

## December Meeting

### SEX AND HUMANISM: Delight or Depravity?

What does it mean to be a sexual being? Where did we learn to do what we do? Who decides what is "right" or "wrong"? Why do people assume that if we are humanists, we are somehow depraved or deviant?

Our presenter will be Barbara Lynn Eisenstadt, Ed. D., an empathetic and lively speaker. Barbara is a clinician, trainer, and lecturer in the fields of addiction, sexuality, group therapy, and women's issues.

Come and explore these and other intriguing topics, as Barbara helps us to investigate and explore our own definitions of sexuality. Be prepared for a program of answers, shared humor, queries, and responses.

Wolf Roder suggested this program. He wrote:

"Most religions, and Christianity in particular, place great restrictions on sexual activities of all kinds. Christianity seems to just about outlaw it altogether, except for certain times and purposes. Islam allows four wives. Judaism seems to take it much more easily. All three religions clearly elevate the importance of men over women, and in fact promote a strong sense of patriarchal hierarchy. So do some other religions. Where, if anywhere, do Secular Humanists stand?"

Gary Weiss, our Program Chair, loved the concept and was pleased when we were able to get our good friend, Barbara Eisenstadt, to come from Albany to lead the discussion on this topic.

For background reading see "A Humanist View of Sexual Relations" immediately below.

Joe Levee

### A HUMANIST VIEW OF SEXUAL RELATIONS

*A group of prominent humanists headed by Lester Kirkendall prepared the following statement. It was published by Prometheus Books in 1976 under the title A New Bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities. Since it seems to be the most recent detailed statement on this subject, we believe that it will make interesting background reading for our December 19 meeting on humanism and sex. It is printed here with the permission of Prometheus Books.*

Sexuality has for too long been denied its proper place among other human activities. Physical eroticism has been either shrouded in mystery and surrounded by taboos or heralded far beyond its capacity, by itself, to contribute to the fullness of life. Human sexuality grows increasingly more satisfying as life itself becomes more meaningful. The time has come to enhance the quality of sexuality by emphasizing its contributions to a significant life.

For the first time in history there need be no fear of unwanted pregnancy or venereal disease, if proper precautions are taken. The limitation of sexual

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### Events

**December Meeting**  
December 19 7:00 p.m.  
At the Vernon Manor Hotel,  
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati

**January Potluck Dinner**  
January 9, at 6:30,

Members, you will soon  
be receiving your  
annual renewal notice  
in the mail. Please  
renew soon to keep  
your newsletters

## OUTREACH THROUGH RESEARCH

The November meeting featured Gary Edward Dean, Associate Professor, University of Cincinnati, Department of Molecular Genetics, UC College of Medicine, describing his current project involving the science education of children, grades K through 12 (actually the program starts with grade 4 and extends through high school).

The development of this program starts with the proposition: "Kids can do real science, and they learn better that way."

The model that was developed encompasses the following principles: choose a real problem, teach teachers and provide tools, teach students sufficient basics, set up the experiment, build hypotheses and test, assess and redesign as indicated.

A grant was secured from the National Science Foundation to fund the program and the Cincinnati Public School System was persuaded to give it a try. The long term goal was that if successful it could be expanded to other school systems, eventually.

It was obvious from the presentation that Gary Dean has a great deal of enthusiasm for this project. The chosen problem was to have the students find mutant yeast genes that can grow at high pH. (A pH of 7 is neutral; lower is acid and higher is base. Normal yeast genes can grow only at low pH).

The students were given the prepared yeast genes and asked to find the mutants. Naturally some students did better than others but there were always some who "got it!" in every grade level.

Some of the presentation was very technical and involved the use of terms unknown to some of us so perhaps the children were able to "get it" better than the audience was. Therefore most of the questions in the discussion period tended to be about the educational aspects of the program.

Was there an assessment of the effectiveness of the contribution to the science learning of the students? Perhaps at the start of the program not enough attention was paid to the necessity for assessment which can be an extremely difficult process but this lack is being attended to.

How do teachers respond to what must be an additional burden upon them? Most of the teachers who have been recruited to participate have been enthusiastic as well.

About how many children are involved in the program? The goal was to reach about one third of the students in the Cincinnati Public Schools and this goal is currently almost there close to 5000 kids are involved.

As to the future of the program expansions are being made to Seattle and Boston and hopefully in Ohio involvement of Wilberforce and Central State Universities. One of the audience suggested that it might be a good idea to secure some corporate sponsorship. The speaker said that no one had come knocking at his door. She responded that as a fund raiser she suggested that it was necessary to go knocking on their doors and perhaps she could give him some advice. They traded contact information. So, perhaps the speaker in exchange for giving us something may have obtained something in return.

George Maurer

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# Rationally Speaking

A monthly e-column  
by Massimo Pigliucci  
Department of Botany,  
University of  
Tennessee

## N. 5, December 2000: "Intelligent Design - the Modern Argument"

This column can be posted for free on any appropriate web site.

If you are interested in receiving the html code, please send an e-mail: [pigliucci@utk.edu](mailto:pigliucci@utk.edu)

Let's face it: creationists don't have an easy time claiming academic superiority over their opponents. As much as they call themselves "scientific" creationists (essentially an oxymoron), and despite the existence of the Institute for Creation Research (whatever that is), and even of creationist museums, anybody can see that the credentials of most creationists are as good as those of a car salesman. Yet, there is a group of creationists (who don't actually like being labeled as such) that is trying—with some success—to make headway in the academic world, or at least with the media and some relatively high ranking politicians. Meet the Intelligent Design (ID) movement, perhaps the most sophisticated attack on modern science mounted so far.

Mind you, gaining a sympathetic ear within academia does not necessarily imply intellectual respectability. Post-modernist philosophers and social scientists have been littering college classrooms and wasting a lot of perfectly good trees to spread nonsense about the alleged equal access to truth of any "cultural construction," putting science and astrology (or, for that matter, creationism) on equal footing. But some ID exponents have legitimate PhDs in science disciplines, they don't make wild claims about a young earth or a six-day creation, and even manage to get published by major academic presses. So, who are these neo-creationists, and is there anything of substance to their claims about evidence for an intelligent creator of the universe?

Probably the first and most important salvo of the modern ID movement was Michael Behe's book, *Darwin's Black Box: the Biochemical Challenge to*

*Evolution* (1996). Behe is a biochemist at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania and clearly says that he accepts a lot of evolution, so much so that he should get in plenty of trouble with "old-time religion" creationists. However, Behe draws the line at the molecular level: while evolutionists might be able to explain how humans descended from other primates, and might even have a good explanation for the evolution of the eye, they can't tell us how complex biochemical pathways came into existence. Take blood clotting, for example. In order for the blood to coagulate when a cut through the skin is made, several proteins have to act in a precise sequence. Take any of them out, and you bleed to death. Or consider the flagellum of a bacterium (the "tail" that allows some bacteria to swim). It is made of several parts intricately interconnected to each other. Again, take one of them away, and the bacterial cell will be stuck in place forever. But, notices Behe, evolution is supposed to work gradually and to assemble structures that work at every single step (since it cannot predict the future use of something). This creates an apparent paradox whence a mindless natural force is supposed to come up with something that smells terribly of intelligent design. Isn't this a deathblow to evolution as the explanation of life's "irreducible" complexity?

Not so fast. There are a few things missing from Behe's scenario which are worth considering briefly. First, he has not done his homework. Contrary to what he repeatedly claims in his book, biologists have done a bit of research on the evolution of biochemical pathways, and there are several known examples of bacterial flagella that are simpler than the one Behe conveniently uses. It doesn't take a rocket scientist (or a biochemist) to figure out that in fact these simpler versions could easily represent intermediate steps toward complex flagella. Second, it is not true—again contra Behe—that biochemical pathways are assembled in a way that one cannot take any element away without having the whole system collapsing. In fact, most of genetic research is based on the ability to produce mutations that knock down certain genes (and therefore certain components of biochemical pathways) while still yielding a functional organism to be studied. One of the major discoveries of 20<sup>th</sup> century molecular biology (which Behe must have somehow missed) is that organisms are not *irreducibly* complex at all; rather, they show redundant complexity: they are made of several parts that have no unique and irreplaceable function. As biologist Francois Jacob put it, this is exactly what you would expect if natural selection worked like a bricoleur rather than a cunning engineer. A bricoleur is somebody who assembles new things out of old parts that are easily

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available. The result is bound to be complex, redundant, suboptimal, and not too pretty. Exactly like living organisms, and precisely what you would expect from a natural phenomenon. No intelligent design required.

Behe makes at least two fundamental mistakes in his attack against evolutionary biology (other than neglecting to check the available literature more thoroughly). Perhaps the subtler of the two is that he completely ignores the fact that evolutionary biology deals with historical as well as current events. If one picks a modern organism, say a bacterium of the species *Escherichia coli*, and tries to imagine how it could have evolved, one is up against a huge problem: what you see today under the microscope is not a "primitive" organism, but the result of (literally) billions of years of change. As we know from organisms that actually leave fossils (contrary to most bacteria), more than 99% of the species that ever existed went extinct. Since most of these don't leave fossils (especially bacteria), we are lucky if we see a few intermediate links at all, alive or in the fossil record. No wonder that evolution may look like a series of huge jumps that could not possibly have been the result of natural selection. Yet Behe behaves as if we didn't know anything about extinction and evolution, and bases his argument on an extremely naive picture of biological research and of science in general.

The second fatal mistake is common to all versions of Intelligent Design: the whole approach is essentially based on an argument from ignorance. Let us assume that biologists really don't have the foggiest about the way a particular biochemical pathway (aerobic respiration in mitochondria, for example) came about. What is that supposed to prove? If Behe were alive at the time of Aristotle, would he be arguing that lightning is clear proof of Zeus' existence because we have no idea of how a natural phenomenon could possibly provoke such a sudden discharge of energy? And yet this is exactly what the core of Behe's argument is: since we don't know how it happened, it must have been God. Sorry, Michael, but science is about working hard to find the answers. Bailing out while invoking a *Deus-ex-machina* is not the name of the game.

**Further reading:**

Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: the Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*

Robert Pennock, *The Tower of Babel: the Evidence Against the New Creationism*

**Web links:**

Kenneth Miller's web site (<http://biomed.brown.edu/>

[faculty/M/Miller/Miller.html](http://faculty/M/Miller/Miller.html)) at Brown University: how to debunk Behe in a few strokes of the keyboard.

Michael Behe's own web site(<http://www.lehigh.edu/~inbios/behe.html>).

For more debunking of Behe, visit Niall Shank's web site (<http://www.etsu.edu/philos/faculty/shanks.htm>) at East Tennessee State University.

**Next Month: "Split-brains, paradigm shifts, and why it is so difficult to be a skeptic"**  
© by Massimo Pigliucci, 2000

**A fully Christian Campus.**

After being thrust into the limelight and criticized for intolerance after presidential candidate George W. Bush visited the campus in February, little has changed at Bob Jones University. Female students still must wear knee-length skirts and males must wear dress pants and ties before lunchtime. Any off-campus dating requires a chaperone. And romantic physical contact is still prohibited.

AP, 16 September 2000

1898 seemed like a full year; the Cuban War excitement was good for the house. The jolly idea of busting up the Spanish was on everybody's mind. I couldn't have cared less as to who blew up the Maine, but everybody in the street seemed ready to get a gun and start killing spiks. I always liked the Spaniards I met they had good manners and didn't see how killing a man who sold me diamond earrings or one who reset the broken glass windows was to be blamed for the Maine. I've never been what could be called a flag waver. To me it's just a sewed up colored pattern even if I know what it stands for. But I never confused a country with a government; the bums who ran things for awhile, with its flag. I knew in my dealing for protection that a government is not just a flag or its past history, but at the moment is usually a collection of greedy and rather rotten people called politicians. I didn't even feel they were all bad. We've had some grand men a few in Washington. In every barrel of rotten apples you find one or two good ones.

Nell Kimball (1854-1934)  
*Her Life as an American Madam*  
(NY: Macmillan Co. 1970) p. 209



expression to conjugal unions or monogamous marriage was perhaps sensible so long as reproduction was still largely a matter of chance, and so long as women were subjugated to men. Although we consider marriage, where viable, a cherished human relationship, we believe that other sexual relationships also are significant. In any case, human beings should have the right to express their sexual desires and enter into relationships as they see fit, as long as they do not harm others or interfere with their rights to sexual expression. This new sense of freedom, however, should be accompanied by a sense of ethical responsibility.

Fortunately, there is now taking place a world-wide reexamination of the proper place of sexuality in human experience.

We wish to affirm and support the statement of a committee of the United Nations World Health Organization on human sexuality: "Every person has the right to receive sexual information and to consider accepting sexuality for pleasure as well as for procreation."

We believe that the humanization of sexuality is far enough advanced to make useful a statement of rights and responsibilities of the individual to society and of society to the individual. Accordingly, we wish to offer the following points for consideration.

1. *The boundaries of human sexuality need to be expanded.* Many cultures have tended to restrict sexuality to procreation. Any other purposes of sexuality were regarded as derivative, were looked at askance, or were sternly disapproved. But the need to limit population growth, the widespread use of effective contraceptives, and the developments in reproductive technology have made the procreative aspects of sex less significant today. Responsible sexuality should now be viewed as an expression of intimacy for women as well as for men, a source of enjoyment and enrichment, in addition to being a way of releasing tension, even where there is no likelihood of procreation.

This integration of sexuality with other aspects of experience will occur only as one achieves an essentially balanced life. When this happens, sexuality will take its place among other natural functions.

2. *Developing a sense of equity between the sexes is an essential feature of a sensible morality.* All legal, occupational, economic, and political discrimination against women should be removed and all traces of sexism erased. Until women have equal opportunities, they will be vulnerable to sexual exploitation by men. In particular, men must recognize the right of women to control their own bodies and determine the nature of their own sexual expression. All individuals, female or male, are entitled to equal consideration as persons.

3. *Repressive taboos should be replaced by a more*

*balanced and objective view of sexuality based on a sensitive awareness of human behavior and needs.* Archaic taboos limit our thinking in many ways. The human person, especially the female, has been held in bondage by restrictions that prescribed when, where, with whom, and with what parts of the body the sex impulse could be satisfied. As these taboos are dispelled and an objective reappraisal ensues, numerous sexual expressions will be seen in a different light. Many that now seem unacceptable will very likely become valid in certain circumstances. Extramarital sexual relationships with the consent of one's partner are being accepted by some. Premarital sexual relationships, already accepted in some parts of the world, will become even more widely so. This will very likely also be true of homosexual and bisexual relationships. The use of genital associations to express feelings of genuine intimacy, rather than as connections for physical pleasure or procreation alone, may then transcend barriers of age, race, or gender.

Taboos have prevented adequate examination of certain topics, especially with respect to female sexuality, thus blocking the discovery of answers to important sexual questions. Abortion is a case in point. By focusing only on the destruction of the fetus, many have avoided facing the other issues that are fundamental. They do not, for example, openly discuss ways of providing a comprehensive sex-education program for both children and adults. There has been a long struggle over the issue of providing adequate information about available contraceptive procedures for those who wish them. Likewise, taboos that cause people to feel that viewing the genitals is an obscenity or that any verbal or visual expression of the sex act is pornographic undermine objectivity and lead to demands for censorship. The oversacramentalization of sex also inhibits open discussion by not allowing people to treat sex as a natural experience.

4. *Each person has both an obligation and a right to be fully informed about the various civic and community aspects of human sexuality.* The need to be fully informed about sexuality is obvious in the individual's private life, but it is rarely thought to extend to one's social-civic life as well. Sexual attitudes are intimately related to many problems of public import, but again taboos inhibit free discussion. Too rapid population growth cannot be dealt with except as individual attitudes toward sexual expression and contraception are recognized. Clearly, the social status of women is also involved here. In the rehabilitation of incarcerated criminals, establishing meaningful ties with others is important. It is inhumane and self-defeating to cut these persons off from the possibility of sexual relationships. We should extend this

(Continued on page 6)



concern to all persons who are confined in institutions, for example, those in senior-citizens' homes. The right of the physically and mentally handicapped to be fully informed about sexuality and to have sexual outlets available should be another concern. The commercialization of sex needs careful scrutiny. Patterns in child-rearing that may result in dysfunctional sexual expressions, such as child abuse and emotional deprivation, must be adjusted to new technological and medical developments and to changing cultural patterns.

5. *Potential parents have both the right and the responsibility to plan the number and time of birth of their children, taking into account both social needs and their own desires.* If family size is to be so regulated and the birth of unwanted children is to be prevented, then birth-control information and methods must be freely available to both married and unmarried couples. There must be a continuing reassessment in light of the world population situation. Involved in the right to birth control is the right to voluntary sterilization and abortion. We should especially point out that birth control should be the appropriate responsibility of men as well as women. Male contraception should be the object of further research. Contraception should not be considered the sole responsibility of females.

6. *Sexual morality should come from a sense of caring and respect for others; it cannot be legislated.* Laws can and do protect the young from exploitation, and people of any age from abuse. Beyond that, forms of sexual expression should not be a matter of legal regulations. Mature individuals should be able to choose their partners and the kinds of sexual expression suited to them. Certain forms of sexual expression are limiting and confining, for example, prostitution, sadomasochism, or fetishism. However, any changes in such patterns, if they are made, should come through education and counseling, not by legal prohibition. Our overriding objective should be to help individuals live balanced and self-actualized lives. The punishing and ostracizing of those who voluntarily engage in socially disapproved forms of sexual conduct only exacerbate the problem. Sexual morality should be viewed as an inseparable part of general morality, not as a special set of rules. Sexual values and sex acts, like other human values and acts, should be evaluated by whether they frustrate or enhance human fulfillment.

7. *Physical pleasure has worth as a moral value.* Traditional religious and social views have often condemned pleasures of the body as "sinful" or "wicked." These attitudes are inhumane. They are destructive of human relationships. The findings of the behavioral sciences demonstrate that deprivation of physical pleasure, particularly during the formative periods of development,

often results in family breakdown, child abuse, adolescent runaways, crime, violence, alcoholism, and other forms of dehumanizing behavior. We assert that physical pleasure within the context of meaningful human relationships is essential, both as a moral value and for its contribution to wholesome social relationships.

8. *Individuals are able to respond positively and affirmatively to sexuality throughout life; this must be acknowledged and accepted.* Childhood sexuality is expressed through genital awareness and exploration. This involves self-touching, caressing parts of the body, including the sexual organs. These are learning experiences that help the individual understand his or her body and incorporate sexuality as an integral part of his or her personality. Masturbation is a viable mode of satisfaction for many individuals, young and old, and should be fully accepted. Just as repressive attitudes have prevented us from recognizing the value of childhood sexual response, so have they prevented us from seeing the value of sexuality in the middle and later years of life. We need to appreciate the fact that older persons also have sexual needs. The joy of touching, of giving and receiving affection, and the satisfaction of intimate body responsiveness is the right of everyone throughout life.

9. *In all sexual encounters, commitment to humane and humanistic values should be present.* No person's sexual behavior should hurt or disadvantage another. This principle applies to all sexual encounters--both to the brief and casual experience and to those that are deeper and more prolonged. In any sexual encounter or relationship, freely given consent is fundamental, even in the marital relationship, where consent is often denied or taken for granted.

Perplexing questions are raised by these concepts. Those directly engaged in the encounter may hold widely differing points of view toward sexual conduct. This possibility makes necessary open, candid, and honest communication about current and future expectations. Even then, decisions are subjects of judgment and projection, and their outcomes are only slowly revealed.

No relationship occurs in a vacuum. In addition to the persons directly involved in the sexual relationship there are important others. The interests of these other persons are usually complex and diverse; no course of action will satisfy everyone. Some might prefer that no sexual involvement whatever occur and are disturbed if they are aware of it; others might be quite accepting under most circumstances. For this reason each individual must have empathy for others. One might ask oneself- "How would I want others to conduct themselves sexually toward me and others I care about?" "Am I at least as concerned for the happiness and well-being of my partner,

(Continued on page 7)



and others involved, as for my own?"

There is also a broader consideration, namely, that each person contribute to creating a social atmosphere in which a full acceptance of responsible sexual expression will exist.

## CONCLUSION

The realization of the points in this statement depends upon certain attributes in the individual. One needs to have autonomy and control over his or her own sexual functioning. One needs to find reasonable satisfaction in living and to accept and enjoy pleasures of the body. Furthermore, one needs to respect the rights of others to those same qualities. The society in which one lives, while it makes demands, should also be attuned to individual needs and the importance of personal freedom. Only as these conditions are met will loving and guilt-free sexuality be possible.

At this point in our history, we human beings are embarking on a wondrous adventure. For the first time we realize that we own our own bodies. Until now our bodies have been in bondage to church and state, which have dictated how we could express our sexuality. We have not been permitted to experience the pleasure and joy of the human body and our sensory nature to their full capacity.

In order to realize our potential for joyful sexual expression, we need to adopt the doctrine that actualizing

pleasures are among the highest moral goods—so long as they are experienced with responsibility and mutuality.

A reciprocal and creative attitude toward sexuality can have a deep meaning, personally and socially. Each of us will know its personal meaning when we experience psychic growth and ego enhancement with others. In effect, our behavior can say to another, "I am enriched for having had this experience and for having contributed to your having had it also."

The social meaning can derive from the loving feelings engendered by person who is experiencing guilt-free, reciprocal pleasure. The loving feelings of mental and physical well-being, the sense of completion of the self, that we can experience from freely expressed sexuality may well reach out to all humanity. It is quite impossible to have a meaningful, ecstatic sexual and sensual life and to be indifferent to or uncaring about other human beings.

We believe that freeing our sexual selves is vital if we are to reach the heights of our full humanity. But at the same time, we believe that we need to activate and nourish a sense of our responsibilities to others.

# QUOTES FROM WOMEN

"I'm an atheist, and that's it. I believe there's nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for other people."

—Katherine Hepburn, in *Ladies' Home Journal*, October 1991

"Praying is like a rocking chair—it'll give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."

—Gypsy Rose Lee (1914-1970), stripper, quoted by E. Haldeman-Julius

"I feel not need for any other faith than my faith in human beings. Like Confucius of old, I am so absorbed in the wonder of earth and the life upon it that I cannot think of heaven and the angels."

—Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973), *The Great Quotations*, George Seldes, ed., (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1960)

"I'm an atheist, and Christianity appears to me to be the most absurd imposture of all the religions, and I'm puzzled that so many people

can't see through a religion that encourages irresponsibility and bigotry."

—Butterfly McQueen, actress who played a slave girl in the film version of *Gone with the Wind*, quoted in the *Charleston Gazette* after her death, January 11, 1996

"Why is it when we talk to God, we're said to be praying, but when God talks to us, we're schizophrenic."

—Lily Tomlin, *Quoted in Dictionary of Contemporary Quotation* (J.G. Burke Publisher, 1981)

"Religion...is the first enemy of the ability to think. That ability is not used by men to one-tenth of its possibility, yet before they learn to think they are discouraged by being ordered to take things on faith. Faith is the worst curse of mankind, as the exact antithesis and enemy of thought."

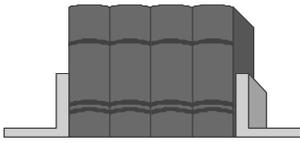
—Ayn Rand, private notes, 1934, reported in Barbara Brandon, *The Passion of Ayn Rand*

*2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt*, James A. Haught

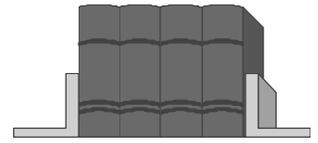
December 2000



7 FIG Leaves



# Book Reviews



*The Changing Face of the Priesthood:  
A Reflection on the Priest's Crisis of Soul*  
by Donald B. Cozzens

(Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000)

I review this book with some hesitation. Aside from the fact that I know little about the nature and commitments of the Roman Catholic priesthood, Cozzens' slim volume reads in many ways as an internal document. It is the concern of an active priest addressed to his fellow priests and secondarily to Catholic lay persons. It would be very easy to misread or misuse what is written in an attack on the Church.

The book "endeavors to take a long, honest look at the present state of the priesthood, ... , from the perspective of one priest who may well be misreading the issues and challenges facing the priesthood today." (p. xi). The Church and its priests surely face several major problems. At the same time I have the impression that the present Pope and the top men of the Curia are unwilling or unable to change the conditions under which the priesthood serves.

For one thing, the number of priest is shrinking. In North America and Europe, the major regions of the Church, the number of priest has declined by about forty percent. At the same time the number of students in the seminaries has declined even more, so that the average age of the priesthood is rising. Already there are few priests under the age of forty. "Researchers predict that by the year 2005, only one in eight priests will be under the age of thirty-five with the average age of priests close to sixty." (p. 132). At the same time as these dramatic declines are occurring, the Catholic population is increasing. In the 1980's there was about one priest per 1000 faithful, by 2005 there will be one per 2,200. With the Catholic family shrinking as is the family size generally, the typical parents are less willing to encourage a son or daughter to choose the celibate life at the cost of foregoing children's children. Add to this, that Catholics have been economically quite successful and a career as priest no longer carries the respect and advantages of earlier immigrant times.

Over the past decades, as society and the Church have changed, some 20,000 priests have left the

ministry. Most have left in order to marry, (p. 100). Among the priesthood remaining, many are gay. Cozzens examines a number of estimates without coming to a conclusion, but leaves little doubt that about half of today's priests share a homosexual orientation. He suggests that this proportion may be greater among young priests and seminarians. (p. 99). In and of itself a homosexual orientation is not negative as long as the priest is hard working and obeys his vows. Yet, gay priests will shape a social life comprised of other homosexual men, and the large number of homosexual priests has created a gay subculture within most US dioceses. (p. 100).

"Sooner or later the issue will be faced more forthrightly than it has in the closing decades of the twentieth century." (p. 110).

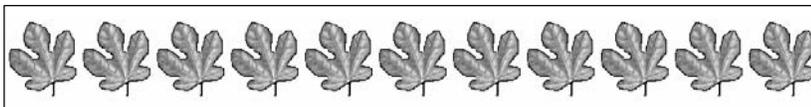
"Betraying Our Young" is the chapter in which Cozzens takes a deep and painful look at the morass of pedophilia. He is thoroughly familiar with *the crisis* and the insidious similarities which recur from case to case. He scores his colleagues, who, taken up in dealing with the crisis of the moment, have refused to ask why these behaviors have become so pervasive. Cozzens describes these crimes and temptation to illegal actions as part of the priestly life style.

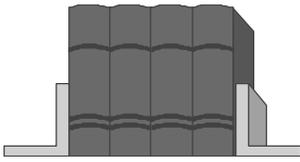
There is a relation of power and dependency between priest and layperson, especially if that layperson is a trusting child. Cozzens comments that far from welcoming a discussion of the problems of mandatory celibacy, sex, and power, the Church keeps its head in the sand. "Those who mention in conversation that they do not see mandatory celibacy as inherent in the priesthood are suspected of disloyalty." (p. 119). The present Pope has explicitly forbidden any discussion of contraception, abortion, homosexuality, masturbation, a married priesthood, or women priests except in the context of defending the Church's official dogma.

I am left with the insight that there is a serious, destructive crisis in Roman Catholicism. But also that there are good people thinking about these problems, and that ever so slowly the Church must change.

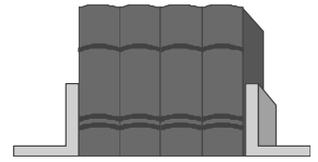
Wolf Roder

*Oberammergau: The Troubling Story  
of the World's Most Famous Passion Play*  
by James Shapiro





# Book Reviews



(New York: Pantheon Books, 2000)

Mentioning Oberammergau brings to mind a small peasant village in the Bavarian mountains where the people stage a simple historical passion pageant every ten years. The real Oberammergau is no village but a small town of 4500 inhabitants. The valley is too narrow for extensive or effective farming, so the villagers have been craftsmen and wood carvers for hundreds of years. They have and do sell their wares throughout Europe and the world. The passion play is good advertisement which makes the town known and propagates their carvings widely. Shapiro recounts much of this history, but his focus is on the twentieth century, and particularly on the Nazi period and the time since the War.

Jews have reason to fear passion plays. The Oberammergau passion play is the only survivor among what were once hundreds of village performances in a tradition which began in the late middle ages and early Renaissance. It was a means of portraying vividly the Gospel conflict between evil Jews and good Christians, of laying the blame for the Crucifixion on the High Priests, and paint the Jewish blood guilt for ever and ever. In this the plays did follow Christian doctrine and the words of the Gospel. Violence and pogroms against Jewish fellow citizens often followed such plays.

The Nazis and Hitler personally endorsed the play, as showing clearly the grasping greed, selfishness, and other shortcomings of such villains. Oberammergau had more than the average number of Nazi party members, and differed in no way from the rest of Germany in persecution of its one and only Jewish inhabitant. Nevertheless, after the War the play was revived with the financial and other support of the American occupation authorities, and with the same old script only slightly softened. For by 1950 the US was courting a revived West Germany as an ally against the Communist threat to religion.

Two things happened to bring change in the sixties. First, the Pope acknowledged that Jesus had been a Jew and a rabbi, and that it was the Romans who executed him. And second, Oberammergau became a major tourist destination for Americans,

so that the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-defamation League could put pressure on Oberammergau under the threat of a tourism boycott. For the first time there was a serious attempt to show the passion as an historical event with due concern for everyone's sensibilities.

It is one thing to accept Jesus as a Jew, it turns out it is quite another to portray him as a rabbinical sage which goes against all the expectations of Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. It is one thing to think of the Hebrew Scriptures as a history of the Jews, another to portray Old Testament scenes as foreshadowing the coming of the Christ. Christian and Jewish interpretations simply can not be meshed. The very idea of a "Judeo-Christian" religious tradition is simply a *chimera*, a beast cobbled together from various dissonant parts.

Then, in the final decades of the century the Popes started back pedaling on the Jewish Christ. There is just so much historical reality the church can stand, and the play can not get ahead of the theological position espoused by the church. There is supreme irony how the gospels take the story of a Jewish Rabbi executed by the Romans and turn it into the story of a Christian put to death by the Jews. The Church has in some way or fashion to take the Hebrew Scriptures from the Jews and direct them towards the coming of the Christians. This leaves really no way of getting around stereotyping the Jews as greedy, misanthropic, and vindictive. It is difficult to even conceive a passion story that is not anti-Jewish.

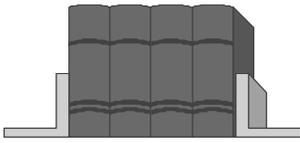
In the end though business and compromise won out. Oberammergau did manage to garner the *imprimatur* of the two American Jewish organizations. No boycott was launched for the millenium.

Wolf Roder

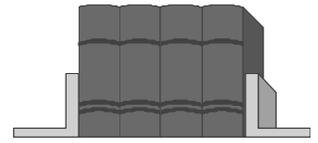
"If there is a supreme being, he's crazy."

—Marlene Dietrich (1909-1992), quoted in *Rave* magazine, November 1986





# Book Reviews



***How We Die***  
***Reflections on Life's Final Chapter***  
 by Sherwin B. Nuland  
 (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994, 278 pages)

Everyone will die and we all know it, yet most people fear death. To the extent that knowledge conquers fear, would knowledge about death's mechanisms help us to face the inevitable? Such is the premise of this Pulitzer prize winning book by the surgeon and historian of medicine, Sherwin Nuland. He states that the book was written to "...demythologize the process of dying." But the book offers no advice on how to achieve a death with dignity. Rather, he feels that a dignified death is, "...not to be expected by any but a very few people." Death with dignity is part of the myth as seen by this physician. In the introduction, Nuland tells of a patient whose breast cancer had been successfully removed but who then watched her mother suffer an agonizing death of the same disease. There was no time for the mother and daughter to become close and review life's journey together. "It was nothing like the peaceful end I expected...there was too much pain, too much Demerol." It seems that there are a few basic problems: 1) many things happen suddenly and there is no adequate preparation---this engenders messiness, 2) when your body starts failing, there is lots of stuff to do and plenty of the stuff is undignified, and 3) if your brain is failing, there is no dignity whatsoever.

The number one killer is heart disease and so our story begins with a massive heart attack. This is a problem of the first type: sudden and messy. One does not say, "Oh, I'm scheduled for a heart attack tomorrow at noon, would you look after the mail for me until I get back? My triple by-pass should have me on my feet in a couple of weeks." Of those with ischemic (blood starvation) heart disease, 50 to 60 percent will die within an hour of one of their heart attacks, most with severe pain in the chest like a charley horse. A very small number will drop dead without pain. What is this like? A survivor described his experience, "...then the lights went out, as if you're in a little room and flipped the switch...it was in slow motion...the change was very gradual." This man's brain was dying and its functions were shutting

down. Nuland, a religious skeptic, finds a reasonable physical explanation for this near-death experience and considers the mystification of such processes as more harmful than good.

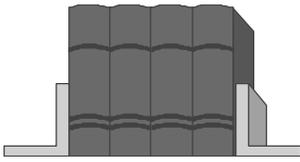
His story telling, often engrossing, of case histories alternates with lightly learned explanations of many medical terms. He intersperses the development with historical anecdotes which are revealing and cleverly chosen. A particular instance is the description of the 1891 painting, *The Doctor*, by Sir Luke Fildes. This depicts a small, probably unconscious, girl whose grieving parents watch at her bedside with the helpless physician. It is a scene of peace. Nuland points out that 14 years before creating this work, Fildes own son died, perhaps of diphtheria, scarlet fever, or meningitis. None of these diseases allows one to die peacefully, but would be accompanied by choking, delirium, or convulsions. Thus Nuland prefers Goya's painting, *El Garrotillo*, which shows, "...a doctor holding a young patient's head steady with one hand on his neck while preparing to insert the fingers of his other hand down the boy's throat in order to tear out the diphtheritic membrane that will choke off his life if not removed."

Describing the death of his grandmother as an instance of death of old age, we learn of the thousand little indignities suffered during the process of dying: incontinence, memory lapses, loss of balance, and repeated infections as the immune system collapses, to name a few. Most importantly, we shut the dying population away in hospitals where they lose contact with friends and the outside world, to gradually withdraw and often suffer deep loneliness and depression. This is for the coherent patient. For someone with Alzheimer's disease, there is a loss or a dramatic change of personality as the brain deteriorates. The patient may be unaware, and perhaps this is merciful from the patient's point of view, but to family and friends, it is often so disorienting and frightening that people consciously avoid the patient. Nuland chooses his words carefully, and he describes the results of Alzheimer's disease as "devastating."

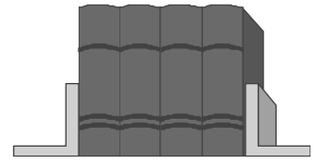
He also discusses murder---the murder of a nine year old girl, Katie, who was stabbed to death in the face and upper body by a maniac in front of her

*(Continued on page 11)*





# Book Reviews



(Continued from page 10)

mother at a street fair. The first time I tried to read this book, I stopped here and could not go on; it was too heart rending. I had several nightmares about my own girls and I would get up to check on them in the middle of the night. The point of including this horrific story is that Katie did not show signs of terror. Nuland surmises that just as the famous missionary-physician, David Livingston, became calm after a lion seized him in its teeth and swung him like a cat swings a mouse, so Katie became calm. The evidence is from the mother who held Katie after the murderer was dragged from Katie's body. Nuland believes that in times of stress and life threatening events, endorphins are provided by the brain to remove the sense of pain and panic. This might allow a severely injured person to escape the dangerous situation and be of significant survival value. While this is plausible and has been stated by others, he has no proof. Let's hope that he is correct. This is also the spot where Nuland suggests that similar mechanisms are responsible for near-death experiences.

Suicide, according to the statistics, is usually messy and violent, though he remarks that the hemlock society dose of barbiturates and plastic is effective and neat. He is compelled to correct the cause of death using their technique. Without mentioning his name, Nuland strongly condemns Kervorkian, "...we are treated to the spectacle of those publicized peddlers of death willingly expounding their philosophies on TV talk shows. They extol their own selflessness even as the judicial system seeks to prosecute them." He then discusses euthanasia positively and comments that "...involvement is the essence of the thing." I am not sure if Nuland is complaining about how information is passed around in pop culture, or if he believes that it is necessary to be middle class or better, with a long standing relationship with a physician before a person qualifies for euthanasia. His attitude seems inconsistent to me. AIDS gets two chapters and is well described technically with a moving chapter to provide the anecdotal account. Up to this point the professional clinical detachment of the surgeon brings a measure of objectivity to the subject. When he speaks of cancer things become more difficult.

Nuland's mother

and grandmother died when he was young. He was motivated to become a doctor by the physician who attended his mother in their home. His grandmother died when he was in college. But his brother died only a few years before the book was started so that Nuland was in a position to help and assist with years of professional experience to guide him. What did Nuland do? He hid the truth from his brother and encouraged him to

accept treatments which prolonged his pain and diminished the quality of his life. To me, this is the difficult lesson: we are not rational about death. If Nuland's case provides evidence, no amount of training, knowledge or even professional medical skill will make us so. Life is all we have. Whether or not there is a philosophical justification for our attitude, Dylan Thomas stated it correctly in the poem he wrote to his dying father:

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Bob Riehemann

The word "modern" in history is a flexible term. Although Woody Allen defines modern man as "any person born after Nietzsche's edict that 'God is dead' and before the hit recording 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand,'" most historians tend to date the beginning of the modern era during the seventeenth century, when educated people first stopped looking to religion for answers about the world.

Ethel Diamond, *Aristotle would have liked Oprah* (1999) p. 36

## Birth Control Double Standard in America?

Time it took for FDA approval:  
26 years for the birth control pill for women  
12 years for the abortion pill for women  
6 months for Viagra for men

CSH Newsletter, October 2, 2000

