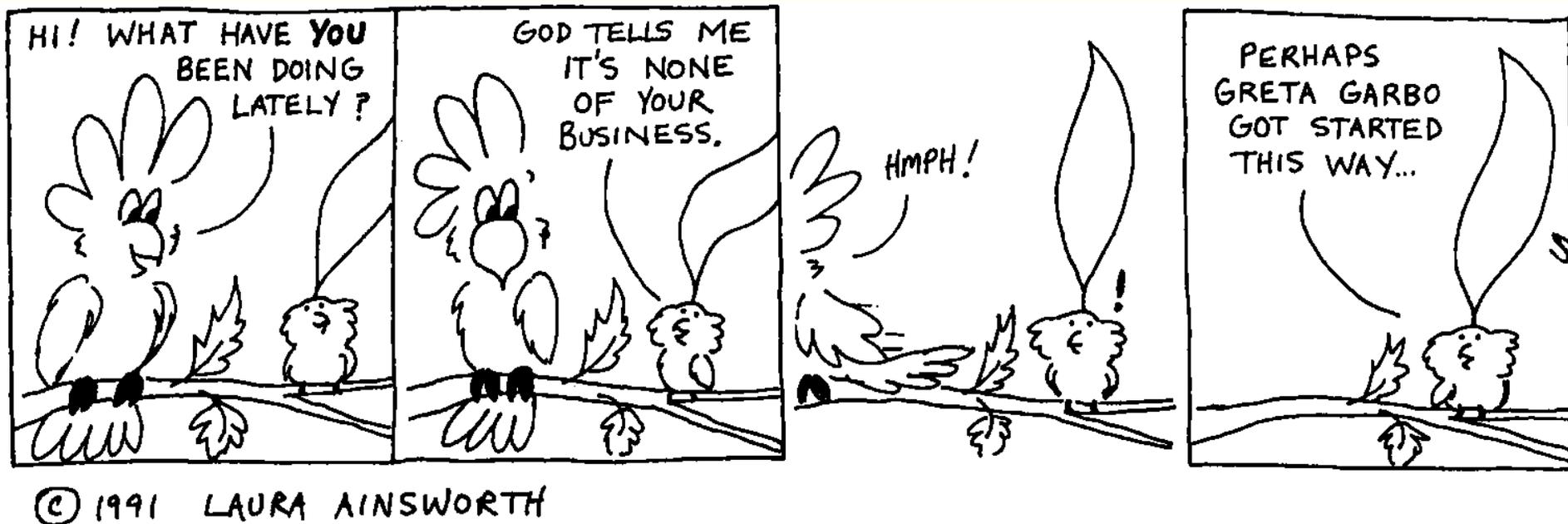
There is a group that invites us to meet with them and to debate them. This is MIOS, the Metroplex Institute of Origin Science (true believers, what else). They meet the first Tuesday of the month. I don't go, because Tuesday is school night for me, but you can. I'll give you their address. They aren't going to present their story on our turf, however. We tried that last year, and they finally declined to attend our meeting and discuss the issues.

The Seagoville Church of Christ advertised Dr. Douglas Dean in billboards on the highway and in quarter-page adds in the Dallas Morning News. Both sides (we and Dean's promoters) tried to get the issues discussed on the local broadcast stations, but nothing panned out. They promise to have Dr. Dean back again next year, this time out of church. Others tell me we should ignore the creationists and let them preach in private, the less notoriety the better. Will I follow this advice? -- Come on.

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## Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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