

REFORMED

Perspective

A MAGAZINE
FOR THE
CHRISTIAN
FAMILY

REFORMED
ENQUIRER
BECAUSE REFORMED MINDS WANT TO KNOW

EXCLUSIVE...
**IS YOUR
NEIGHBOR
A JEDI?**



**Nostradamus
vs
the Bible**



**HOUDINI'S
SAD QUEST**

BONUS A CHRISTIAN
TAKE ON
REINCARNATION...?

What's inside?

- My Wife Has Died
- Celebrating Male and Female
- Divorce and Bombs

A black and white photograph showing a long, straight, narrow road or path that leads towards a tall, thin monument or obelisk in the distance, set in a rural landscape.

Editorial

by A.W.

My Wife Has Died

I write this a few months after the death of my wife, following a comparatively short illness, which we both knew was terminal. Sudden deaths and ten-year “battles with cancer” have their own contrasting extremes of experience and need. Ours was different; but then, everyone’s is different. I write here not for widows and widowers, but for their friends; sooner or later that means you.



I write here not for widows and widowers, but for their friends.



I dare not frame my suggestions as commandments: just ideas, recommendations or pleas – please! I give only three; in my current state small numbers are easier to cope with.

1 - Write something

“I’m no good at writing,” or “I didn’t know what to say” are poor excuses. One of my most treasured letters is from someone who is no good at writing. Her very struggles with pen and paper move me to tears; she cared that much! Something printed on a card may help you to speak, or a friend to hear, but please add your own words and don’t let the card company say it all.

You need not say much and you need not compose a sermon; in fact, please don’t. A Scripture text has power, if it is one you have found and made your own rather than passed on second-hand. But say something, however simple, about the one who has died: some memory, some event, something they said, did or were rather good at – especially if you are the only one who might know or remember. I love to discover small, little-known facets of my wife’s life and character: wholly authentic, perfectly consistent, yet new to me and our family.

2 – Go to the funeral

Of course, there may be geographical, medical or work-related reasons why this is impossible. But some apologies for absence seem to me a bit thin, most of them involving activities that would surely come round again next week, month, or year. You only die once and most people have only one funeral. You may not get much chance to talk but your presence can mean far more than you would guess or ever know. Most funerals bring glad meetings and some surprises; small reunions can mean great blessings. I’ve never heard anyone say: “I’m so sorry I went to so-and-so’s funeral. . . .”

3 – Afterwards

Unless you know that the bereaved person is surrounded daily by family and friends (but do you truly *know*?) be specific in your offer of help. “Let me know if there’s anything I can do” is often useless, meaningless, even cruel, adding a further burden of anxiety and decision-making to the already heavy load of grief.



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More to the point may be: "Are you free to come to supper one day next week?" "Can I mind the children one afternoon?" "I found this bargain at Sainsbury's this week - any good?" "Can you use any help with the garden?" - and many more like those. These are practical, time-giving, loving uses of the imagination.

Some Christians, even pastors, think it is smart, pious or cool to be anti-funeral; "a dead loss" said one noted conference speaker as his audience tittered uneasily. "Let the dead bury their dead" is a text so easily wrenched out of context. The grieving for Jacob in the Old Testament and Stephen in the New may be more to the point. The command to Ezekiel not to mourn his wife, "the delight of his eyes" (24:15-27) is so dreadful, sudden, and surprising; it would never have occurred but for the unique divine word that God was sending to Israel.

Elsewhere in Scripture the human rituals of death, burial and mourning are constantly valued and counted significant. And never underestimate the witness you may bring to such occasions. You won't bring it if you're not there, or say nothing. Or if you make your offer more to clear your conscience, half hoping it will be forgotten (it won't) than to help your friend.

Remember, please, that losing someone very close should not make the survivor an outcast, rather the reverse. Bereavement is neither contagious nor shameful. Please don't let your shyness, uncertainty or feelings of inadequacy deprive your friend of your much needed, much valued love. By receiving they will grow; by giving, so will you.

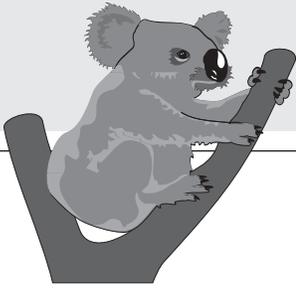
This article has been reprinted with permission from the October 2003 issue of Evangelicals Now. A. W. stands for "a widower" as the writer wished to remain anonymous.



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Two ways to shake society's foundation: Divorce and bombs

Recently our Prime Minister made a statement about marriage that earned him a lot of flack. Mr. Howard said that marriage was there to continue the human race.

The objections came from those who said the world was too full already, and from those who felt it was an attack on homosexual relationships. And what is wrong, some asked, if people decide not to have children? In some quarters Mr. Howard did not earn many brownie points.

This news was very relevant in light of some recent reading I did in the magazine *Vision*¹ and especially two articles: one called, "Marriage: Mystery and Meaning" and the other, "A culture of Divorce." Brian Orchard wrote both pieces, and the second is especially worth reviewing. This I will try to do in the first part of this article.

Marriage: going, going, but not gone

Brian Orchard starts by stating: "Statistics tell us that first marriages today stand a 45 per cent chance of breaking up and second marriages a 60 per cent chance." This has caused a complete change of attitude, not only to divorce but also to marriage. As a young lady said when asked about marrying a guy she had only known for a short time: "Well it is easy to marry and easy to get out of."

What, you may ask, has happened to cause marriages to break up? Have things changed that much in recent times?

I don't know how Canadian law dealt with this some 25-30 years ago, but in Australia someone had to prove fault² for divorce to be granted. It was 1975 when Australian lawmakers changed this to a "no-fault divorce" system.³ This opened the floodgates. Someone might ask, were marriages better before that time? Of course not. But when difficulties arose people tried to solve them or even put up with a not too happy marriage. All that changed when it became possible to just walk out of a marriage. Orchard argues that industrialization and urbanization during



We've created a new kind of society never before seen in human culture.



the 20th century and the fact that during World War II women were drawn into the work force changed the attitude toward the relationships in marriage. There were also new birth control methods that gave women control over fertility. Also the disintegration of marriage "accelerated by various social movements with civil-rights, feminist and human-potential agendas."

All these changes brought "freedoms" denied to previous generations. As Orchard

puts it: "The commitment to stay in a marriage in order to make it work gave way to an attitude of moving on if the marriage was in difficulty. Women working outside the home gained a measure of economic freedom. This in turn created less of an incentive to work out marital differences. The independence produced by increased household income also gave men a loophole to reduce their sense of responsibility and commitment to a marriage."

Added to this is a basic change in how people perceive the world around them. A new generation grew up who regarded things from a totally personal point of view. This is referred to as the "Me now" generation. Everything centers around the individual. That means that if relationships don't work out you move on. I am the most important person, not my neighbor, no matter how close. It is a generation that has done away with Christianity. But it goes further than this. Elsewhere in the article Orchard quotes Judith Wallerstein, a senior lecturer emeritus at the University of Berkeley's School of Social Welfare who states in her book *The unexpected legacy of divorce*: "It's clear that we've created a new kind of society never before seen in human culture."

Referring to Malachi 2 Orchard writes: "Marriage is a covenant. It is not independent of God. He is witness to the agreement: 'Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously;

yet she is your companion and your *wife by covenant*” (verse 14).

But we live in a culture which has done away with all that – a culture we and our children are growing up in. I wonder sometimes how much of this culture is influencing us. Can we be unaffected when all of us are daily confronted with a society that has an entirely different approach to life than the one we have learned in the preaching and the daily reading of God’s Word? It inevitably means that we will be perceived by those around as real odd bods. Letters to the editors of our local newspapers make it more than clear that while we are allowed to have our own *opinions*, we are not allowed to argue that God’s Word *demand*s this or that.

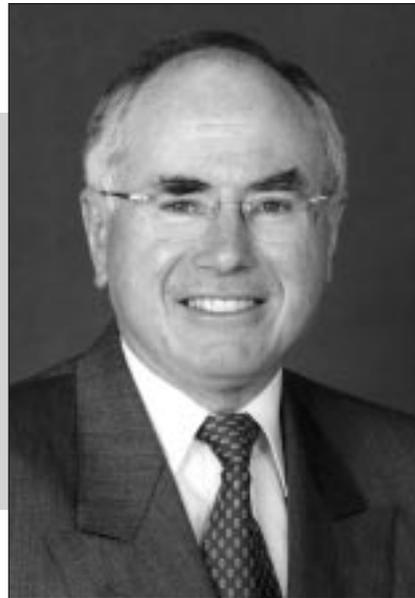
Terrorism

The August 5 bombing of the Marriott hotel in Djakarta reminded us once again that Asia is a dangerous place for westerners. While Australia seems a safe enough place the authorities are doing as much as possible to assure that it stays that way. For this reason many of our police experts are working with the police in Indonesia to help them track down the terrorists who bombed Bali last year.

A man named Amrozi was one of the first caught, and after his trial he was sentenced to death. Amrozi was referred to as the smiling bomber. He arrived in court each day full of smiles and when given the opportunity would cry out “Allah Acbar” or, God is great. He made it clear during the trial that he detests all that the West stands for. The way Australians and other visitors to Bali drank and carried on was especially condemned by Amrozi and it contributed to his hatred of them.

Before being sentenced he made it clear that he looked forward to meeting Allah and receiving the reward that he is convinced all warriors of Allah receive. But a couple of days after the sentence was handed down he did decide to appeal against the sentence, which earlier

Prime Minister Howard’s statements about marriage earned him some flack.



he had said he would not do. Reality must have sunk in.

I am in no position to judge how Muslims act when together as a group, but if they are as well behaved as Amrozi suggested during his trial, I have some sympathy for his abhorrence of the behavior of Westerners when they holiday in places such as Bali. Listening to people who have been there, there is little doubt that clubs in Bali become places where there is little restraint, plenty of cheap alcoholic drinks and all that entails. It is certainly no place for Christians.



We will be perceived by those around as real odd bods.



Not that this in any way excuses these Muslim extremists of course.

While Australian authorities have done much to improve the security in our airports and other places of entry and

around government buildings there remains the worry that our nation, once regarded as far from the troubles of this world, is no longer so secure.

Add to this the stance that the Australian government has taken by supporting the US in its fight with the Iraqi regime and it is not surprising that the opposition makes much of any shortcomings they can find in our security, real or imagined. But that is what oppositions do.

ENDNOTES

¹ *Vision - Journal for a new world* (Winter 2003)

² A divorce would only be granted if there was proof that:

- a. one or both parties to a marriage were guilty of misconduct, for example: adultery, cruelty, habitual alcoholism, or desertion
- b. *or* one party was insane
- c. *or* there had been a separation for a period of five years.

³ Under no-fault divorce the only requirement was that the couple first be separated for 12 months.





HOMEFRONT

Wife between Disdain and Respect

by Jane deGlint

The wife is the heart of the home. When the woman of the house is happy, the whole household basks in the healing glow. Sulking toddlers smooth out their frowns. Recalcitrant teenagers soften their attitude. The exhausted husband is reinvigorated. All family members draw from the well of the mother's love. Actively she pursues their well-being. When her fine-tuned intuition picks up disharmony, she unobtrusively restores the peace. With her encouragement and empathy she sustains those who are overcome with disappointment or frustration. While her husband and children call themselves blessed, she derives great satisfaction from their affection. The love of the wife and mother reaches the dark corners of the house and bounces back to her – it is recharged as it is dispensed.

This is the woman of Proverbs 31. Her husband has full confidence in her. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She works with eager hands. She gets up while it is still dark and sets about her work vigorously. Her lamp does not go out at night. She opens her arms to the poor, and extends her hands to the needy. She is clothed with strength and dignity and can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

Yes, a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. It is a miracle of God's grace that in this fallen world the light of healthy womanhood still brings life and prosperity. The Lord has not deserted his created order. After the fall into sin woman was reinstated in her special place. For the sake of the believers the Lord upholds creation and its structure, especially the institution of marriage. It is in a healthy marriage bond that the Lord's relationship with his people

is reflected. Jesus' love for his church is made visible in a husband's love for his wife, while the church's awe for the Lord is portrayed in the wife's respect for her husband. Husband and wife rejoice in each other's honor, since they both receive their shine from the glory of the God of creation.

The very place where God's glory is reflected most brilliantly has become the most desirable target for the Destroyer. It is of great benefit to the Evil One that the light is dimmed. The more distorted the image, the more easily people are led astray. It is important to the Deceiver that the foundations of marriage are undermined. He smirks when husband and wife are at odds with each other. He wrings his hands with wicked satisfaction over a malfunctioning marriage. A husband who serves himself serves the Devil, and a wife who despises her husband is Satan's accomplice.

.....

The church's awe for the Lord is portrayed in the wife's respect for her husband.

.....

There is a great contrast between the glorious position which the Lord has intended for a wife and the perverted, shameful, destructive alternative of the Evil One. Yet, many godly women lose sight of the God-given order and surrender their luster for dullness. These God-fearing wives do not set out to destroy the perfect image. Through misunderstandings, disagreements or even mistreatment they are thrown off track. At first they might search

for a restoration of the proper focus. But over time they start to expect more from men than from the Lord. Foolishly they seek solace in building their ego and demanding their rights. They allow these pervasive, secular concepts to infiltrate their minds. Over time the respect that they once cultivated for their husbands is replaced with disdain. In the end they have no use for their men.

Little do these women realize that the Creator has no use for wives who look down on their husbands. As a master disciplinarian the Lord turns the consequences of their misguided thinking into their punishment. The disrespectful wife loses her heart. She is no longer the source of warmth and light for her family. She argues where she used to reconcile. She is irritated when once she smiled. She is focused on herself and her own enjoyment, while before she was ready to help and heal. Though she might be pleased about her hard won status, she in fact demoted herself from her position of honor to a place of humiliation.

As sad as it is to see how a woman dishonors her husband and herself, it is even sadder to realize that many men have brought this situation upon their wives. This is not said to excuse the woman, but to point to the created order in the relationship between husband and wife. As the head of his wife, the man bears the responsibility for the health of the relationship. He must be ready to give account to his Lord about the state of affairs. Awareness of this responsibility prevents a husband from feeling victimized by his wife. It will also make him understand that it is his task to initiate the restoration of the marriage, for the sake of his Lord's honor.

Many believing men know about the concept of headship, yet they are not sure how it functions. Our modern culture sends conflicting messages. The finger pointing of man-bashers has caused Christian men to confuse headship with tyranny. At the same time husbands have been degraded to wimps by the caricature drawings of cartoon artists. Ironically, believing men who do not understand headship may unwittingly turn into the kind of husband they never wanted to be.

Headship is an office that the Lord gives to every husband. Within the structure of marriage husband and wife have their distinct tasks. For proper order and procedure the husband has received the office of head. Being accountable to his Lord, he bears the full responsibility for the well-being of his family. In that position he gives direction and coordinates activities. He is the spiritual leader as well. It is his task to ensure that the ways of the Lord are taught and kept. All these things he does in close cooperation with his wife. She adds her feminine touch and wit to enhance and stimulate.

If headship is reduced to a legal status of the man, the marriage relationship will experience stress. Headship is more than a legalized position of power. Balanced and beneficial headship combines this legal endorsement with loving action. Headship is practical and hands-on. A good head knows what it takes to do the nitty-gritty work of living together in a covenant of love.

Usually a believing wife thrives under the headship of a believing husband. It is likely to be a sign of unbelief if she consciously pulls her energy and interest away from the marital relationship and the family unit. However, if the headship does not function properly, a God-fearing wife may be pushed away by her husband from her honorable position. Once a dysfunctional husband has caused his wife to lose respect for him, her unholy reactions often aggravate her husband's failure to provide leadership.

After a while the wife's behavior can become so offensive, that it becomes difficult to distinguish whether the erring woman acted from unbelief or reacted to her husband's malfunctioning. The symptoms are almost identical. The only differ-



ence lies in the fact that the believing woman responds positively to admonition. Even though she might regress time and again, she will, prodded by the Spirit, resolve to return to the holy walk of married life. Her light may grow dim at times, but the flame of true love will occasionally burst into its full glow.

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A husband who serves himself serves the Devil.

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In essence the erring woman becomes unfaithful. She walks away from her obligation to her Lord, to her husband, to her children. This might first show itself in a disinterest toward her function of wife and mother, coupled with an increased desire to promote herself. Every woman has interests that lie outside the immediate family circle. Reason for concern arises when these outside matters become the main focus. After a while the wife's personal accomplishments take such priority that she forgets to include her husband in her plans for her future. With that act she has fundamentally separated herself from her status as wife and mother. The loving wife has made way for the calculated, reserved career woman, who has a spouse. The warm, giving mother has disappeared; in her stead we find the sophisticated lady of the house,

who also raises a family. Before long she starts to look down on her husband. Publicly and privately she opposes him. No longer does he call himself blessed to be her husband. He counts his blessings when he is tolerated. At this point husband and wife are only one small step away from entrusting their hearts to someone else. Once the soul has found an anchor in foreign waters, it takes much fervent prayer, spiritual wisdom and godly patience to repair the breaches in faithfulness.

Even in this loveless desert of shifting loyalties the Lord provides many oases of honor and holiness. Examples abound of godly women who endured mistreatment at the hand of their husbands. Often the endurance of these God-fearing wives does not reach the public eye. Even less do outsiders know the struggles which a wife has to endure before she is able to respect her husband again, in spite of his severe shortcomings. Every woman who went through these trials knows the fear, the indifference, the disdain. Only in the strength of the God who upholds the widow and the fatherless can respect for one's dysfunctional husband be regained. Ultimately the husband receives his wife's respect not because he deserves it, but because the wife wants to serve her heavenly Lord.

Matrimony is holy. Husband and wife live on sacred ground. The Deceiver makes every effort to desecrate this special territory. At times he successfully infiltrates the hearts of believing husbands and wives. Disdain for one another obscures the holy image of divine love and harmony. Yet, the victory has been won for all hurting husbands and wives. In the strength of the Spirit believers learn to respect their spouses again. And in return they are respected, and loved, and honored. Healing has come, as a foretaste of eternal bliss.

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Genesis 2:24, as integrated in Ephesians 5:31-33).

Celebrating Male and Female

"Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning, made them male and female?"

Matthew 19:4 KJV

by Margaret Helder

Life is definitely more interesting with members of the opposite gender around. Men and women, boys and girls, have always derived great pleasure in speculating about the other gender and in trying to attract favorable attention. All too often, however, controversies begin as to who treats whom better, and whose contributions to society are more valuable. Some base their arguments on details of biology while others approach the topic from a point of view of prejudice or self-interest. Christians, of course, base their views on God's written word. However, in that God created people as male or female, it is of interest to examine the biology as well.

Hot guys

While most animals exhibit gender differences, there is no universal way that gender is determined. The controlling factor may be environmental or genetic. In the case of sea turtles and geckos, for example, temperature during development causes embryos to become male or female. Below a certain temperature, all the young are female. Above a certain temperature, all the young become male. In between these two extremes, the gender ratio is 50:50.

For the slipper limpet (a mollusk somewhat like a snail) distance from another female determines whether a newcomer will develop as a male or female. If a local female dies, the adjacent male then becomes a female. Young limpets are sexless and motile. As they mature, they settle down and attach themselves to a surface. The individual on the bare surface becomes female. Individuals piling on top of the female, all become male.

Among social insects, certain genetic factors determine gender and role in the community. Fertilized eggs all become female. The vast majority of these become sterile worker bees. Only one becomes a fertile queen. The eggs that happen not to be fertilized, become male drones. Their role is to fertilize the eggs. Because the drones are not universally efficient, some eggs remain unfertilized. Thus the ranks of the drones are replenished too.

Among some other insects, like grasshoppers, all the offspring develop from fertilized eggs. However half the offspring have two sex chromosomes and half have only one. The grasshoppers with two sex chromosomes are female, while those with only one sex chromosome are male.

Moreover there is another diverse group of organisms which includes galinaceous birds (like chickens), and also some insects like butterflies and some fish. These organisms are supplied with two kinds of sex chromosomes. The individuals with two similar chromosomes are the males, and those with one copy of the sex chromosome as in males, and also a smaller sex chromosome, are the females. All mammals, alternatively, have a system of gender determination which is opposite to that in chickens. The female has two identical chromosomes while the male has unmatched sexual chromosomes.

Feminists disparage Y

A little reflection reveals that in people, it is the father who determines the gender of a baby. Half the time, on average, a father donates an X chromosome to his future child, and a girl results. The rest of the time,

on average, the father confers a Y chromosome on his future child, and a boy develops. The father also confers 22 other chromosomes that include information for many other characteristics of the future child. The mother, for her part, contributes a similar set of 22 chromosomes plus one X chromosome. Thus the new child contains 22 pairs of chromosomes, one set each from mother and father, plus an X chromosome from the mother and father (in the case of a girl) or an X chromosome from the mother and a Y chromosome from the father, in the case of a boy. Thus the Y chromosome is passed on only by fathers and only to their sons.

In a society where males are esteemed, you might expect that the Y chromosome would be similarly regarded as a "good thing." Our western society, however, does not value men, often quite the contrary. Some of the excuses for disparaging men have been couched in seemingly scientific terms. The Y chromosome, after all, is much smaller than the X chromosome. Obviously there can be no genes essential for survival on the Y chromosome. Otherwise there would be only male, and no female offspring. At first it was assumed that there was only one gene on the comparatively puny Y chromosome. That would be the male sex determining region (SRY). In recent years the number of genes on the Y chromosome was reevaluated and increased to three. That was still a far cry from the substantial X chromosome which includes, besides genes concerned with sex determination, many other genes essential for survival and other important characteristics.

**One X corrects the other . . .
in women**

Both men and women are supplied with an X chromosome in every cell of their bodies. The difference between the genders obviously is the presence or absence of a Y chromosome. One might ask whether the presence of the Y chromosome confers any advantages compared with the possession of a second X chromosome. There actually are a number of disadvantages which men may suffer because they lack a second X chromosome. At a number of sites on the X chromosome, mutant forms of genes can exist. If a male receives an X chromosome with one or more mutations, these will be expressed since there is no second X chromosome with normal genes to block expression of the mutant form. Thus red/green color blindness, hemophilia, and SCID (immune system failure) among other sex linked conditions, almost always are expressed only in men. Women seldom inherit two identical mutations on the X chromosome so female carriers appear normal.

There are thus some disadvantages to the male condition. Biologists in recent years have thus heaped scorn on the Y chromosome. It is small, it can't override various diseases and it is on its way, so they have said, to extinction. The reader might be forgiven for wondering how males, but not the whole human race, can be headed for extinction. The reasoning is based partly on evolutionary assumptions and partly on feminist attitudes. Based on the unfounded assumption that the Y chromosome was once as large as the X chromosome with about 1000 or more genes, scientists claim that the Y chromosome has been losing genetic information at such a dramatic pace that soon nothing will remain. Thus Robert Lee Hotz wrote: "In scientific circles, the Y chromosome – the essence of masculinity – is scorned as the runt of the human genetic family, so henpecked by mutations that it is wasting away. . . .scientists investigating the human genome felt free to jeer or mostly ignore it" (*Los Angeles Times* June 19, 2003).



Jim Dwyer 2003 ©

Until now, in biological terms, men and women have been considered as almost identical except for their sexual organs. Feminine dislike of mathematics and physics is then ascribed only to unfortunate social prejudices rather than to real abilities. The objective of social planners and educators has thus been to encourage females to enter formerly male dominated professions. There is, in principle, nothing wrong with this as long as the girls really have aptitude for such careers. However, the thinking of the feminists seems to be that if men become extinct, girls will have to carry out all the jobs! Indeed with the advent of cloning experiments, some feminists consider that society indeed could do just fine without men. One feminist newspaper columnist thus opined: "New research on the Y chromosome shows that my jittery male friends are not paranoid; they are in an evolutionary shame spiral. . . as civilization advances, those who bear Y chromosomes are in relative decline. . . Better to be an X chromosome than an ex-chromosome" (*National Post* July 10, 2003 A14).

Why Y is simply amazing

The June 19 issue of the journal *Nature* brought the male bashing to a screeching halt. Genetic analysis of the Y chromosome has revealed some features never before anticipated. The Y chromosome, it turns out, has seventy-eight genes. Most are concerned with reproduction and gender determination, but others contribute to other aspects of health. The implications of this discovery are extremely disconcerting to feminists. There may well be an important genetic basis to differences between men and women in biology, learning styles and behavior. Men, after all, have some genes (not connected with reproduction), which women lack and women have no genes that men lack!! Oh dear. It also transpires that the Y chromosome is more densely packed with genes than any other section of DNA in the human genome.

The June 19 study revealed yet more remarkable insights. The Y chromosome appears to be a most amazing molecule. Apparently suggestions about the possi-

ble disappearance of the Y chromosome were wishful thinking on the part of feminists and evolutionists. The issue concerns a mechanism for correcting errors. When chromosomes occur in pairs in the cell (one from the mother and one from the father), special machinery typically replaces defective information on one chromosome with good sequences present on the other chromosome. In the case of the Y chromosome however, there is no other example with information good or bad. The Y chromosome stands alone. Thus scientists feared that any and



The Y chromosome contains eight long sections, which read the same forward or backward.



all changes would be permanently retained. Eventually, it was supposed, the defective material would be discarded altogether, the whole sequence lost to posterity forever. This is not, however, what happens. The Y chromosome contains eight long sections, which read the same forward or backward. This is a literary device called a palindrome.

The example everyone talks about is "Madam I'm Adam." Obviously it is extremely difficult to draft even a short palindrome, yet on the Y chromosome, the longest is three million nucleotides, or base pairs, long and it reads 99.97% identical in both directions. This sophisticated and subtle condition results in an even more unexpected repair mechanism. In order to replace bad sequences with good, the molecule simply doubles back on itself in order to compare one sequence with a template running in the opposite direction. Dr. David Page, biologist at the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research in Massachusetts, remarked that such a discovery highlights nature's "inventive" quality (quoted by Hotz in *LATimes*).

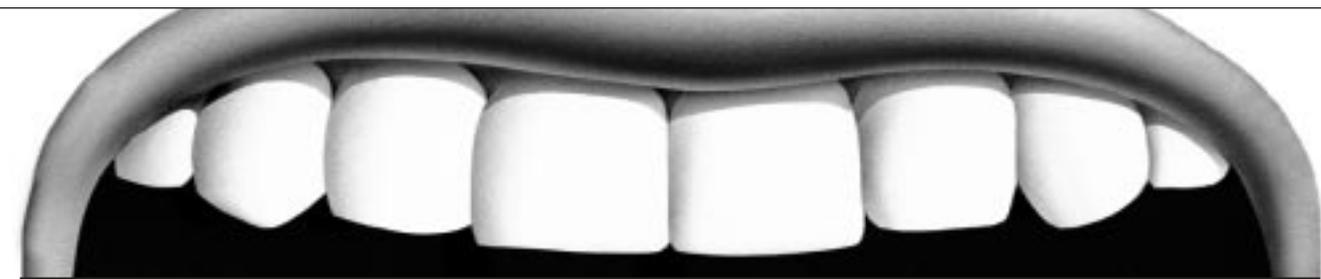
Since the palindrome mechanism was completely unexpected by scientists who had both high technological expertise and imagination, one can be sure that undirected natural processes would never develop so fancy a scheme. Of course we aren't looking for a natural process to design the Y chromosome anyway. We know that God created men and women initially perfectly good and perfectly wonderful. As to the existence of differences between men and women, we say, "So be it." Each of us has special talents and capabilities. Let us use our individual talents to God's glory. As far as gender differences go, we say "Vive la difference!"



Palindromes in honor of the chromosome Y

A palindrome is a sentence that reads the same backwards as forwards. The Y chromosome is a palindrome as well, so in its honor we bring to you ten of the very best palindromes.

1. Do go to God
2. Yaweh. The way.
3. Now I won.
4. Don't nod.
5. Are we not drawn onward, we few, drawn onward to new era?
6. War, sir, is raw.
7. Step on no pets.
8. Was it a rat I saw?
9. Niagara, O roar again!
10. A man, a plan, a canal – Panama!



RP STAFF

Canada

The Canada Family Action Coalition estimates that between 80,000 and 100,000 Canadians gathered at MP's offices across the country Sept. 7 to support the sanctity of marriage. . . . When Christian lobbied in front of his office, in favor of traditional marriage, NDP MP Pat Martin called them "bastards" "Pharisees" and some unmentionable names. . . . After a Catholic bishop told Prime Minister Jean Chrétien that his eternal salvation was in doubt if he supported gay marriage Toronto Liberal MP Charles Caccia told the PM "I will go to hell with you." . . . A Sept. 16 motion declaring marriage to be "the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others" went down to defeat by a vote of 137-132. Only four years ago, in 1999, a similar motion passed by a wide margin, 216-55. . . . An NDP MP briefly courted controversy when she told her leader she planned to vote in favor of traditional marriage. In the end though, Bev Desjarlais, MP for Churchill, backed down and skipped the vote altogether.

The Canadian Firearms Registry had a cost overrun of 50,000 per cent (it was initially supposed to cost \$2 million but has already cost \$1 billion) but that didn't keep the federal government from handing out performance bonuses. Canadian Alliance MP John Williams reports that last year bonuses averaging \$10,000 each were given to 96 per cent of *all* senior public servants.

Australia

The Australian Euthanasia group EXIT recently rated different car models on the carbon monoxide emissions they put, and which ones would therefore be best to use when committing suicide. This stunt was meant to garner favorable publicity for the group, but probably exposed their callousness more than anything else.

USA

Scientists from Chicago's Center for Human Reproduction announced at a Madrid conference on reproductive technology that they had created male/female hybrid human embryos. Lead researcher Norbert Gleicher said that the privately funded experiments saw 12 human embryos develop normally after cells from male human embryos were transplanted into 21 one-day-old female embryos. *Source: LifeSite Daily News*

International

UNICEF, the United Nations Child Fund, is again being criticized, this time by the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM). C-FAM wants UNICEF to return to the mandate it had under Jim Grant in the 1980's when it focused on helping children through proven healthcare interventions, such as massive immunization drives and oral rehydration for children suffering from diarrhea. After the 1995 appointment of Carol Bellamy as executive director UNICEF went in a very different direction. Money was spent to increase children's access to condoms, and to endorse abortifacient "emergency contraceptives" for refugee women. UNICEF also started distributing graphic sexual education material to children in Roman Catholic countries in Latin America.



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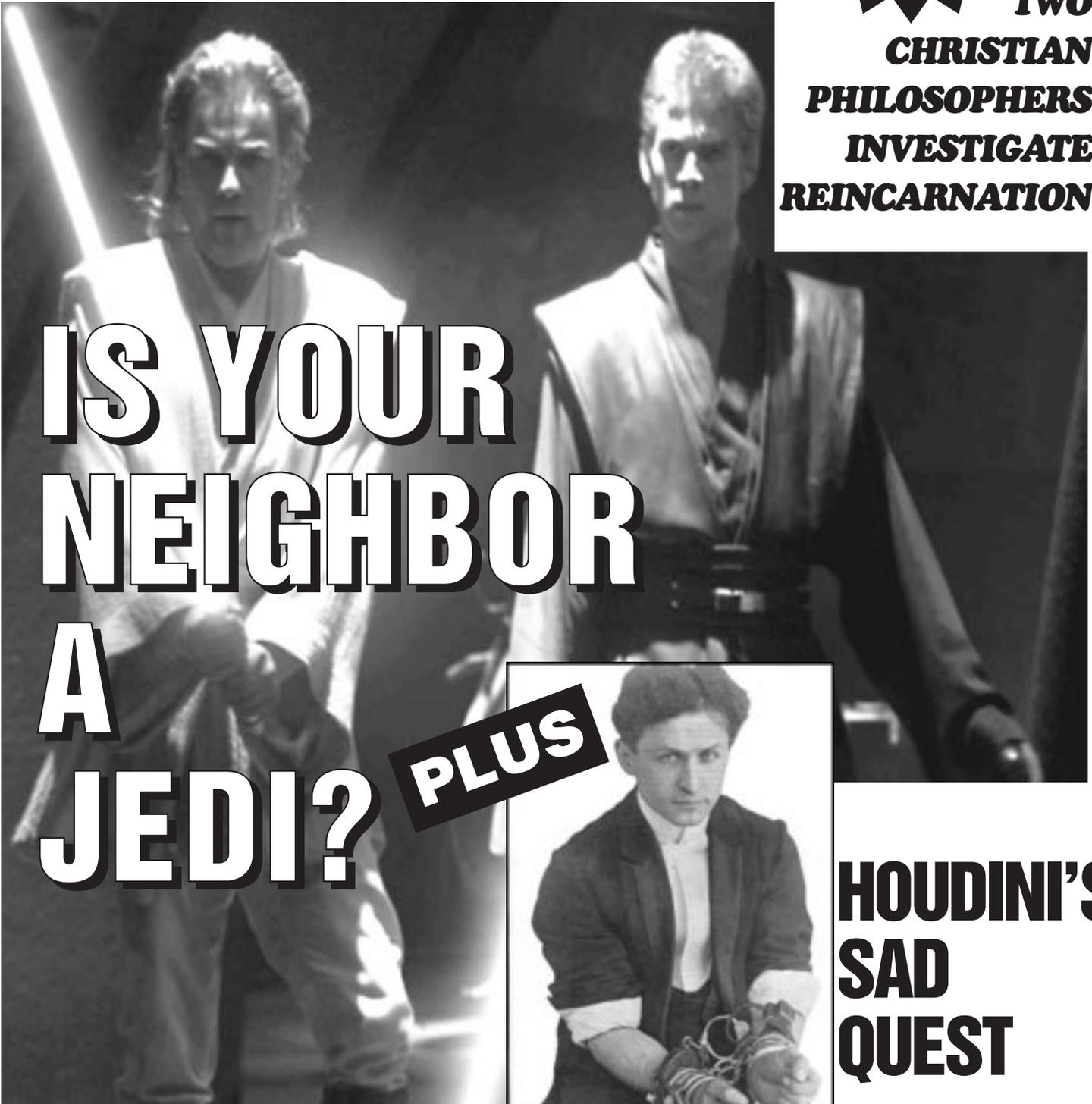
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NEIGHBOR
A
JEDI?**

PLUS



**HOUDINI'S
SAD
QUEST**

THE “FORCE” BEHIND BAD STATISTICS

by James Dykstra

Sometimes statistics don't mean what they seem to mean. According to figures released by Statistics Canada this past May, there are 20,000 of them in Canada. They have joined 53,000 in New Zealand, 70,000 in Australia, and a startling 390,000 in the United Kingdom. Who are they? They are Jedi.

If you're not a fan of the *Star Wars* science fiction films, you might not have heard of the Jedi. In this series of movies – five so far – Jedi “knights” wield the good power of the “Force” to fight against those who would seek to destroy the universe and enslave it to evil. It's a weird sort of Eastern mystical “Force” where both good and evil originate in the same source. The Jedi wield the power of good found in the Force while the “Dark Side of the Force” is used by the arch villains.

By now you've probably spotted the problem with the Statistics Canada census. 20,000 Canadians claim to believe in a religion – “Jediism” – that exists only in *Star Wars* movies. How can that make any sense?

Earnest idiots

If you're Derek Evans, director of the United Church-affiliated Naramatha Centre in B.C., you see calling yourself a Jedi as “part of a journey. . . discovering the powers that rest within,” and how to use those powers to take care of the ones you love.¹ Derek Evans is probably a bit too serious.

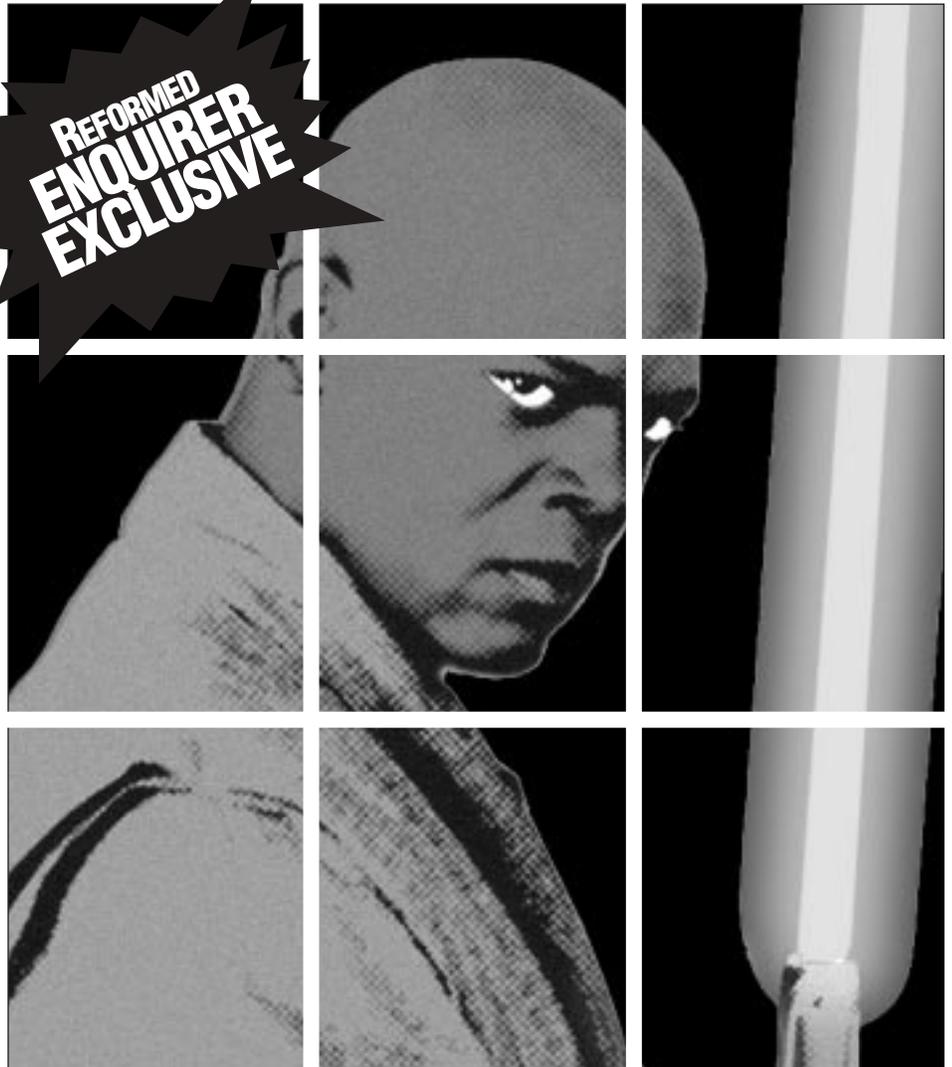
Chris Brennan had a different take on the whole thing. As president of the Australian Star Wars Appreciation Society, he didn't think the census details were quite accurate. He estimated that of the 70,000 Aussies who claimed to be Jedi, no more than 5,000 or so were “true hard-core people that would believe the Jedi religion carte blanche.”² Chris Brennan didn't quite get it either.

MYOB

You see there's a much simpler explanation. The people claiming to be Jedi didn't take the census seriously. On May 1, 2001, prior to the Canadian census, Denis Dion posted a message on the Canadian Ski Patrol message board urging people to list their religion on the upcoming census as Jedi. He claimed that if 10,000 Canadians were to do this, then Jedi would become a “fully recognized and legal religion.” This

message, circulated by Dion and others, obviously made the rounds, and 20,000 people joined in on the stunt.

What was the motivation? If you can believe the folks at Jedi Census (www.jedicensus.com), somebody in New Zealand thought that asking someone's religion was a nosy question that didn't deserve an honest answer. As well, some people just don't really have a religion that they believe in strongly so they don't know what religion to check off on their census forms.



Other than the fun they had, the people who signed up as Jedi missed one of their other main targets. None of the statistics offices in Canada, Britain, Australia, or New Zealand declared Jediism to be an official religion. Statistics bureaus can't do that. Some of them did, however, give the religion a "code" because it was statistically significant. Just as Statistics Canada can't declare the Canadian Reformed Churches to be a religion, they can give them a code, too, because there's a lot of Canadian Reformed people in the country. Canadian Reformed people, like Jedi, are tracked by Statistics Canada.

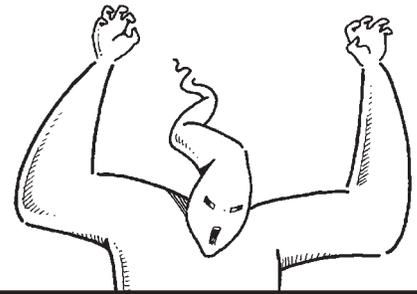
In Australia, the Jedi missed even this little victory of being officially tracked. Australia's Bureau of Statistics simply took everyone who said his religion was Jedi and labeled them as "not defined for census output purposes." While the Australians keep track of religious societies

like the Flying Saucer Group or the Builders of Adatum, Jedi simply don't rate high enough to be tracked.

Lightsabre sales still down

So what's the moral of the story? With more than 500,000 people worldwide claiming to be Jedi, what can we learn from this bizarre tale? Simply this: sometimes if a statistic seems unbelievable, it probably is. We need to be skeptical when we're told the results of surveys. For a survey to be accurate, it needs to be taken seriously, and it needs to be something that people are willing to answer. When answering surveys, people don't like to appear foolish, and they are often unwilling to give up personal information yet unwilling to say this. In four different countries people were either unwilling to tell the statistics offices their real religion because it was too personal, or just weren't taking the question seriously.

When we're outnumbered, and surveys tell us that very few people believe a fetus is "human," or that most people believe gay



Ghost U

WORLD magazine reports that Lund University in Sweden is planning on appointing the country's first professor of parapsychology, hypnology and clairvoyance. The Netherlands leads the way though, as Utrecht University already has a chair in parapsychology.

couples should be allowed to "marry," take it with a grain of salt. Those who oppose abortion or gay marriage are unlikely to tell pollsters their true opinions because their answers are politically incorrect and seen as foolish, and those answering the surveys don't want to seem foolish. They're often unwilling to give an honest answer.

So when you're faced with impossible statistics, with insurmountable odds, maybe the best thing to do is to simply laugh. The BBC did when it reported on the 390,000 Jedi supposedly living in the United Kingdom. You see, if there really are that many Jedi in the U.K. it's only a matter of time until sales of lightsabres start to sky rocket.³ And when we're faced with impossible odds and improbable statistics, we can laugh boldly, because we have a power greater than statistics and far stronger than the Force to lend us aid.

¹ *Globe and Mail*, May 14, 2003

² *The New Zealand Herald* "Jedi order lures 53,000 disciples" www.nzherald.co.nz, August 8, 2002

³ "Census returns of the Jedi," 13 February, news.bbc.co.uk



Hocus Pocus!

Everyone knows that the phrase "Hocus Pocus" is a part of many magic acts, usually right after the wand waving, and right before the puff of smoke. But did you know it has its origins in the Mass?

When the priest held up the Communion bread he would speak a few words in Latin. The actual words used are the same ones Jesus spoke at the Last Supper: "This is my body." In Latin that becomes *Hoc est corpus meum*. For the common people this would seem a lot like magic since Roman Catholics believe the priest is able to turn the bread into the actual body of Christ. So in their minds, he said a few magic words, and poof, suddenly the bread was transformed.

SOURCE: *1001 More Things You Always Wanted to Know About the Bible*

THOU MUST MURDER?

Killing Clones around the world

by Ike Van Dyke

My clone would have neither a mother nor a father. He would be my identical twin, with the same genetic code – the same DNA – but my mother would not have given birth to him, and this twin would never have been a gleam in my father’s eye. A case might be made for calling him my brother, as he is my twin, but what does that really mean when we don’t share the same parents?

Twenty years ago a question like this would only have been asked in a science fiction novel. It wasn’t something we had to deal with in the real world. But improvements in cloning technology have made parentless humans a real possibility – we have moved into the asexual age. This is a horrifying prospect, even to non-Christians, so there has been a push to ban human cloning.

What the difference?

But while some want to ban all human cloning, others want only a “reproductive cloning” ban. They want “therapeutic cloning” to remain legal.

What does that mean in English?

Reproductive cloning is done with the intent of eventually producing adult humans. Clones would be created and then planted in a surrogate’s womb to gestate for the normal nine months. Basically, aside from their abnormal creation, the hope is that these clones would be normal in every other way and would grow and develop in the normal fashion through childhood and into maturity. This may not be a realistic hope at this point! (in animal trials cloning seems to result in shorter life spans) but that is the aim of reproductive cloning.

Therapeutic cloning is done with the intent of killing the clone and experimenting with its cells. Let me restate that to make it clear. In therapeutic cloning scientists create a human being, and then kill it so that they can play with its body parts. I wish I could say this in some much more horrifying manner but hopefully you are already struck by the sheer vileness of this idea.

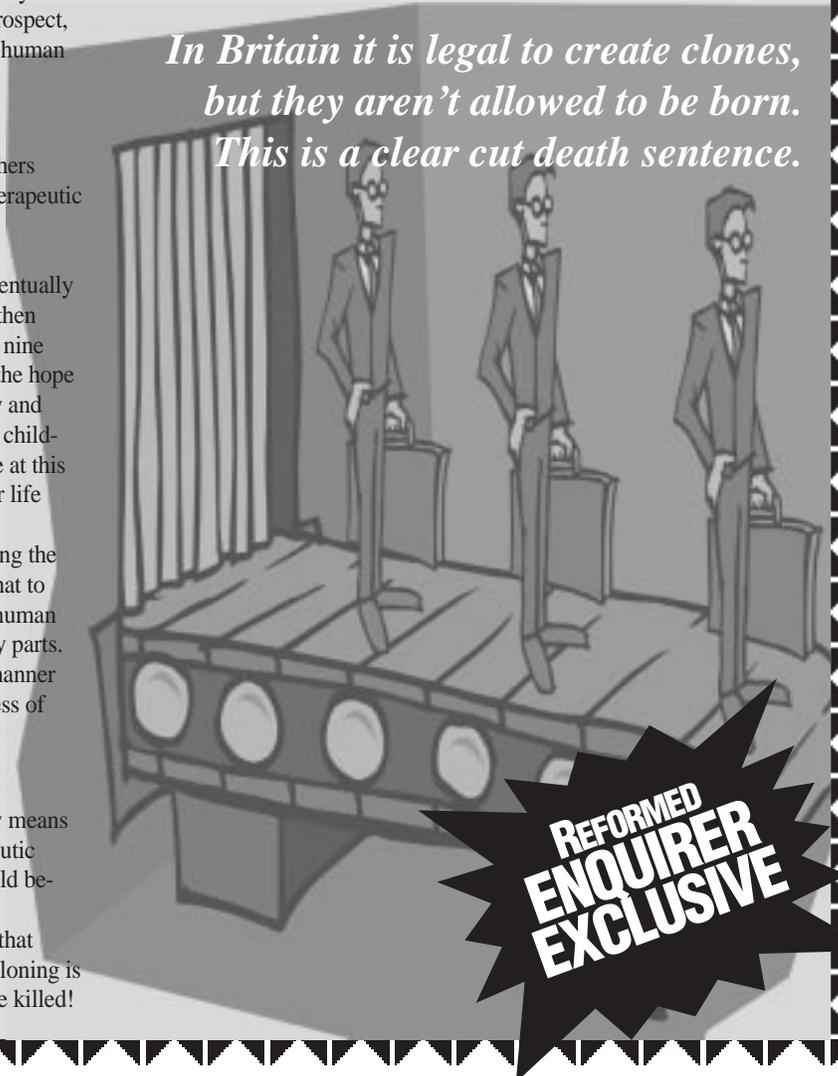
Death demanded

Things get worse when you consider what it really means to ban reproductive cloning while still allowing therapeutic cloning. Creating clones would still be legal, but it would become illegal to let them live and grow to maturity.

This is the law of the land in Britain right now. In that country reproductive cloning is illegal but therapeutic cloning is allowed. Clones can be created but these people *must* be killed!

**THE LAW SAYS
THEY
MUST DIE:**

*In Britain it is legal to create clones,
but they aren’t allowed to be born.
This is a clear cut death sentence.*



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This is worse even than the legalization of abortion. Yes, by allowing abortion the state does stand idly by as millions of unborn infants are murdered. But the British government has gone even further with their cloning legislation – they don't just allow the murder of clones, they *require* it. It is illegal to let clones live and be born.

International efforts

Currently two anti-cloning resolutions are being proposed at the United Nations. The first would ban all cloning while the second would ban reproductive cloning while allowing therapeutic cloning.

Canada supports the second resolution, even though Health Minister Anne McLellan insists Canada wants all cloning banned.² She says that getting the reproductive ban is a first step, and than afterwards she will pursue a ban on therapeutic cloning as well.

She obviously doesn't understand what she is proposing – her first step would be a ban that allows cloning, but requires the death of all clones. How is that a reasonable first step?

A rose by any other name

The one question I am most often asked when I bring up this subject is whether clones are actually human beings. Christians also ask this question. After all, clones are created in a strange and

even perverse manner that is obviously contrary to what God intended, so are they really people?

The answer to this question is another question: is Rebecca Wasser Kiessling a person? This woman was also conceived in a perverse manner that was contrary to what God intended – her father raped her mother. But obviously the horrible way in which her life began has no bearing on what she is. She is clearly a human person.

Clones too, are people. It doesn't matter how their life began – it matters only what they are, and they are human.

Does your apathy know any bounds?

This is the point in the article in which I try and give you a guilt trip about how little you have done to

save the unborn, cloned and otherwise. It is also the point in which I give you an opportunity to do at least one small thing. Do you have a precious feet pin on your lapel? No? These little pins are a life-size imprint of the feet of an unborn baby ten weeks after conception. They are a fantastic conversation starter. Wear them long enough, and on enough outfits and all your friends are sure to ask you what they are.

This magazine has agreed to give away these pins free to anybody who requests them, as long as you promise to feature them prominently on your wardrobe, or perhaps on your school knapsack.

It isn't a big thing. But it's a start. Tomorrow you can do more, but today make sure you email this magazine, or write them a letter, so you can do at least this little thing. If you don't speak up for the unborn who will?

¹ For more on the problems with cloning see Margaret Helder's article "Dolly is Dead" in the July/August 2003 issue of *Reformed Perspective*.

² In Canada the Health Minister has proposed a bill – C-13 – which is supposed to make all cloning illegal in the country. Opponents argue that the bill has exceptions and loopholes that would still allow certain forms of cloning. As well, this bill would allow the creation of embryos for the purpose of experimentation. These embryos wouldn't be clones but they would be human beings. By the time you read this, the bill will probably be in the Senate. Have you ever written your senator?

See the ad this issue for more information on how to get your precious feet pin.

WILLFULLY IGNORANT

A Gallup Poll cited by J.P. Moreland and Gary Habermas in their book *Beyond Death* revealed a little more than was intended.

Apparently 21 per cent of American Protestants and 25 percent of American Catholics believe in reincarnation. These are two contrary and conflicting beliefs, so the only way this poll could be true was if almost a quarter of professing US Christians don't ever open their Bibles.

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Nostradamus vs the Bible

by Jon Dykstra

If you've never heard of Nostradamus your spouse must do the grocery shopping. This 16th century "prophet" is a mainstay of supermarket tabloids – every time something big and bad happens the claim is made that Nostradamus predicted it more than 400 years ago. Some even set his prophecies up against those in the Bible, and say that Nostradamus was every bit as good.

As good as he gets

For example, one of his most famous prophecies concerned the Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986. In poetic form he wrote:

*Of the human flock, nine
shall be set apart,
Removed from judgment
and counsel:
Their fate will be deter-
mined on departure
Kappa Theta, Lambda,
dead, banished,
scattered.*

The very act of going into space certainly sets astronauts apart from the rest of the human flock and as investigations into the accident determined, their fate was sealed at their departure. The command center at NASA was unable to help, or in other words the shuttle crew was removed from their judgment and counsel. The last line is a little hard to understand but when you consider that the defective engine was built by Morton Thiokol Inc., it becomes easier to understand.

Kappa, Theta and Lambda are Greek letters (K, Th, L) that together spell out most of the company's name: ThioKoL.

There is a problem though. First, there were only seven astronauts in the shuttle. And second, though this is one of Nostradamus' clearest prophecies, not all Nostradamus experts agree it refers to the shuttle. For example, Henry C. Roberts was sure it referred to either the American Supreme Court or the old Soviet Union Politburo, both of which had nine members. Both also dealt out death, and forms of banishment (everything from jail to exile in Siberia).



So either Nostradamus made a mistake (nine instead of seven) or his prophecy was vague enough as to be applicable to almost anything.

No mistakes

So how does this prophecy – one of Nostradamus' clearest and most famous – measure up against biblical prophecy?

To answer that we should first look at the high standard the Bible sets for prophecy; in Deuteronomy 18 we are told that if a prophet makes even a single error in his prophecy he is a false prophet. In other words, close was not good enough – to be a true prophet you had to be 100 per cent right.

When we look at the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ we find this high standard upheld through numerous texts. He was to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), the Son of God (Psalm 2:7) the seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesse and David (Gen 22:18, 21:12, Numbers 24:17, Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5) and born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zech 9:9) be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver which would be thrown into God's house and used to buy a potters field (Zech 11:12,13). He would be silent before his accusers (Isaiah 53:7), his clothes would be taken and lots would be cast for it (Psalm 22:18) and afterwards his side would be pierced (Zech 12:10) though no bones would be broken (Psalm 34:20).

So how does this compare with Nostradamus' vague, error prone prophecy? Well, the whole Old Testament points clearly to Jesus and only Jesus – no one else could have fulfilled all these conditions. Not only is this prophecy specific, it is also 100 per cent true – all of it has been fulfilled in Christ's coming, his death and his resurrection. This shows once again that the Bible is simply beyond compare.

COMING BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN...



by Jon Dykstra

How would you react if a Hindu told you that reincarnation was true? Would you react differently if a Christian told you that the evidence for reincarnation couldn't just be dismissed? And what if instead of just one Christian telling you that, it was two, and both were well respected philosophy professors?

J.P. Moreland and Gary Habermas are the Christians in question. Separately they have authored or edited such orthodox titles as: *In Defense of Miracles*; *Love Your God With All Your Mind* and *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. These guys are not liberals, or new age wing nuts. They're not crazy.

What they're saying just seems crazy.

The evidence

In their collaborative effort *Beyond Death* they devote a chapter to reincarnation and present some interesting evidence.

A case they call typical, involved a four-year-old boy named Prakesh who suddenly started telling his parents his actual name was Nirmal and that his home was in a different village. He told them many details about his "real" family including the names of friends and relatives and what business his father was in. He repeatedly tried to run away to this



A CHRISTIAN TAKE ON REINCARNATION

“former” home. Five years later things got really interesting when:

“... Nirmal’s ‘real’ father visited Prakesh’s village and Prakesh recognized him. It was discovered that Nirmal was actually the name of the man’s son, who had died prior to Prakesh’s birth. Prakesh wanted to return ‘home,’ and subsequently was reunited more than once with those whom he claimed to have known in his previous existence. He recognized those he said were his former relatives and friends, greeted them with appropriate emotions, and provided precise details concerning the furnishings of his earlier home. Yet he was puzzled by the changes that had occurred in the intervening ten years.”

Another explanation?

This freaky little story is pretty compelling and it is easy to see why it and others like it are viewed as good evidence of reincarnation. But reincarnation does not fit with

the Christian worldview; in the Bible we are told we live once, die and then are raised to a new life in a different, perfect state. We die once, and are raised once, not again and again and again as the reincarnation model states.

So reincarnation is not true. But the evidence for it seems to be. What is a Christian to think? Is there another explanation that will fit the evidence? A better explanation?

Yes. We need to look at the evidence a bit more deeply but by doing so we get a better picture of what is really going on.

In a bit of an ironic twist Moreland and Habermas turn to a reincarnation advocate to find the information they need to undermine the reincarnation position. Ian Stevenson presents a number of cases in which a child

claimed to be the reincarnation of someone who was still alive when the child was born. This is clearly impossible. Reincarnation is supposed to involve the passing on of a soul from a dead body to a new one, not the passing on of a soul from a living body to another body.

So, for example, I cannot be a reincarnation of my brother Jeff, since my brother is still alive and still very much in possession of his soul. He cannot pass it on to a new body until his old body is done with it. But in the cases Stevenson cites the reincarnated individual was born before the “earlier incarnation”

had died. In one case in India “the deceased individual died when the second person was three and a half years old.”

The spiritual realm

Reincarnation has no explanation for such events... but the Bible does.

In Scripture we learn that evil spirits can take possession of a person and control both what they say and what they do (see, for example, Mark 5:1-15).

Scripture also tells us that these evil spirits have been living on earth for millennia. In the course of their time here they have undoubtedly seen a lot and had the chance to learn many facts and details about the lives of people long dead. They would know this information because they were actually there!

So the evidence for reincarnation can be explained just as easily, and indeed better, as evidence of demonic possession. These people are not reincarnated versions of some former person – they are possessed by demons who have memories of events from long ago.

Additionally Habermas and Moreland note that many of these “reincarnation cases” occur in cultures that have very occultic religions. They quote one former Hindu guru who described his religion this way: “My world was filled with spirits and gods and occult powers, and my obligation from childhood was to give each its due.” Perhaps the reason “reincarnation” is more common in these cultures is because they openly and blatantly worship evil spirits. It doesn’t seem too far a stretch to suppose that in a culture that prays to evil spirits possession by these spirits might be more common.

Conclusion

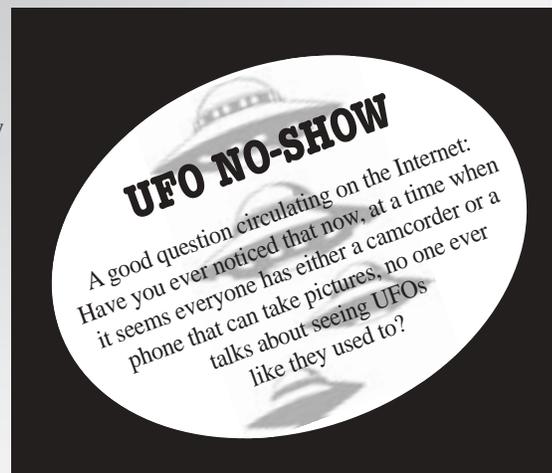
Christians too often forget that there is both a material world *and* a spiritual one. It seems that if we can’t see something, we disbelieve in it, acting much like the world does. Yet we profess to believe in an invisible God!

Sure, there are good reasons to be skeptical when we hear of things like reincarnation stories, since many of them are outright frauds. There is also great reason to be skeptical of palm readers, astrologers, mediums, witches and Ouiji boards. But because we know there is more to the world than can be seen with just our eyes, our skepticism should not descend into cynicism. That means that we shouldn’t just dismiss these “National Enquirer-ish” sorts of things and we certainly should not play around with them. Demons do exist, and they are a force to be reckoned with.

Fortunately God is more powerful than any demon, so as long as we rely on his strength and ask Him for his help in our spiritual battles, we have nothing to fear in this life... or our next.



People who believe in reincarnation say that after you die, you return to earth again . . . and again . . . and again.





THE HOPELESS MOURNER

by Christine Farenhorst

In 1853, a young man by the name of Samuel Weisz, living in the Pest portion of the city now known as Budapest, tried to enter law school. Finding the doors of the law schools in that city closed to Jews, he began to study what he considered the next best thing to books — the Talmud. A rabbi-in-the-bud, he married a pretty, young Jewish girl, fathered a little boy and settled down. However, disaster was in the offing. His wife died leaving him with a tiny baby for which to care. And as the fresh-out-of-rabbinical school, eager scholar juggled the duties of diaper changing and Talmud study, he was dismayed that no congregation tendered a call.

In time, however, Samuel was blessed by providence with a second wife. Anxious for a job, Samuel answered a little ad in a German newspaper from a newly formed Jewish congregation in Appleton, Wisconsin. In sore need of a rabbi, this congregation offered him a job. In the spring of 1874 the entire Weisz family, now consisting of Samuel, Cecilia, Herman and Ehrich, emigrated to the United States.

Pies made the man

If it is said of some children that they are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, little Ehrich Weisz was born with a silver key in his mouth. When he was only a toddler, his mother would bake apple pies of which he was inordinately fond. Climbing onto the counter and opening the kitchen cupboard, the small tyke feasted on dessert. In order to stop him from being able to steal the food, Cecilia



MOURING MAGIC MAN: *He had wealth and fame but what he really wanted was a message from his dead mother.*

Weisz put a lock on the cupboard. Perhaps she should have spanked him but who is to say whether she did not — it's not recorded. In any case, the next time she made pies, the child got into the cupboard again picking the lock with no trouble at all. A subsequent double padlock made no difference! Young Ehrich had inadvertently latched onto what would become his life's vocation.

America was, at first, kind to the Weisz family. Blissfully Samuel settled into the community of Appleton, devoting himself to the Torah. But before long troubles began manifesting themselves. The European Jew was not appreciated, was considered old-fashioned and was not able to assimilate into American culture. Some nine years after emigration, Samuel found himself out on the American street with no job. The family moved to Milwaukee. Samuel tried his hand at kosher butchering, performing circumcisions on the side. Ehrich, who was now ten, sold newspapers and shined shoes to augment the family income — a family which had grown by six more children.

If Samuel Weisz failed to impress the American congregation with his preaching and teaching, he also failed to implant a sense of Biblical direction in Ehrich. Ehrich was a likeable enough child, who loved playing on a trapeze and swing in the backyard. His agility on the bars was so amazing that he was able to put on shows and charge the neighborhood children admission. Traveling circuses captured his imagination and he would sit for hours by the railroad tracks watching them

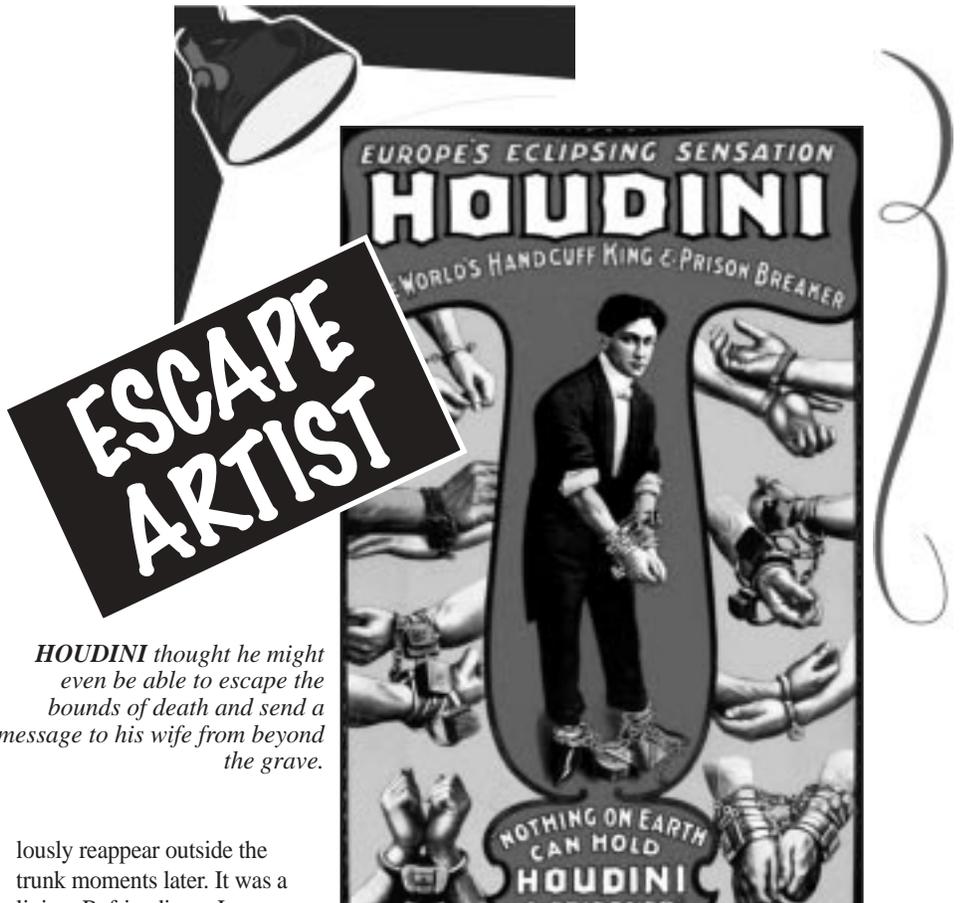
pass. The magicians in the sideshows held his attention as his father had never been able to and a lifelong love for a world of make-believe was born.

Deathbed promise

In time father Samuel's job as butcher and circumciser also petered out, so to speak, and he moved on to New York where he set up a Hebrew school. A small three-room apartment tested mother Weisz' patience to the limit. Ehrich was thirteen now, had never attended school for any length of time and was bound and determined to become a magician. In the evening he conducted shows in the cellar, together with one of his brothers, and in the daytime was an assistant necktie-lining cutter. Ehrich, or Harry as he was now known, was eighteen when his father died. On his deathbed Samuel called Harry and made the boy renew a promise he had made when he was twelve. "Swear on the Torah that you will always provide for your mother and never let her want." Harry swore and kept that promise. He always cared for his mother.

Dexterity in tricks and illusions increased. Harry read every book available on the subject. He also visited locksmiths, offered to work for free and became more and more proficient at handling and recognizing the various locks and keys in circulation. When he was twenty he married Bess Rahner, an eighteen-year-old Roman Catholic girl. Her mother did not approve of him and his mother did not approve of her. However, after they were married by a justice of the peace, a rabbi and a priest, in that order, Cecilia Weisz relented. The marriage effectively broke up the Weisz brothers' act and Bess became Harry's new partner.

Robert Houdin, a French illusionist, had been Harry's role model since his teenage years. By adding an 'i' to Houdin, he felt he could become like his hero. Thus the name Harry Houdini was coined. Bess and Harry, as Mr. and Mrs. Houdini, signed up with the Welsh Brothers Circus in 1895. Bess sang and Harry was a caged, wild man, a rather demeaning role but it paid the bills. Together they also performed a trick called the Metamorphosis in which Harry was put into a sack, placed in a padlocked trunk only to miracu-



HOUDINI thought he might even be able to escape the bounds of death and send a message to his wife from beyond the grave.

lously reappear outside the trunk moments later. It was a living. Befriending a Japanese balancing group the rather illiterate Houdini taught the Asians English in return for being taught the yoga principle of muscle control as well as the art of swallowing and regurgitating objects. From the Welsh Brothers Circus, the Houdinis moved on to perform in a number of other venues.

A Yankee export

In 1900 the Houdinis, who had saved just enough money for one month abroad, sailed to England. Harry found the way to Scotland Yard, challenged the police there to handcuff him and they obliged. The superintendent remarked as he stretched Houdini's arms around a pillar and placed a pair of English "derbies" on his wrists, "Here's how we fasten Yankee criminals who come over and get into trouble." Grinning he turned to leave, together with the other policemen who were watching, but before they reached the door they heard the cuffs fall off Houdini's hands as he shouted, "Here's how Yankees open the handcuffs!"

England loved Houdini. They flocked to see the man who could open gaols, cuffs and manacles. The years of studying locks paid off. He triumphantly broke out of cells built by Oliver Cromwell, murderer's cells, and the

cells of famous jailbreakers. Houdini basked in the public adulation and, with Bess in tow, traveled on to Germany. There he obtained permission to jump off one of Dresden's bridges into the Elbe River while fully manacled. A champion swimmer with extraordinarily strong lungs, he could hold his breath for almost four minutes. Hundreds were lined along the banks of the river as Houdini, handcuffed, leg chains and irons on, jumped off the bridge. Untied and smiling, he resurfaced to loud cheers and the publicity was tremendous.

A few months later, back in London, Houdini saw a beautiful dress, (one which had been designed expressly for Queen Victoria who had just died), displayed in a shop window. Staring at it for a long time, he surmised that it would probably fit his mother and resolutely went into the shop asking for the proprietor. After a long discussion the dress was sold to Houdini, who immediately sent for his mother to come and visit him in Europe. Upon her arrival he took her to Budapest. Renting the courtyard of a big hotel, he invited relatives from all over Hungary and threw a party. He had his mother wear the Queen Victoria dress and crowned her queen for a day. Then he escorted her back en route to America.



Houdini exposed numerous frauds, including the taking of “spirit pictures”— photos supposedly taken of people long dead. To expose the hoax Houdini had a picture taken of himself with the “ghost” of Abraham Lincoln.

If you can make it there. . .

Europe was at Houdini’s feet, but America had not yet acknowledged the emigrant boy from Hungary. He bought a home in New York and it became the base from which he and Bess traveled. An oversized bathtub enabled him to practice underwater feats. Books on magic, Bess’ cookbooks, autographs of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, a collection of Lincoln letters, the original Martin Luther Bible, as well as plenty of material about circus freaks and anatomical anomalies, bulged out of library shelves. Houdini avidly studied the volumes dealing with magic, but it is not recorded whether or not he read the Bible. Childless, the Houdinis had a little dog, which they took along everywhere they went and to which they were devoted.

Having established his home for life, Houdini now turned his attention to securing a burial plot in the event of death. He bought one at Machpelah Cemetery in Cypress Hills close to Brooklyn. He transferred the remains of his father and his older

brother Herman there. Before committing them to the new family plot, however, he opened both caskets to look at their remains and remarked, “brother Herman’s teeth are in excellent condition.”

Eager for American acclaim, Houdini worked hard at a new stunt which he dubbed the Milk Can Act. In his own words, “Ladies and Gentlemen, my latest invention – The Milk Can. I will be placed in this can and it will be filled with water. A committee from the audience will lock the padlocks and place the keys down in front of the footlights. I will attempt to escape. Should anything happen, and should I fail to appear within a certain time, my assistants will open the curtains, rush in, smash the Milk Can and do everything possible to save my life. . . Music, Maestro, please!” As the minutes ticked on the audience became nervous. But always, just as the assistant held up the ax, ready to smash the can, Houdini emerged. Wet and grinning, he bowed as the public cheered. People never tired of this stunt. It was a trick, of course, but no one cared.



A son’s love

Houdini loved his mother very much. He had faithfully kept the promise he had made to his father on his deathbed and had always sent part of his salary home to his mother. While playing in a theater in New York in 1912, Houdini requested to have his salary paid in gold. The manager agreed and filled a canvas bag with a thousand dollars worth of gold coins. Houdini polished these coins, and took them to his mother’s room. His wife records that he said, “Mother, do you remember the promise I made to father years ago; that I would always look after you? Look what I bring you now! Hold out your apron!” And with that he poured the coins into her lap. Then they both cried.

Cecilia Weisz suffered a paralytic stroke in the summer of 1913. Houdini was on tour in Europe. Two days after the stroke she died while trying to form the words of a message for her magician son. A cable was sent to Copenhagen, where Houdini was playing. Heartbroken, he immediately traveled back to New York. For weeks afterward he could not sleep and would walk the night hours away, usually winding up in a graveyard – any graveyard. During the day he visited his mother’s grave, often throwing himself upon the mound of earth under which she was interred. He craved physical contact with her. Her letters, which he had saved for at least thirteen years, were transcribed into good German and typed up so that he could read them more easily. The clock he had given her was stopped at the hour of her death. Cards were printed with her photo and the words “If God ever permitted an Angel to walk the earth in human form, it was my Mother” were engraved on them and sent to friends. And Houdini brooded endlessly about what it was which she had been trying to say at the last.

World War I

In time his zest for work returned and he began to perform again. Always convinced that the key to his success lay in the fact that he could “conquer fear” Houdini is quoted as saying: “When I am stripped

and manacled, nailed securely within a weighted packing case and thrown into the sea, or when I am buried alive under six feet of earth, it is necessary to preserve absolute serenity of spirit. I have to work with great delicacy and lightning speed. If I grow panicky, I am lost. And if something goes wrong, if there is some little accident or mishap, some slight miscalculation, I am lost, unless all my faculties are working on high, free from mental tension or strain."

The First World War had begun. Houdini enlisted but was turned down because of his age. He copyrighted and legally changed his name from Weisz to Houdini, refusing to reveal his real last name to the newspapers. Embracing Appleton, Wisconsin as his birthplace, he assumed the day that America declared war against Germany as his birthdate. Performing for the boys in many wartime shows, he entertained troops and sold War Bonds.

Planning a message from beyond

The First World War took many lives and the influenza pandemic, which took twenty million more lives, followed hard on its heels in 1919 and 1920. There were few homes that were not touched by casualties of war or influenza. The countless deaths and the shallow beliefs held by many, brought spiritualism into vogue. Many people, including Houdini, had a burning desire to communicate with the dead.

Houdini went to séance after séance, looking for any word from the great beyond. There was none. Bess reported later: "Even after numerous disappointments, whenever we visited a new medium, Houdini, with closed eyes, would join in the opening hymn, and then sit with a rapt, hungry look on his face that would make my heart ache. I knew the message that he wanted, and sometimes I felt tempted to give the medium the word that he longed for. I would be tempted – but I could not betray his trust in me. So the séance would go on – the same guesses, the same trivial nonsense, the usual spook tricks that Houdini could do with his hands tied. The rapt look would fade from Houdini's face. And at the next visit to his mother's grave, I

would hear him say, 'Well, Mama, I have not heard.'"

Houdini never kept any Jewish ceremonies – with one exception. This exception was the Kaddish, a prayer for the dead. This prayer he recited on the anniversary of his father's death. No matter where he was he would seek out a synagogue and say the five-verse form of this prayer. He also kept a little notebook in which he recorded carefully the dates when friends, relatives or acquaintances had died. Haunting cemeteries, he asserted: "If it is possible for anyone to get through after death, that person will be me."

If Houdini had walked through the pages of the Bible as doggedly as he walked through cemeteries looking for life among the dead, he would have found the answer for which he was looking. "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren," says Paul in 1 Thes. 4:13 and 14, "concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."

Houdini finally gave up on the séances. Instead he began an exposé of mediumistic trickery. Reproducing elaborate phenomena

mediums used, he convinced a great many audiences that most mediums were frauds. Yet, at the same time, he also continued to make pacts with associates, friends and his wife about contact after death – piercing the veil, he called it.

"Hammer-like blows"

Houdini was an athletic man. He swam well, exercised regularly, and was in top form. An interesting sideline to his physical abilities is that he had prehensile toes. He often removed his shoes and stockings with his toes, tied and retied the knots of the shoes, while in conversation with others. No doubt these abilities stood him in good stead as he starred in and produced some movies in the early 1920s, forming the Houdini Pictures Corporation. He only made a few movies in which he performed incredible feats.

In October of 1926, at the onset of a tour, Houdini had an engagement at McGill University in Canada. He lectured on spirit fraud and mediums he had exposed. Afterwards, students and faculty came to talk with him. Later that week, still in Montreal, a first-year student came to his dressing room. The following was related by another student who was also present: "A student,



whose name was Whitehead, asked Houdini if it was true that punches in the stomach did not hurt him. Houdini remarked that his stomach could resist much, though he didn't speak of it in superlative terms. Thereupon Whitehead gave Houdini some very hammer-like blows below the belt, first securing Houdini's permission to strike him. Houdini was reclining at the time with his right side nearest Whitehead, and the said student was more or less bending over him. The blows fell on that part of the stomach to the right of the navel. . . I do not know how many blows were struck. I am certain, however, of at least four very hard and severe body blows because at the end of the second or third blow I verbally protested against this sudden onslaught on the part of the first-year student, using the words, 'Hey there. You must be crazy. What are you doing?' or words to that effect, but Whitehead continued striking Houdini with all his strength. Houdini stopped him suddenly in the midst of a punch, with a gesture that he had had enough. At the time Whitehead was striking Houdini, the latter looked as though he was in extreme pain and winced as each blow was struck. Houdini immediately after stated that he had had no opportunity to prepare himself against the blows. . . ."

Houdini had broken his ankle just previous to coming to Montreal. His reaction to pain and illness was a mixture of ego and a high threshold of pain. The foot injury did not stop him from lecturing and he devised a special brace for his foot so that, against all medical advice, he could go on with his tour. Believing himself to be immune from injury, he had performed in pain and distress on many occasions. After the blows on the stomach, Houdini felt some distress but dismissed it. He boarded a train for Detroit and, as they say, "went on with the show." His temperature was 104 and prior to his performance he was diagnosed by a doctor to have appendicitis. In the middle of the show, however, he collapsed and had to be carried offstage and rushed to the hospital.

Surgeons at the hospital operated immediately. Houdini, by the way, insisted on walking into the operating room by himself. After the operation the prognosis was

that he would not live for more than twelve hours. But, contrary to the prognosis, Houdini's condition stabilized. He hung on determinedly for a week, even undergoing a second operation for peritonitis. Twice a day the hospital posted bulletins on his condition and most people believed he would escape from this challenge even as he had so often escaped from coffins submerged in pools, crates lowered into rivers and straitjackets suspended from cranes.



. . . he convinced a great many audiences that most mediums were frauds.



Occasionally Houdini talked to those around his bed. At one point he addressed the chief surgeon who had operated on him. "Doctor, you know I always wanted to be a surgeon, but I never could. I have always regretted it." The surgeon was surprised. "Why, Mr. Houdini," he said, "here you are the greatest magician and the greatest entertainer of your age. You make countless thousands of people happy. You have an unlimited income and you are admired and respected by everybody. And I'm just an ordinary 'dub' of a surgeon." Houdini smiled and said, "Perhaps those things are true, doctor, but the difference between you and me is that you actually do things for people and I am in most every respect a fake."

A message never heard

Two days before he died, Houdini motioned that Bess should come close and as

she bent over him he whispered secret words in her ear by which she would know him if and when he could break through the bonds of death. The last words he said were "Robert Ingersoll." Ingersoll was the great, fashionable agnostic of the nineteenth century and a man whose newspaper clippings Houdini collected.

All the things that Houdini had taken along for his last tour had been sent back from Detroit to New York, with the exception of a bronze casket in which he had intended to be buried alive and come out. It was used as his funeral bier. He was buried at Machpelah Cemetery with a packet of his mother's letters under his head as he requested.

Bess spent a lot of time trying to contact her husband. Every Sunday at the hour of his death she shut herself in her room opposite his photograph and waited for a sign. She also posted a standing offer of \$10,000 for any medium who could produce the secret message. But no one did and towards the end of 1928 the offer was withdrawn. On the anniversary of Houdini's death Bess always redoubled her efforts and held a one-hour séance. It was not until 1936 that she finally became resigned to not hearing from him. She died in 1943 but was not buried at Machpelah Cemetery next to her husband because she was not Jewish.

SOURCES:

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Martin Luther

A brief biography

by Cor Hoff

Martin Luther was born in 1483 in Eisleben, Germany. He had a strict upbringing, which seemed to have a lasting effect on Luther, making him fearful of his sin and continually worried about his salvation.

His father wanted him to become a lawyer, but Luther was drawn to the study of Scriptures. After receiving his M.A. in 1505 from the University in Erfurt, he kept a vow he had made to become a monk, and joined the Augustinian monastery, where he studied the Scriptures for three years. In 1507 Luther was ordained a priest and lectured on the Scriptures and Philosophy at the University of Wittenberg. There he became a powerful and influential preacher.

1510-1518 Ninety-four theses?

As professor of biblical Exegesis at Wittenberg (1512-1546), he began to preach the doctrine of salvation by faith rather than by works. This was a very different stance from the Roman Catholic Church. An archbishop of the Roman Church published 94 theses favoring the sale of indulgences, which were a type of "get out of purgatory" certificate. The Pope wanted people to believe that the Church had a great storehouse of good deeds – extra good deeds done by the saints and by Christ – which the Pope could hand out so others could benefit from them. Or which the Pope could sell to whomever had the money. In other words, salvation could be bought.

A year later, on October 31 1517, Luther drew up his own list of 95 theses on indulgences in response to the archbishop's

94 theses from the year before. Luther denied that the Pope had the right to forgive sins by way of indulgences and maintained that the Pope could not sell the good deeds of the saints and of Christ to help people leave purgatory quicker. Luther nailed these 95 theses to the Church door at Wittenberg. It was common in those days to make your ideas and grievances known in this fashion. In 1518 Pope Leo X summoned Luther to Rome to answer for these theses, and retract these teachings.

1519-1528 A diet of worms

There were those who felt it unsafe for him to go to Rome to answer to these 95 theses so, in 1519, they had the hearing

in Germany instead. It was at this time that Luther started to attack the papal system more boldly. In 1520 he wrote his famous book *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae prelude* (A Prelude concerning the Babylonian Captivity of the Church). In this treatise he attacked the doctrinal system of the Church of Rome. This resulted in a papal bull containing 41 theses against him. Luther burned the papal bull publicly, his performance watched by the professors of the University of Wittenberg, its students and the town's citizens. This resulted in his excommunication and he was summoned to the Diet of Worms in 1521 where he was to retract his teachings. "Diet of Worms" sounds rather strange, so let me

DEFINITIONS

Purgatory: Roman Catholics believe that after Christians die they still have to be punished for their sins before they can enter heaven. So before entering heaven, dead believers are first sent to purgatory where they undergo a limited torment to pay off their sins.

Babylonian Captivity: In 1309 a French pope, Clement V, moved the capital of the Roman church from Rome, to the French city of Avignon where it remained for almost 70 years. Roman Catholics refer to this period of time as the Babylonian Captivity, comparing it to the 70 years of captivity the Hebrews endured at the hands of the Babylonians. In 1377 the church capital was moved back to Rome.

Peasants' Revolt: also known as the Peasants' War, it lasted from 1524-1525 and involved as many as 300,000 peasants. By the time it was ended an estimated 100,000 were dead.

Transubstantiation: the belief that the bread and wine used during the Lord's Supper celebration turn into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Reformed Christians don't believe in transubstantiation and instead say that the bread and wine only *symbolize* the body and blood of Christ.

**Martin Luther
at the movies
PART II
Luther**

Starring: Joseph Fiennes, Peter Ustinov

Release date: Sept 26, 2003

Director: Eric Till

Rating: PG 13 – some violence

by Jon Dykstra

You can tell Halloween is approaching: horror films like *House of the Dead*, *Underworld* and a remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are all being released just in time for this devilish day.

But Oct 31st is more than just Halloween; it is also the 486th anniversary of the day that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Wittenberg church door. And this year a film is being released to commemorate that pivotal moment in history. *Luther* looks like a pretty lavish production, with a cast of hundreds, some pretty big names stars and historic European locales.

At the time this article was written *Luther* hadn't yet been released, but there are a number of reasons to be optimistic about the film. It seems to have a very Lutheran bent to it, or in other words this doesn't look like a Hollywood perversion of history. *Luther's* official website links to some Christian youth websites (when is the last time you saw a movie do that?) and it has been advertised in a number of Protestant Christian publications including *Christianity Today*.

One possible negative is that the movie has been rated PG-13 for scenes of violence.

The film opens Sept 26 in the US, but Canadians and Australians will have to wait at least a couple more months. For more information, or to see the film's trailer, go to www.lutherthemovie.com.

tell you what it was. In old Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, government assemblies were often called "diets." This particular assembly was held in the German city of Worms, thus it was called the "Diet of Worms." Luther refused to retract his writings and an order was given to burn all his books. This order (known as the Edict of Worms) also declared him to be an outlaw and anyone could kill him without legal problems. For his own protection Luther was seized by his friends on his return from Worms, and hidden safely away in the Wartburg fortress.

When Luther was "kidnapped" by his friends it was not publicly known that Luther was safe, so many feared the worst. German painter **Albrecht Durer** wrote in his diary: "who will henceforth bring to us the gospel so clearly? Oh God, how could he not have written for us for the next ten or twenty years?" Unknown to Durer, Luther in reality was already busy writing. His first work was a commentary on Psalm 68. He also wrote a letter to the Archbishop Albrecht from Mainz telling him to stop the

sale of the indulgences in his area. Amazingly the Archbishop listened to that "little monk" who had been excommunicated by the Pope. While at Wartburg, Luther wrote a great number of sermons – examples for his followers. It was here that he translated the New Testament into the German language in only a few months time. The devil may have thought he was winning by taking Luther out of circulation, but this time period turned out to be very beneficial for the Church.

However, when Luther, who also was a respected leader, could no longer lead, some things did take a turn for the worse in the Reformation. Dr. Andries Karlstadt, another professor at Wittenberg and a colleague of Luther, took over the leadership of the Reformation. But he was not a good leader. He thought the reformation was going too slow and he decided he was going to make sure that it sped up under his leadership. Space does not allow me to go into detail, but the situation turned out to be disastrous, especially when others such as Gabriel Zwilling joined Karlstadt,



and **Thomas Munzer**, a sectarian from Zwickau arrived.

Munzer taught that the Bible was irrelevant and that ministers were not needed. This caused the University of Wittenberg to lose its students. Furthermore, public protests, of which the Peasants' Revolt became the worst and bloodiest, caused many more problems. When Luther heard all these things happening,

.....

***The Archbishop listened
to that "little monk"
who had been
excommunicated by
the Pope.***

.....

he returned to Wittenberg after only a ten-month stay at the Wartburg. Luther did not fear for his life because he knew he was doing God's work. And once more through his faithful preaching, at first daily in Wittenberg, and then across the region, Luther was able to stem the tide of destruction and prevent the collapse of the Reformation. We see here that the Lord of the Church provides men in times of need.

1529 Zwingli and Calvin

At the famous conference at Magdeburg in 1529, Luther engaged the Swiss reformer, **Ulrich Zwingli** and others with the controversial question of transubstantiation. This created many hard feelings.

However Zwingli distributed many booklets by Luther. Zwingli was appreciative of Luther to the extent he called Luther: "the long expected Elia, the hero sent by God, who with overwhelming weapons would renew Christendom. An excellent warrior of God, who with such great zeal has perused the Scriptures as no one has done for the last thousand years before him." Luther's impact on Zwingli caused

Zwingli to change his humanist views and made Zwingli understand that righteousness is by faith alone.

Moritz Goltsh, a bookstore owner in Wittenberg, presented Luther with a book by **John Calvin**. In it Calvin addressed the strong polemic disagreements which emerged when Luther, Zwingli and John Cœcolampadius could not agree on the explanation and meaning of the Lord's Supper. Luther remarked about Calvin: "Moritz, this is certainly a well educated and devout man; from the beginning I would have let this man deal with this question which we have been battling."

Calvin had never met Luther but said of him: "If he would call me a devil, I would still honor him and call him an outstanding servant of God." It was Calvin's desire to work together with Luther. It is also interesting to note that Luther's best friend was **Philipp Melanchton** and at a Church meeting in Frankfort, Calvin met Melanchton. They establish a lasting friendship, and Luther's friend Melanchton also appreciated Calvin. Luther said of Calvin: "Oh, I would like to die at his heart."

One only wishes that the reformers had been able to stay in close contact as perhaps then they could have avoided a split in Protestantism.

1530-1546 Death

In 1530 Melanchton ably represented Luther at the Diet of Augsburg, and wrote up a summary of Luther's theological views in what became known as the Augsburg Confession. This marked the culmination of the German Reformation.

Luther died in 1546 at Eisleben and was buried at Wittenberg. The man was endowed with broad human sympathies, massive energy, manly and affectionate simplicity, and a rich, if sometimes coarse humor. He was undoubtedly a spiritual genius. His intuitions of divine truth were bold, vivid and penetrating. He possessed the power of kindling other souls with fire and conviction. God had given him many qualities to reform His erring Church. 

Martin Luther at the movies PART I

Martin Luther

Starring: Niall MacGinnis

Release date: 1953

Director: Irving Pichel

Rating: G

reviewed by Jon Dykstra

Martin Luther is the type of role actors must salivate over. This was a strong weak man – overcome by torment and yet still able to stand up to the most powerful men of his day. This is also the type of role that few actors could pull off but Niall MacGinnis does it brilliantly. His portrayal of Luther, as he stands before the Diet of Worms, captures the contradiction of the man – even as he stands defiant he is distraught and trembling.

The first time I saw this film was years ago back in grade 6 or 7. It was an old film, in black and white, shown in a large echoing gymnasium on a small TV screen. It didn't include even a single car chase. But it was great.

This movie will be a treat even to those not interested in Luther – it is a solid well-acted drama with a great story to tell (and it doesn't have any nudity, violence, or swearing!). But if you are eager to know more about this Reformation giant, then you absolutely must see this flick. It will give you a thorough overview of his life, from his tormented time in the monastery all the way to his marriage to an ex-nun. About the only thing it doesn't deal with is Luther's coarse sense of humor, but then again if it dealt with that the teachers in my school probably wouldn't have been able to show it to us.

Recently re-released on video in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary, it is available for purchase at many Christian bookstores. You can also get it for only \$4.99 US at www.christianbook.com.

A funny thing happened on the way...

AN AGNOSTIC SINGS CHRISTIANITY'S PRAISES

by Michael Wagner



A person's religious perspective has a very significant effect on the way he or she views the social convulsions that are engulfing Canada and other Western countries. Christians see such things as the increasing legal privileges of "sexual minorities," the growing number of single-parent families, and widespread abortion as evidences of a decadent society. Secular humanists view those same phenomena as evidence of the spread of freedom. People are no longer confined to traditional gender roles, and women are no longer forced to carry a pregnancy to term. Abortion and sexual permissiveness are freedoms to be celebrated, from a secular humanist perspective. Society is getting better, not worse, according to this religious view.

Why America does not need religion

One such secular humanist, political scientist Guenter Lewy of the University of Massachusetts, decided to write a book defending secular humanism from conservative Christians who he saw as presenting a threat to individual liberty. Unexpectedly, however, as he evaluated the social effects of Christianity versus the effects of humanism, the focus of his book changed. Secular humanism wasn't the key to human happiness that he had thought. The book resulting from his efforts is *Why America Needs Religion: Secular Modernity and Its Discontents* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996).

He describes his change of mind as follows: "A funny thing, if one can call it that,

happened on the way to the completion of this book, which I envisaged as a defense of secular humanism and ethical relativism. Positions that I had always supported and taken for granted turned out to be, on new reflection, far less convincing than I had assumed" (p. x). In the end, the book he finally wrote demonstrates the social benefits of Christianity, and encourages Christians to take their religion more seriously. And this is especially surprising because Lewy remains a "religious agnostic" much as he had been before writing the book.

Those religious humanists

According to secular humanism, Christianity is an oppressive religion. Christianity allegedly promotes intolerance and bigotry, and imprisons its adherents within a strict moral code. As societies such as Canada abandon Christianity, human life will improve. Some secular humanists see the shift away from Christianity as mankind "outgrowing" the need for religion, as if belief in Christianity reflects some sort of immaturity. They think secular humanism represents the triumph of rationality over religion. But they fail to see

that secular humanism is itself a religion, just as much as Christianity. This is what makes secular humanism so subtle and clever; it is the religion that masquerades as not being a religion. Secular humanists believe they are following reason and science rather than religion. But their faith in what they call "reason" and "science" is fundamentally based upon religious presuppositions about the nature of the world and humanity. Despite their denials, secular humanists are religious, but their religion is anti-Christianity.

As society becomes more secular, things should be getting better from a humanist perspective, but instead, social problems are actually getting much worse. As Lewy notes, secular humanism attacks the traditional family which it views as an unnecessary arrangement based upon Christian beliefs. Secular humanism's "successful attack upon tradition has encouraged an extravagant individualism that recognizes no other moral standard than personal fulfillment. Freeing human beings from the constraints of inherited beliefs has led to the spread and toleration of all kinds of harmful behavior and has weakened one of the most important traditional institutions of society – the family" (p. 28). And this weakening has proved harmful to the most vulnerable members of society, the children. Concern for the traditional family is supported by much research that has been undertaken by people who are certainly not trying to provide support for Christian views. "There is general agreement among social scientists that in today's

society family structure has become the most important determinant of children's well-being, more important than race, geography, or any other factor" (p. 44).

Traditional families kick butt

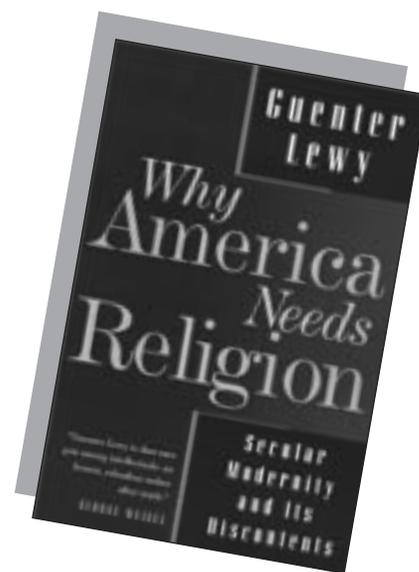
Yet it's not just any form of family that benefits children. Instead, "there exists an impressive body of research that supports the superiority of the traditional family over all rival arrangements" (p. 44). The currently fashionable view that any form of family is equally good and wholesome is simply not true. It is not true from a Christian perspective, of course, but it is also untrue from the perspective of current social science research. Secular humanism undermines the well-being of children by undermining the traditional family.

Not only does Christianity have better social benefits than secular humanism by supporting the traditional family over alternative family forms, but there is evidence of other social benefits of Christianity as well. Lewy surveys a large number of studies covering various aspects of behavior to show the positive results of Christianity. Using the word "religious" in the sense of "traditional religion," teenagers with a strong religious commitment are less likely to be involved in delinquent behavior. Similarly, adults who are religious are less likely to commit crimes. Religious teenagers are less likely to be sexually promiscuous and have out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Religious adults are less likely to have unstable marriages or have a divorce. This, again, is very significant for the well-being of children, because divorce has serious negative consequences for children. Lewy summarizes the evidence this way: "Whether it be juvenile delinquency, adult crime, prejudice, out-of-wedlock births, or marital conflict and divorce, there is a significantly lower rate of such indicators of moral failure and social ills among believing Christians. The vast majority of the research available supports this finding" (p. 112).

Contrary to the expectations of secular humanists, the move away from Christianity is not making society better. The increasing dominance of secular humanism is worsening life for many people. The secular humanist worldview encourages individual fulfillment at the expense of community, which is to say, at the expense of other people. Secular humanists, as Lewy points out, "reduce ethical issues such as sexual morality, abortion, and the use of drugs to issues of civil liberties. They show no awareness that doing right is more important than exercising rights. They herald the toleration of destructive behavior as a blow struck on behalf of personal freedom. They turn moral relativism into a protective umbrella for all kinds of eccentricities, not to say moral depravities. Seeking to free us from what they regard as the encrusted moral beliefs of the past, they plead for the need to tolerate different lifestyles, including those that champion the fulfillment of unrestrained impulses and other destructive kinds of behavior" (p. 138). Secular humanism promotes a perspective that is harmful to human well-being. Conservative Christianity, on the other hand, enhances human well-being.

Humanism can only tear things down

Irving Kristol, a prominent American intellectual, notes that the dominance of secular humanism is leading to moral disarray. The rationalism of secular humanism provides a critique of traditional moral beliefs, but it cannot support a moral code itself. In his book *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (The Free Press, 1995), he writes (beginning with a secular humanist assumption), "If God is really dead, by what authority do we say any particular practice is prohibited or permitted? Pure reason alone cannot tell us that incest is wrong (so long as there are no offspring)" (p. 451). Furthermore, "Pure reason cannot



tell us that bestiality is wrong; indeed, the only argument against bestiality these days is that, since we cannot know whether animals enjoy it or not, it is a violation of 'animal rights'" (p. 451). Moral relativism cannot provide answers to the important ethical questions.

The social issues of our day largely reflect a religious struggle between the remnants of our Christian heritage and the onward march of secular humanism. Far from leading to a better society, the success of secular humanism is breaking down the very institutions that are most important in sustaining human well-being, especially the traditional family. Secular humanists accuse conservative Christian activists of forcing their religion on other people. But there is always a religious basis to any political and legal order, so if that basis is not Christianity, it will be some other religion. The choice is not between Christianity and neutrality (or absence of religion); the choice is between Christianity and another religion, in this case secular humanism. Secular humanism has been successful in parading itself as a non-religious perspective, but this charade needs to be exposed. The evidence is clear that as secular humanism supplants Christianity as the basis of our society, many people are suffering the consequences.



Halloween

– Another Nail in Death’s Coffin?

by Berwyn Hoyt

It is October 31. There is a knock on the door and, when it is opened, the inevitable, “Trick or Treat!”

“Ah, I’m sorry but I don’t have a treat for you. . . however, I can tell you a good Halloween story. In fact, this story is so good that quite a few people have died for it! Would you like to hear it?”

“Uh. . . alright.” says the tricking treater.

“Well, as you know, Halloween is all about the gruesome: demons and death. This story is about the conqueror of both the demons and of death: the Elixir of immortal life. Immortal life. . . no wonder so many people have died for it.

“This Elixir of life was the Son of God who came to earth as a man. He lived a perfect life – the kind that only the Son of God can live.

“But despite his perfection – or, perhaps, *because* of it – his countrymen hated him and murdered him. He was buried, some 2000 years ago in Palestine. This would normally have been considered the end of a good man.

“However, this was no ordinary man. God, his Father was so pleased with his Son’s perfection that he raised him up from the dead just three days later. He was the first man in history to rise from the dead and live immortally for ever.

“But he was not the last. He calls himself the ‘Water of Life’ and promises that anyone who believes in him will not die, but live forever. To date billions of



people have been given this Elixir of life, and his victory over death is celebrated weekly in churches all over the world.

What better treat could I give on Halloween than the story of death’s death?

“Now I’ve told you this story of the source of life, but any time you want to hear more about it, I don’t just tell it on Halloween. And even though many real men have died for this story you don’t need to. All you have to do is believe in the Son of God, and his life will be yours. The simple question is, ‘Do you want it?’”

What better treat could I give on Halloween than the story of death’s death? I figured that if they could choose their trick then I could choose my treat! This was my chance to speak – albeit in riddles – to an unbelieving generation. I had it all planned out. The day came, I rehearsed my gospel outline, night drew on. . . but no tricking treaters. . . no one knocked on our door to receive this life-giving treat. Not a single soul.

Perhaps the devil learned from last year that my house was not a good place to send an unprepared treater. Or, just perhaps, the Lord planned it that I would be so disappointed at the “lost” opportunity, that I would be motivated to write the idea up for all of you.

“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light.”

Luke 11:33

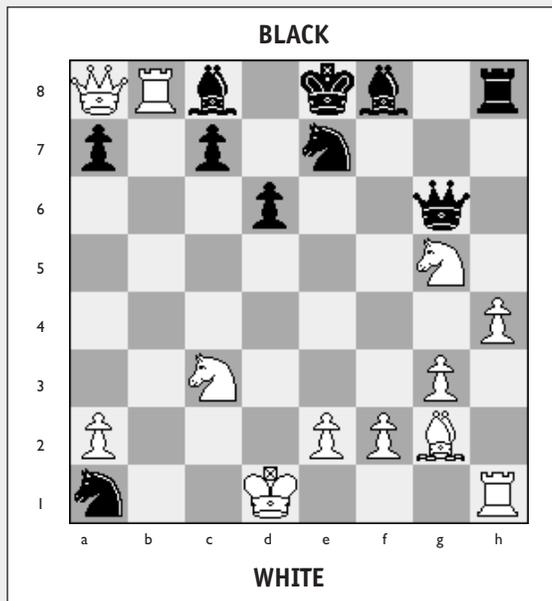


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NEW PUZZLES

Chess Puzzle # 93



WHITE to Mate in 3
Or, If it is BLACK's Move,
BLACK to Mate in 4

Riddle for Punsters #93 – “A Fowl Way to Solve Fowl Play”

Why is Inspector Mallard such a brilliant detective?
He uses de _ _ _ tive reasoning.

Problem to Ponder #93 – “Likely Flavours”

Jasmine has a bag of coloured candies. The bag has 3 reds (cherry flavour), 4 blues (blueberry), 5 yellows (lemon), 4 oranges (orange) and 2 greens (lime). Without looking, she draws out one candy. What is the probability or likelihood that it is (a) blueberry? (b) blueberry or lemon?

If the candy is cherry, she will eat it right away; otherwise, she will replace the candy. If a second candy is drawn, after drawing a cherry, what then would be the probability of (c) drawing a cherry? (d) drawing a lime?

If she instead draws out 2 candies one at a time from the original bag of candies, what is the probability that (e) both are blueberry? (f) one is blue and the other is lemon?

Word Challenge

By changing each letter, one letter at a time in any order, change BLOKE into GRAVY.

For example, BAG B L O K E
BAT - - - - -
HAT - - - - -
HIT - - - - -
- - - - -
G R A V Y

SOLUTIONS TO THE PREVIOUS (SEPTEMBER) PUZZLE PAGE

Answer to Riddle for Punsters # 92 – “Nuptial niceties”

The bride wanted her wedding dress to look perfect, but she had to walk in the rain, so her efforts were to no a v e i l (if you follow my t r a i n of thought) whereas her husband-to-be still managed to look well g r o o m e.

Answer to Problem to Ponder #92 - “Better Buy Bikes”

Johannes wants to buy a new bike now that end-of-summer sales are now on. Sport Shed has on sale for 25% off the \$240.00 bike (including assembly and kick stand) Johannes wants. The same bike sells for \$245 at Canadian Competitors (where customers get 1% cash back on all purchases, including taxes) and are on sale for 35% off, but assembly is \$15 and the kick stand \$8. At Mega-Mart the every-day discount price is \$203 (including stand) but a \$12 assembly fee is added on. Mega-Mart will also pay the 7% Provincial sales tax on Tuesdays, whereas both taxes must be paid at the other stores. Where will Johannes get the best price for an assembled bike with a stand if he has a \$25 Mega-Mart gift voucher?

At Sport Shed the bike will cost $\$240 \times .75 = \180 , then add 14% tax for a total of $\$180 \times 1.14 = \mathbf{\$205.20}$

At Canadian Competitors the bike will cost $\$245 \times .65 = \159.25 then add \$23.00 for assembly/stand to get \$182.25 then add 14% tax, resulting in $\$182.25 \times 1.14 = \207.77 , then take off 1% for a final price of $\$207.77 \times .99 = \mathbf{\$205.69}$

At Mega-Mart the bike will cost $\$203 + \$12 = \$215$, then add 7% tax to get $\$215 \times 1.07 = \230.05 , then reduce by the \$25 voucher, for a overall price of $\mathbf{\$205.05}$, the best price if bought on a Tuesday.

SOLUTION TO CHESS PUZZLE # 92



WHITE to Mate in 3

Descriptive Notation

1. RXP ch KxR
2. R-R4 ch K-N4
3. P-KB4 mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Rh1xh6 + Kh7xh6
2. Ra4-h4 + Kh6-g5
3. f2-f4 ++

Or, If it is BLACK's Move,

BLACK to Mate in 4

Descriptive Notation

1. _____ R-K8 ch
2. K-R2 RxR ch
3. KxR Q-B8 ch
4. K-R2 QxNP mate

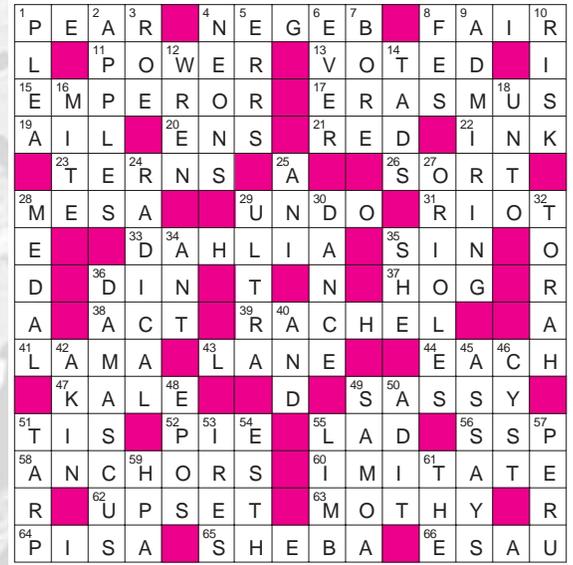
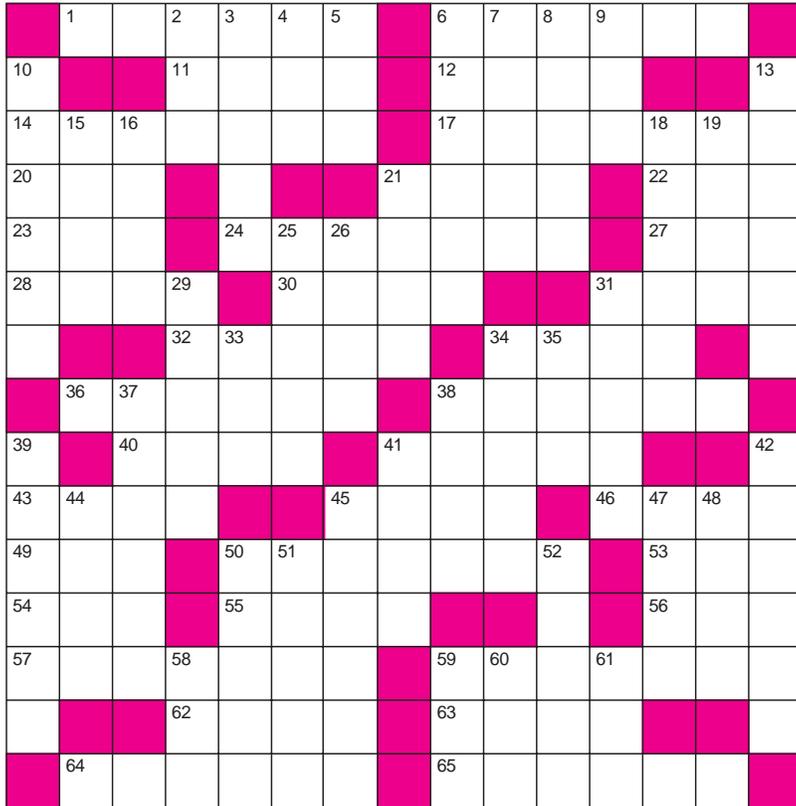
Algebraic Notation

1. _____ Re8-e1 +
2. Kg1-h2 Re1xh1 +
3. Kh2xh1 Qa6-f1 +
4. Kh1-h2 Qf1xg2 ++

Crossword Puzzle

Series 11, No. 7

Last month's solution Series 11, no. 6



Joyce

ACROSS:

1. Indonesian city and port
6. On fire
11. In a different form
12. Wood fastener
14. Bright round gourd
17. Tall African mammal
20. Lonely number
21. Certain high voice
22. Wrath
23. Poem
24. Highest mountain in the world
27. Fish catcher
28. Land portions
30. Eager
31. Small arachnid
32. Increased
34. Golf pegs
36. Fix
38. Clear stocks
40. Make a loan
41. Tall wading bird
43. Arabic chief
45. Interpret data
46. Ostrich-like bird
49. The upper limit
50. Acquired knowledge
53. Computer keyboard key
54. Friend in France
55. Likewise
56. Louse egg
57. Edible root
59. Gospel
62. Network of nerves
63. Similar to
64. Untied
65. Prepares to pray

DOWN:

2. Small sleep
3. Foot part
4. ___ gratia
5. Possess
6. Slightly slanted
7. Lures
8. Plural of lira
9. Wing
10. Thread holders
13. Wobble
15. Take apart
16. Encounter
18. End
19. Worry
21. Dry
25. Lacking liveliness
26. Always
29. Very powerful
31. Certain measurement
33. Cooking container
34. Barter
35. Long time
37. Cure-all
38. Kind of cereal
39. Lays out in a new pattern
41. Large fish
42. Child's toy
44. Parent
45. Scraped
47. Put up a picture
48. ___ Wiesel, writer who won the Nobel Peace Prize
50. Car paths
51. The choice part
52. Male duck
58. Theater abbr.
59. Large deer
60. Coq au ___
61. Maiden name