

Red River Rationalist

No. 98 - April, 2007

redriverfreethinkers.org

A Dialog Between World Systems

(A visit from the Office for the Preservation of Doctrine)

"What have you done?"

"I really wasn't going to tell anybody about this, your grace."

"I need to hear you, Doctor, in your own words, tell me what you have done."

"No, really, I wasn't even going to publish. My most earnest desire, in fact, was to pass away quietly before my results became generally known."

"Speculation abounds, bloggers planet-wide and in liturgical netspace, accuse you of blasphemy. I need to know, we need to know, to blot out the rumors."

"If I tell you, I will have betrayed the trust of other high officials."

"The rumors are true then?"

"Which rumors? That I have cloned a mastodon? That I can create ape-men? That I have found indicator genes for criminality, for piety? That I can replicate the genetic code for faith? I've spent a little time in the blogosphere myself, one has to. Beliefs are as important as facts, since facts kill you only when you ignore them."

"I will back up a step. Who authorized such a monstrous undertaking?"

"It was agreed to by a consortium of world leaders and ecclesiastics. I didn't get involved willingly. In fact, I resisted. But the last request of a dying pope, you know— a direct appeal from God as it were. I couldn't refuse."

"I realize a pope need not give reasons. Still, did he elucidate, give his thoughts as to why you, or anyone should attempt such 'black arts.'"

"And I realize, your eminence, my friend, that you are now stationed in a distant parish where the 'black arts' as you call them, are banned. I admire your fortitude, at your age (and mine) in undertaking such an arduous journey, on foot, by ox cart and on horseback to a far congregation and my humble abode. It's amusing and ironic to consider travel in the third millennium— air transport has fallen into disrepute as a transgression upon the heavenly realm; automobiles are proscribed, belch they iniquity over the face of Gaia. In direct answer to your question, the Pope did have ruminations. He considered this enterprise to be the final proving ground for science, a last chance to join with the community of Greater Theology in a spirit of shared inquiry and to end for all times the sectarian-secular strife that has plagued our sorry century."

"And governments? Why would the Synod, the College, the Knesset, or even the Caliphate back such a project?"

"Now you are spouting heresy."

"Am I? Armies, armadas, our vaunted technology itself could, overnight, become useless, a side show, as befuddled as a condom carrying fedaykin. Nearly 100 years ago a writer (Oh yes! I've read forbidden texts) stated that technology would appear as magic to the uninitiated. The reverse is also true."

"How? Rumors always lack specifics."

"The implications are beyond the most fantastic dreams in the history of science: healing the disabled, eradication of disease, of famine, with precisely the outcomes you would want."

"What a boon for humanity, perhaps I was sent in haste."

"There is more: global weather control, or, on an even larger scale, a world could be created, or remade, perfect as anyone would wish. Now you understand, your grace, why all earthly governments unhesitatingly put their full faith and financing behind this project."

"I had not the slightest idea your research had progressed so far. It is enough. Tell me, exactly, in your own words, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?"

"I've sequenced the Holy Genome."

"But how, what was, I must ask, what was your source material? Surely there is no spatter of dried DNA to stain the Shroud of Torino."

"No."

"Did you vandalize a tomb, disturb the sacred stones on the floor of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher?"

"Of course not!"

"Is there then some lost scion and have you, after eighty-two generations, reconstructed the One True Genome?"

"Who's spouting heresy now?"

"But where, what was your source, I must know!"

"Transubstantiation."

"This approach gave you results?"

"Yes, although the final gene sequencing took longer than originally planned, what with daily electrical fluctuations and outages being nearly as dependable as the normal brown-outs for the Sabbath, and Observances."

"So, it is complete, the Holy Genome. Why have we not witnessed the wonders you spoke of?"

"There is a problem your Grace. I've looked at the data, for months checking and rechecking. My experimental results directly contravene Theological teachings, which, I had been assured at the outset, would be patently impossible."

"You blaspheme!"

"No your eminence! I haven't spoken to any outside of my small research group. If I had, none would listen and all are impatient."

"Tell me, what is this problem?"

"The Holy Genome, at the 99.99% confidence level is indistinguishable from wheat."

"I have arrived just in time."

- **Gerald Fauske**

Pledge of Allegiance

(1924 - 1954)

*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation,
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all*

Remembering Molly Ivins

The Progressive of March, 2007 had a commentary consisting of quips from Molly Ivins' columns. Molly, who wrote for *The Progressive* for twenty years, recently died of breast cancer. Following are some of those excerpts:

"Maybe we should add a rule that we can't invade any country the President can't pronounce." (June, 2001)

"My worry is that Bush is painting himself into a corner with his rhetoric. This is not a war; it's a

gigantic police operation in the face of a crime beyond all understanding. . . . Back home in Texas, the sign outside our neighborhood strip joint says, 'Hot Babes, Cold Beer. Nuke'Em, GW.'" (November, 2001)

"It's hard to convince people you are bombing that you're doing it for their own good." (December, 2001)

"You have to admit, the corporations are getting prompt service from Republicans in return for their donations." (January, 2003)

"So constant is the reiteration of the words 'coalition,' 'coalition forces,' and 'coalition position' that you might assume one actually exists. . . . Eritrea and Ethiopia do not a coalition make." (May, 2003)

"I have a suggestion for a withdrawal deadline: let's leave before we've killed more Iraqis than Saddam Hussein did." (October, 2003)

"He's not bright enough to be President. For a long time, anyone who questioned Bush's ability to think was pointed to the opinion polls and told that discussing whether or not the President is borderline stupid was bad manners and counterproductive. Actually, that is the main problem with Bush. He neither reads, nor writes, nor speaks well. It turns out that a C average is not good enough for the Presidency." (March, 2004)

"I can think of nothing more likely to convince the people not to vote Republican again for a long time than four more years of George W. Bush. ' (December, 2004)

"Uh-oh. Excuse me. I'm sorry but we are having an honest-to-goodness constitutional crisis as the Testy Kid violates his oath to uphold the laws and Constitution of our country. The Testy Kid wants to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it because he is the President and he considers that sufficient justification. . . . Either the President of the United States is going to have to understand and admit he has done something very wrong, or he will have to be impeached. (February, 2006)

Letters to the Editor

Hi, Chuck,

I see Mikko Cowdery (*Letter to the Editor*, March, 2007) wants Professor Diane Eck and me to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic Christians. I can't speak for Professor Eck, who is a scholar in the field and has resources I lack, but I'm not up to the job. I generally take people at their word. For example, I just received an unsolicited mailing from a St. Matthew's church with a "Bible handkerchief," a "Sealed Prophecy" and a check list of things of things -- including a new car and money blessing -- I could write on the handkerchief and return to St. Matt's so they could pray for me to be blessed. I was also given the chance to sow "my seed gift to God's work of \$_____."

Common sense, without the benefit of revelation or other spiritual gifts, suggests these people are lunatics and/or swindlers, but I can't say whether madness and corruption are incompatible with Christianity. The folks at St. Matt's said they were Christians and quoted the Bible a lot; that's all I know.

It's tempting to say that Christians ought to sort it out among themselves as to who has the authentic mojo, but generally when they start doing that, the weaponry comes out, and the generals replace theologians.

I would say though that if you defined as Christian only those who took the advice of their nominal founder seriously enough to have sold all that they had and given it to the poor as well as making it a practice to return good for evil and to avoid judging others, you could take Eck's estimate that 85% of

Americans are Christians and move the decimal three places to the left.

Cheers,

- John Sherman

Dear Editor:

I'd like to introduce another way of looking at it (as the mouse said as he ran across the mirror).

If some of your readers are subscribers to THE NATION magazine, they may have noticed, from time to time among the "Classifieds," the following ad:

PROOF JESUS FICTIONAL "Scholarly booklet conclusively proves Flavius Josephus (Romans) created fictional Jesus, authored Gospels. Amazing but absolutely incontrovertible!" \$10. (until recently just \$5) Abelard, Box 5652-A; Kent, WA 98064. "For details SASE."

Friends, Long ago, I sent for the \$5 booklet. VE-E-E-E-R-RY INTERESTING; but also weird. Actually for a lot more on this: Google up---ROMAN PISO FORUM.

Don't thank ME. Just doing my job.

- TOAOTH (Marcel Stratton)

"Condoms don't belong in school, and neither does Al Gore," said Frosty Hardison, a parent of a student at the Federal Way School in Washington State, who complained about An Inconvenient Truth being shown at the school.

Intelligent Design Gone Haywire

*I'm going to tell you a story
That may leave you weak in the knees;
Of a man, who was normal, before he
Came down with a loathsome disease.*

*"Reverse peristalsis" its name is --
A malady foul and dread --
All his food had to start at his anus,
Then travel on up toward his head.*

*Well, the problems this caused him were many
(There were some I just hate to repeat);
What a horrible sight it was when he
Had to pull down his trousers to eat!*

It so hurt to shove spuds up his tunnel,

*He soon bought a chopper to blend;
Though he hated to eat with a funnel,
His teeth were all at the wrong end.*

*He was socially viewed with disfavor,
And he tended to stay home and pout;
Then his wife left, but he soon forgave her --
For he knew how she loved to eat out.*

*After years on his own, though, our hero
Found a friend who would help him to eat;
It was tough overcoming his fear, though,
Of the fork, when partaking of meat.*

*Though he kept up a brave front, he did say,
Some things became worse than he'd thought;
He discovered quite soon, there was no way
He could read while he went to the pot.*

*And, his love-life was totally wasted,
For whatever he's chosen to eat --
And however he'd brushed and toothpasted --
His breath never was "kissin' sweet."*

*And the simplest functions caused hitches --
It was hard to maintain any "class,"
When his belches emerged from his britches,
While he covered his mouth to pass gas.*

*I could go on and on with this story
About the poor guy and his fate;
But, let's get to the end -- this is gory --
Not a tale that I like to relate:*

*He'd gone to the clinic to be seen
For some minor digestive distress,
And, they gave him, as part of the routine,
An enema -- and choked him to death!*

- by **Chuck Crane**

“GOOD NEWS”

Fundamentalists range from those who really know nothing of the bible to those who can quote from it at length. I think it can be useful to disturb the former by quoting the latter to them. From the throw-away bench in the Moorhead library I picked up a copy of the March-April GOOD NEWS.

"Church President" Clyde Kilough states (p. 2) that "to diminish or dismiss Satan's role in the universe ... shows a disturbing lack of respect for what Scripture says ..."

One Mario Seigli tells us (p. 6) "The Scriptures ... reveal these fallen angels will attempt one more time to storm heaven ...," citing Revelation 12:7-9. There's much more of this sort, but perhaps more interesting:

Reports on "conditions around the world" (p. 13) include: A recent poll printed in *Le Monde Des Religions* revealed that "the number of self-declared French Catholics had dropped from 80% in the early 1990s and 67 percent in 2000 to 51 percent today" In contrast, the number of declared atheists rose from 23 percent in 1994 to 31 percent today. Henry Samuel, in Paris reporting for *The Daily Telegraph*, stated that "of the 51 per cent who still call themselves Catholics, *only half said they believed in God.*

Many said they were Catholics because it was a family tradition" (Jan.10, 2007 ...) "In its institutions, but also in its mentalities, France is no longer a Catholic country." said Frederic Lenoir ..."

- **Bill Treumann**

On Fox News *Hannity & Colmes*, rightwing radio host Neal Boortz said teachers' unions are "much more dangerous than Al Qaeda. . . . Look. Al Qaeda, they could bring in a nuke into this country and kill 100,000 people with a well-placed nuke somewhere. OK. We would recover from that. It would be a terrible tragedy, but the teachers' unions in this country can destroy a generation."

Our Father

Thy kingdom come to every nation
Thy will be done in everything we do
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from those who think they're you

Lord send us forth to be of service
To build the schools to dig the wells
And deliver us from the creepy preachers
With their narrow minds and very wide lapels

Lord, deliver us from politicians
Who drop Your name in very speech
As if they're Your best friend from high school
As if they practice what they preach.
From folksinger Susan Werner's CD, *The Gospel Truth*

- submitted by **Jon Lindgren**

"That we should cease to exist, that we should live and so profoundly will our existence, only to face annihilation a few years hence, a thought from which men recoil, not pausing to ask why such simple non- existence should be filled with such dread for them, but dreading it nontheless. It is from this calamity that religion promises salvation, and upon this promise its strength and appeal entirely rest."

- **Richard Taylor**, American professor of philosophy

Memberships Due for 2007

If you haven't recently renewed your membership or n/l subscription please check below.

Your contributions are the only source of income for this organization. Without your continued support, we will no longer be able to continue producing and distributing this newsletter.

Individual Membership \$30/year

Family Membership \$45/year

Student Membership \$15/year

Newsletter only \$10/year

Send dues, along with name, address, phone number, and e-mail address to: Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405, Fargo, ND 58107-0405

___Your membership for 2007 has been paid.

___You are not yet a member for 2007

The Red River Freethinkers is organized by freethinkers to be a nonprofit educational organization. We are a group of nonreligious people skeptical of religious dogma. We advocate Intellectual Freedom and the use of Reason. Articles and letters in this newsletter present ideas and opinions of individual writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the Red River Freethinkers organization.

Red River Freethinkers Board Members

Interim President

701-232-7868

Jon Lindgren

jon.lindgren@ndsu.edu

Treasurer

701-232-5676

Carol Sawicki

csawicki@corpcomm.net

Secretary

701-293-7188

Davis Cope

davis_cope@msn.com

General Contacts

Interim Program Coordinator

701-232-5528

Bill Treumann

btreumann@yahoo.com

Web Master

Neils Christoffersen

605-280-8930

webmaster@redriverfreethinkers.org

Interim Publicity Director
701-293-7188

Mary Cochran
olliesmaga@msn.com

Newsletter
320-763-5666

Chuck Crane
cranes@rea-alp.com

Items for newsletter may be sent to P.O. Box 995, Alexandria, MN 56308

Red River Freethinkers Calendar

Regularly scheduled meetings are held at 2:30 p.m. on the third Sunday of each month at the Fargo Unitarian Universalist Church at 121 9th Street South in Fargo.

This month's meeting will be on April 15, 2007, at the usual time and place. A special treat will be an appearance by noted raconteur and musician from Alexandria, Mikko Cowdery, who has generously agreed to entertain us. Don't miss this one!

Our speaker for the May meeting will be Mark Chekola, retired professor of philosophy at Moorhead State. We'll have more details on this in the next issue of the Red River Rationalist.

BECOME A MEMBER!

Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter. Send dues, name, address, phone number and e-mail address to Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405, Fargo, ND 58107-0405.

Family membership	\$45/year
Individual membership	\$30/year
Student membership	\$15/year
Newsletter only	\$10/year

NOTE: If you received a complimentary copy of The Red River Rationalist and would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact any of the officers.