

CONVERSION (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

birds over thousands of miles, or the return of salmon from remote regions of the ocean to the specific fresh-water rivers where they had been spawned, or the periodic travel from Canada of billions of monarch butterflies to a certain small region

in central Mexico even though none of their parents had made that trip, but that these just demonstrated what astonishing developments could occur with more than three billion years of evolution. She also quoted Alfred Lord Tennyson: "What is it all but a trouble of ants in the

gleam of a million million of suns?" So poor Jack went off to church alone and Jill continued to be very much the same person she had always been as an atheist. ■ **Bill Treumann**

Life is but a momentary glimpse of the wonder of the astonishing universe, and it is sad to see so many dreaming it away on spiritual fantasy.

-- Carl Sagan

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<http://www.redriverfreethinkers.org>

Articles in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the Red River Freethinkers organization.

The mission of the Red River Freethinkers is to advocate for a skeptical view of the role of religion in society and to promote critical examination of religious authority and dogma.

Items for this newsletter may be sent to 4330 47th Street S Unit K, Fargo, ND 58104.

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RED RIVER FREETHINKERS

THE RED RIVER RATIONALIST

ISSUE 123 MAY/JUNE 2009

"FAIRY TALES" HARSH BUT NOT INACCURATE

A recent letter ("Sad to see the Forum give space to fairy tales, myths, bigotry", 21 May) criticized the Forum for printing letters of religious bigots "trying to explain the workings of the world by citing the fairy tales found in the Bible". It would be more accurate to say the Forum does a good job of printing bigotry of all kinds, religious and otherwise, and the Opinion Page rightly includes the contribution of the bigots of our community. The term "fairy tales" is harsh but not inaccurate, at least for Fundamentalist contributions. Here's why.

The literal truth of the Bible is a defining aspect of Fundamentalist, or "Bible Christian", belief.

The Bible, taken literally, says that all humankind, except for the single family of

Noah, was destroyed by a Flood in 2350 BC, according to Biblical genealogies (Genesis 6-11). Noah's descendants (all speaking the same language) attempted building a tower "unto heaven". God was offended and punished them by confusing their language and scattering them, thus explaining the world's different languages and peoples.

The Encyclopedia Britannica ("Egypt") says the First Dynasty of Ancient Egypt began about 2925 BC with the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. It was an advanced society that kept astronomical and bureaucratic records and used hieroglyphic writing for inscriptions. Ancient Egypt had a continuous existence through some thirty dynasties, nominally ending in 332 BC after conquest by Alexander the Great. The

encyclopedia also explains how we know this. The discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 led, by 1822, to the decipherment of hieroglyphic writing and the ability to read the inscriptions from archeological discoveries. These historical records were fragmentary, but references to astronomical events fill in a timeline. The First Dynasty date of 2925 BC is a convergence of different analyses, which agree to within a century. An independent check of the timeline was provided by radiocarbon dating, introduced in 1948.

Consequently, the Bible's story of the Flood and subsequent creation of languages, taken literally, is wrong. It is a "tale".

Fairy Tales
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LETTER TO THE RED RIVER FREETHINKERS MAY 21, 2009

Dear Friends:

Just a note to thank you so much for your help during our last two food drives. The hard work done by Freethinkers two weeks in a row helped to

make this massive effort possible. This drive was of especial importance because of the recent flood and less-than-ideal economic conditions. Over two tons of food was

collected which will serve the needy in the months ahead. Thank you again for your help. Linda Clark, Coordinator, Emergency Food Pantry ■

POINTS OF INTEREST

- The June RRF meeting will be a Summer Solstice Potluck Party held at the Lindgren's hanger at the West Fargo Airport from 1-3pm on Sunday June 21, 2009. For directions call Lilie at 701 306 0630.
- **Why?** is a new philosophy radio show held on the 2nd Sunday of each month at 5pm, on Prairie Public Radio, KDSU 91.9 FM. June 14 will feature ND Senator Byron Dorgan in a talk entitled "Representing and Governing".

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SPLC REPORT

The letters stand for the Southern Poverty Law Center, the organization founded in the sixties by Morris Dees and Millard Fuller. It was formed to combat hate and bigotry and "seek justice for the most vulnerable members of our society."

Understanding that the justice system is not always fair, Dees combines litigation with education and other forms of advocacy to come up with some impressive wins against hate groups. Among others, the SPLC won a 12 million dollar plus judgment against the White Aryan Resistance, a 21.5 million dollar judgment against the Christian Knights of the KKK for burning down the Macedonia Baptist Church in S. Carolina, and many more.

The current issue of the SPLC Report investigates the huge increase in hate groups due to immigration tensions, a faltering economy, and the election of our first black president. There is also a report on the SPLC's campaign to stop migrant worker labor abuse and racist profiling.

Morris Dees and the SPLC have spent decades fighting these hate groups and the lies they propagate. Do your part and report any of this behavior to www.splcenter.org. You can also donate to the organization at the same website.

Here are some quotes from the Hate Group Members. These quotes from supposed up-standing members of society qualify as Hate Group quotes:

"So you may as well start an Obama savings account right now so that welfare mom can have her new plasma TV as she pops kids out like a Pez dispenser."

-- Substitute host Rick Roberts, explaining on the Dec. 8 broadcast of Talk Radio Network's "The Savage Nation" why people should forego giving to charities at Christmas

SOBRIETY WITHOUT SUPERSTITION

There is a new support group in Fargo for those struggling with addiction called SOS, or Secular Organizations for Sobriety. SOS is a national, non-profit network of autonomous, non-professional local groups dedicated solely to helping individuals achieve and maintain sobriety. Started in 1985, SOS supports healthy skepti-

cism and encourages the use of the scientific method to understand addiction.

For those who are uncomfortable with the spiritual content of widely-available, 12-step programs, an alternative is Secular Organizations for Sobriety. SOS offers a self-empowerment, secular approach to

recovery, based on individual responsibility for one's own "sobriety priority".

The Fargo SOS group meets at 6pm on Wednesdays at 114 Broadway suite 517 in Fargo, ND. For info, contact Jon A at 701 412-1346.

Anonymity is strictly guarded. ■

"What troubles me so deeply... is that there is a real, unbroken line between the jihadist savagery in Mumbai and the hedonistic, irresponsible, blindly selfish goals and tactics of our homegrown sexual jihadists."

-- Singer, actor and writer Pat Boone, in a Dec. 6 commentary on the right-wing WorldNetDaily website, comparing mass murderers to gay rights activists who are seeking to reverse California's Proposition 8, passed in November outlawing same-sex marriage

"There's gonna be a wholesale firing of competent white men in the United States government."

-- Michael Savage, on the Nov. 18 edition of Talk Radio Network's "The Savage Nation," predicting what President Obama's election will bring.

"VivaViagra. Well - after all, who's gonna father the next generation of illegals to come swarming across the border in their effort to reconquer the Southwest?"

-- Jim Quinn, on the Nov. 18 edition of his syndicated radio show "The War Room With Quinn & Rose," reacting to Mexico City's plan to distribute erectile-dysfunction drugs to elderly men.

"I'm not comparing him to Adolf Hitler. What I'm saying is there is the potential."

-- U.S. Rep. Paul Broun (R-Ga.), quoted by The Associated Press on Nov. 10 saying that he fears Obama will establish a Gestapo-like force to impose a Marxist or fascist dictatorship. ■

Chuck Solly

Name this naturalist —>



FAIRY TALES (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

We could continue with other Biblical accounts, assuming them to be literally true, then comparing them with the encyclopedia. Some accounts would appear correct, but we would find further examples (in the areas of anthropology, archeology, astronomy, biology, chemistry, linguistics, paleontology, and physics) where the literal interpretation is wrong.

The many Fundamentalist congregations in Fargo/Moorhead preach the literal truth of the Bible and are aided by creation science ministries interpreting science, "Christian nation" ministries interpreting history, "End Times" ministries interpreting international relations, spiritual warfare ministries identifying demonic influences, marriage and parenting ministries, and, of course, financial planning ministries. These efforts prop up a belief system so thin that an encyclopedia is a minefield of threats.

Belief in the literal truth of the Bible runs through all branches of Christianity. Fundamentalist Christianity is just a notable example. The lesson for all literalists is this: If literal interpretation of the Bible fails in some instances where it can be checked, why should a literal interpretation be used where it cannot be checked, as in ethics or values?

Opinion letters often write about standing up for the Bible. Count me as standing up for encyclopedias. ■

**Davis Cope
Fargo, ND**

CONVERSION OF AN ATHEIST

Jack, a lawyer and a Christian, and Jill, a biologist and an atheist, were good friends. Although Jill was very skeptical at first, Jack convinced Jill that the great complexity of the universe and the fact that so much of it functions in predictable ways proves that it is all the product of a universal intelligence, a supreme being, beginning some 15 billion years ago with the so-called Big Bang. Jack also suggested that rather than use cumbersome language it is easier just to call this super-intelligence "God."

At first Jill had objected that this hypothesis just pushed the explanation back a notch. Such a universal intelli-

gence must be even more complex than its creation and requires an even more impressive intelligent being to account for its own origin. Jack had replied that everything ultimately has to have a first cause; one cannot just go back ad infinitum.

When Jill finally conceded his every point, Jack suggested that Jill to go to church with him. When Jill expressed astonishment and asked why, Jack gave the usual answers. Jill replied that, although this supreme intelligence is certainly impressive, she could not imagine any reason to worship it or to imagine that it, having one way or another, created millions of species, most with

PHILOSOPHY FOR ALL FARGO-MOORHEAD

Philosophy for All Fargo-Moorhead is a free monthly meeting held at 7pm at the Plains Art Museum on the third Thursday of every month, and is open to anyone interested in philosophy. It aims to combine serious philosophical activity with an informal exchange of ideas and views.

On Thursday June 18, Darin Johnson will be delivering his talk entitled "Mindblowing Stories: The Power of Myth and Parable".

"Stories and creating meaning have always been essential to human life. We moderns rely heavily on sense, logic and reason, but is there more to human beings than the surfaces of objective 'flatland'? Explore the mysterious interiors of human life with profoundly evocative, humorous and transformational stories from the past and present. What happens to us when we encounter stories that seem simple at first glance but then resonate deeply or challenge common assumptions? Do stories even hold hope for transforming individuals, culture and social structures to deeper awareness, vital community, and more sustainable life patterns? Let's look at how ancient, modern and postmodern myths shape us, consciously or unconsciously, and how parables and revolutionary stories can shift these patterns and expand consciousness."

The talk will be followed by discussion.

Darin Johnson is the NDSU University Lutheran Center pastor ■

billions of specimens, would be particularly interested in any individuals or be concerned with their behavior. She added that they must be acting in ways that had been built into their design. She expressed doubt that this being (she was reluctant to adopt his shorthand term) would care if any of its creations worshiped it or not, and that it would be illogical to do so. As for Jack's contention that the awe-inspiring nature of the universe is a basis for worshiping, Jill replied that there are many awe-inspiring aspects of biological phenomena, such as the unerring migration of

Conversion
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