



The North Texas

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Religion in the public square

by John Blanton

Mark Peterson is professor of marketing at the University of Texas at Arlington, and in January he put together a lunchtime seminar on “Religion in the Public Square.” It was billed as “an intelligent discussion about where to go next.” More specifically, the matter of religion in public life was “an issue cited by many as playing a significant role in the recent presidential election.”

The North Texas Skeptics was happy to co-sponsor this event, and we contributed toward honorariums for the speakers. The NTS contribution was underwritten by some generous members, to whom we are all grateful. Other sponsors included Sociology Student Association at UTA, UTA Faculty/Staff Christian Fellowship, and Grace Community Church of Arlington.

Speaking were Joe Barnhart, Ron Flowers, Frank Guliuzza, and Ron Overton.

Professor Barnhart teaches religion studies and philosophy at the University of North Texas. He is also a member of the editorial advisory boards for *The Humanist*, and *Free Inquiry*, besides being a technical advisor for The North Texas Skeptics.



Joe Barnhart gestures to make a point. Ron Flowers is on the right

Ron Flowers retired from Texas Christian University, where he taught religion. He heads up the local chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. He is also an ordained minister. Professor Flowers has pre-

EVENTS CALENDAR

Program for February

**Saturday, February 12, 2 p.m.,
Center for Nonprofit
Management, 2900 Live Oak
Street in Dallas.**

Danny Barnett will present “**The Alternative Fix.**”

The alternative medicine industry is big and getting bigger. How did it get this way, and is there any basis for the claims of alternative medicine?

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 members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend
 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or
 reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings
 on topics of current interest or social events.

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viously given talks for the NTS on a number of occasions.

Frank Guliuzza “is a member of the Political Science and Philosophy
 Department at Weber State University in Utah. He is author of *Over the
 Wall: Protecting Religious Expression in the Public Square* published by
 State University of New York Press.

Ron Overton has “practical expertise on church-state issues,” having
 grown up as a military dependent and having attended public university.
 He is founder of The Church, Arlington, Texas.

Professor Alan Saxe of UTA moderated the event. We saw a lot
 more of Professor Saxe back when we had our monthly meetings at
 UTA. We still see a lot of him, but it’s on TV. He is frequently called
 upon to comment on local and national political is-
 sues.

The meeting was for only an hour, so there was no time to get into a lot of depth on the topic. The dialog boiled down to whether religious principles should be, or even should *continue* to be, driving political policy. On this, Ron Overton seemed quite outspoken.



Frank Guliuzza and Ron Overton

Religious expression is being stifled he said. The religion of Darwin is in and other religions are out at the public schools. He did not dwell on the vast numbers of religions that are out, seeming to be concerned with only a specific sect. Since God was banished from the classroom in the early 1960s, he said, all manner of social evils have ramped up. He pointed out rape and out of wedlock teen pregnancy as prime examples, and he backed his point with statistics. All of these vices have surged since publicly supported religion ceased.

Like most others, he turned his focus only forward, after the 1960s, failing to note the great successes of religious influence in the past. No mention of the Inquisition, of course. That’s passe by now. No mention of the Austrian choir boy who later set out on a course to destroy an entire generation of Jews. The number saved by his religious experience in early life surely resulted in many times that number spared. No mention, either, of the famous Georgian theology school dropout. Many more millions would have perished, I am sure, if Joseph Stalin had never bene-

fited from his earlier religious training. The Ku Klux Klan? Without their crosses, how much more mischief would they have done?

Anyhow, Joe Barnhart touched on this slight misuse of statistics in his response. *Post hoc, ergo hoc* (after this, therefore because of this) is not usually a valid argument. My own counter example would be something like “Since the start of the manned space program by this country our social mores have gone into the sewer.”

Finally, I ran into Paul Hanley at the meeting, and he recommended we try to follow up on this with a discussion of “intelligent design.” The ball is rolling on this endeavor. We are, as always, looking for energetic NTS members to participate in these activities and to contribute their particular talents. Shoot us an e-mail or send a letter. Feedback time.

Good news for The Shroud

We are printing this press release without comment for the enlightenment of our readers.

New Chemical Testing Points to Ancient Origin for Burial Shroud of Jesus; Los Alamos Scientist Proves 1988 Carbon-14 Dating of the Shroud of Turin Used Invalid Rewoven Sample

http://biz.yahoo.com/prnews/050119/phw016_1.html

Wednesday January 19, 8:32 am ET

DALLAS, Jan. 19 /PRNewswire/ — The American Shroud of Turin Association for Research (AMSTAR), a scientific organization dedicated to research on the enigmatic Shroud of Turin, thought by many to be the burial cloth of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, announced today that the 1988 Carbon-14 test was not done on the original burial cloth, but rather on a rewoven shroud patch creating an erroneous date for the actual age of the Shroud. The Shroud of Turin is a large piece of linen cloth that shows the faint full-body image of a blood-covered man on its surface. Because many believe it to be the burial cloth of Jesus, researchers have tried to determine its origin though numerous modern scientific methods, including Carbon-14 tests done at three radiocarbon labs which set the age of the artifact at between AD 1260 and 1390.

“Now conclusive evidence, gathered over the past two years, proves that the sample used to date the Shroud was actually

taken from an expertly-done rewoven patch,” says AMSTAR President, Tom D’Muhala. “Chemical testing indicates that the linen Shroud is actually very old — much older than the published 1988 radiocarbon date.”

“As unlikely as it seems, the sample used to test the age of the Shroud of Turin in 1988 was taken from a rewoven area of the Shroud,” reports chemist Raymond Rogers, a fellow of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Rogers’ new findings are published in the current issue of *Thermochemica Acta*, a chemistry peer reviewed scientific journal.

“Pyrolysis-mass-spectrometry results from the sample area coupled with microscopic and microchemical observations prove that the radiocarbon sample was not part of the original cloth of the Shroud of Turin which is currently housed at The Turin Cathedral in Italy,” says Rogers.

“The radiocarbon sample has completely different chemical properties than the main part of the shroud relic,” explains Rogers. “The sample tested was dyed using technology that began to appear in Italy about the time the Crusaders’ last bastion fell to the Mameluke Turks in AD 1291. The radiocarbon sample cannot be older than about AD 1290, agreeing with the age determined in 1988. However, the Shroud itself is actually much older.”

Rogers’ new research clearly disproves the 1988 findings announced by British Museum spokesperson, Mike Tite, when he declared that the Shroud was of medieval origin and probably “a hoax.” The British Museum coordinated the 1988 radiocarbon tests and acted as the official clearing house for all findings.

Almost immediately, Shroud analysts questioned the validity of the sample used for radiocarbon dating. Researchers using high-resolution photographs of the Shroud found indications of an “invisible” reweave in the area used for testing. However, belief tilted strongly toward the more “scientific” method of radiocarbon dating. Rogers’ recent analysis of an authentic sample taken from the radiocarbon sample proves that the researchers were right to question the 1988 results.

As a result of his own research and chemical tests, Rogers concluded that the radiocarbon sample was cut from a medieval patch, and is totally different in composition from the main part of the Shroud of Turin.

Contact: Michael Minor (972) 932-5141

This release was issued through eReleases(TM). For more information, visit <http://www.ereleases.com>.

Web news

The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Hires Intelligent-Design Theorist

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-01-24.htm#dembski>

<http://chronicle.com/free/v51/i20/20a00701.htm>

Creationist William Dembski is moving to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and will become director of the Center for Science and Theology. Dembski at one time headed up the Baylor University Michael Polanyi Center for studying the relationship between science and religion. When it became apparent the Michael Polanyi Center was a thinly disguised showpiece for "Intelligent Design" on the Baylor campus, the science faculty raised the issue of the University's scientific credibility. The net result of their protest was the relegation of Dembski to a lesser role at Baylor and the dissolution of the Polanyi Center.

Since then, Mr. Dembski has not taught a course at Baylor — "No department has been willing to let me" — nor has he spent more than a few days a month on the Baylor campus. "I work at home," he says.

"My work is too controversial for them," he explains. Mr. Dembski is a proponent of "intelligent design," which argues that Darwinian explanations of natural history are insufficient.

Dembski had created the center at the urging of then Baylor president Robert B. Sloan, but now Sloan is gone, as well. Sloan's departure stemmed in no small part to faculty objections to his "decision to emphasize Christian values at the university..."

Dembski applied to extend his stay at Baylor, but funds were not made available to renew his contract. Dembski noted "I was increasingly seen as a political liability."

The dean of the seminary's School of Theology, Russell D. Moore, says the center will help evangelicals engage with Darwinism from a Christian perspective. "Intelligent design is posing questions that need to be asked and are being shut out of public debate," he says.

For his part, Mr. Dembski doesn't worry about preaching to the choir. "I was so ostracized at Baylor that I had very few colleagues I could talk to there," he says. "This will give me the opportunity to influence a huge body of believers who are sympathetic with what I'm doing."

Science Profs Send ID Letter

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-01-24.htm#id>

<http://www.rednova.com/news/display/?id=120162>

In Pennsylvania the science faculties of York College and the University of Pennsylvania have urged the Dover school board to pull back on teaching creationism. More surprising, so has the creationist think tank Discovery Institute. The Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, based in Seattle, is the nation's leading sponsor of "Intelligent Design."

Now 45 Penn State University professors from three separate departments have endorsed the open letter sent to Dover by University of Penn faculty in opposition to the board's decision to require biology students to be told about the concept of intelligent design.

Dover is the first public school in the U.S. to teach "Intelligent Design."

Cobb County Appeals

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-01-24.htm#cobb>

In Georgia, federal judge Clarence Cooper has ruled against Cobb County's requirement to place evolution disclaimer stickers in public school biology text books.

In his ruling, issued on January 13, Judge Cooper applied the so-called Lemon test to conclude that the disclaimer violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Although he was satisfied that the Cobb County School Board's purpose in requiring the disclaimer was not exclusively to promote religion, he wrote that "an informed, reasonable observer would interpret the Sticker to convey a message of endorsement of religion," citing its description of evolution as "a theory, not a fact" as the decisive phrase.

Now the Cobb County Board of Education has decided to appeal Judge Cooper's ruling and to ask for a stay of his order to remove the disclaimer.

For CNN's story on the board's vote, visit:

<http://www.cnn.com/2005/LAW/01/18/evolution.stickers/>

For the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* editorial condemning the board's decision (registration required), visit:

<http://www.ajc.com/opinion/content/opinion/0105/21cobb.html>

For Judge Cooper's decision (a 2.5M PDF file), visit the ACLU's web site:

<http://www.aclu.org/ReligiousLiberty/ReligiousLiberty.cfm?ID=17311&c=139>

Theory of intelligent design enters Blount Co. high schools

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2005-01-24.htm#blount>

<http://www.wate.com/Global/story.asp?S=2836983>

The Blount County (Colorado) school board recently approved the teaching of "Intelligent Design." High schools there teach several theories on evolution, but do not yet teach ID.

"Biology teachers in particular would be able to teach the controversies perhaps within the evolutionary theory. That would be the major thing," says board member Dr. Don McNelly. The intelligent design theory says that human biology and evolution are so complex it has to require the creative hand of an intelligent force.

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"Encouraging our teachers to teach the controversies with respect to biological origin, within a secular content, not relying on anything other than the research," McNelly says.

The plan could have a minor problem, since there aren't any text books on ID. Teachers are going to have to wing it for now.



What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

Earthquacks: the deeper meaning of the tsunami is examined.

Religions are busy explaining how we should view a disaster that claimed more than 150,000 innocent lives. "Innocent"? Buddhists explained that seemingly innocent victims could be paying for some really bad stuff they did in previous lives. A

A leading Moslem cleric in Southern California says it was, "a test from God to see how human beings respond." Columnist and pretentious theologian William Safire also saw the tsunami as a test, and compared it to God's test of Job.

leading Moslem cleric in Southern California says it was, "a test from God to see how human beings respond." Columnist and pretentious theologian William Safire also saw the tsunami as a test, and compared it to God's test of Job. Sure Job is faithful, Satan had scoffed, God made him rich and powerful. Wagering that Job would remain faithful, God lets Satan take it all away: Job's sheep are stolen, his servants slain and a great wind kills his children. Whereupon Job falls to the ground and worships God, "the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." So Job passes the test. Never mind his sons and daughters who died, or his servants who were murdered, it's all about Job. Well, thank God for physics. The tsunami was caused by the release of elastic energy in a tectonic earthquake.

Creationism: court orders warning stickers removed immediately.

The constitutionality of a creationist message got a court test. You will recall that in Cobb County, GA, stickers were placed on high school biology texts warning that evolution is "a theory, not a fact" (WN 12 Nov 04). Yesterday, in ordering the stickers removed, a federal judge said "the stickers convey an impermissible message of endorsement."

Alternative medicine: IOM report calls for tougher standards.

For a decade, WN has argued that the 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act is one of the worst pieces of legislation ever enacted (WN 18 Sep 98). This week, an Institute of Medicine report, Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the United States, called for major revision of DSHEA. It went much further, recommending that the same principles and standards of evidence apply to all medical treatments whether labeled as alternative or conventional.

Medium done: if only the hurricane hadn't washed the body away.

At WN we're still trying to figure out why superstitious nonsense persists in an age of science. Last night we sought clues in the NBC prime-time program *Medium*, based on the exploits of "Research Medium and Criminal Profiler" Allison Dubois. She solves murders by chatting with dead victims. In this episode, she takes a Texas Ranger to a spot in the middle of a field where a boy is buried. Before they can get back with a search warrant to dig him up, a hurricane hits Texas and he washed away. Sigh. Some silly programs are fun; Spiderman's super powers come from being bitten by a radioactive spider. But there's a huge difference — *Medium* takes itself seriously. There really is an Allison Dubois who thinks she's a medium, and she's an NBC consultant; NBC should be ashamed. The James Randi million-dollar prize for proof of the supernatural was pointed out to Dubois. "He'll never give the money to anyone," she sensed. Amazing! So we are offering the WN Chal-

Some silly programs are fun; Spiderman's super powers come from being bitten by a radioactive spider. But there's a huge difference — Medium takes itself seriously.

lenge. She sensed where the boy was buried; if she can sense where his body floated to, she gets WN free for life, and beyond.

Adjustments: Florida state faculty oppose chiropractic school.

There is a faculty revolt brewing at FSU. Both of FSU's two Nobel laureates, Bob Schrieffer in physics and chemist Harold

Kroto are opposed, fearing the impact on FSU's academic reputation. A map of the campus parodies the planned chiropractic school with a Bigfoot Institute, Astrology School and Crop Circle simulation Laboratory. The Legislature has appropriated \$9M annually for the school. Chiropractic was founded in Davenport, Iowa, by Daniel Palmer. It actually began as Palmer's School of Magnetic Cure, but Palmer discovered, as Mesmer had discovered in Paris, that it worked just as well if you left the magnets out, and the name was changed to Palmer's School of Chiropractic.

Darwinian evolution: "monkey trial" reconvenes in Dover, PA.

It's been 145 years since Darwin published *Origin of Species*, perhaps the world's greatest scientific discovery. No other idea has connected so many pieces of knowledge. It's now 80 years since the Scopes trial. If any doubts about evolution re-

It's been 145 years since Darwin published Origin of Species, perhaps the world's greatest scientific discovery. No other idea has connected so many pieces of knowledge.

main, you might suppose that DNA analysis would sweep them away. We can now measure how closely we are related to every creature on Earth. We share half our DNA with yeast. So genetically similar are bonobos to humans that, but for the inability of bonobos to talk, they might demand a seat in the UN. Yet, in Dover, PA, a town much like Dayton, TN, the school board voted to require that intelligent design be taught alongside evolution. The school board will lose in court, but we must ask ourselves why science has been so spectacularly unsuccessful in explaining such obvious truths to people.

Creationism: should warning messages be required on books?

Manufactures are required to include warnings on labels. Why not text book publishers? Besides, the stickers Cobb County wanted on biology texts weren't exactly wrong — evolution really is "just a theory."

Science is open. If someone comes up with a better theory, the textbooks will be rewritten. Although requiring warning labels on medicine bottles is vital, on books they become official

Skeptic Ink

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John Blanton. © 2005.
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doctrine. Several readers suggested stickers for bibles in Cobb County:

"This book contains religious stories regarding the origin of living things. The stories are theories, not facts. They are unproven, unprovable and in some cases totally impossible. This material should be approached with an open mind, and a critical eye towards logic and believability."

<http://www.aps.org/WN/WN05/wn012805.cfm>

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org



Future meeting dates

Unless otherwise indicated, all our meetings will be held at—

Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas
(corner of Live Oak Street and
Liberty Street)

February 12, 2005
March 12, 2005
April 9, 2005
May 15, 2005
June 11, 2005
July 9, 2005
August 13, 2005
September 10, 2005
October 8, 2005
November 12, 2005
December 10, 2005

Events Calendar continued from
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The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the

public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

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Or call toll-free 1-800-634-1610. Subscription prices: one year (six issues), \$35; two years, \$60; three years, \$84. You may also visit the CSICOP Web site at <http://www.csicop.org> for more information.

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