

New FIG Board of Directors

At our August Pool Party, FIG elected by proclamation those members on the board who were up for re-election and new member Michele Grinoch. Soon thereafter the board elected officers as follows:

President: Bob Riehemann Secretary: Philip Ferguson
Vice President: Edwin Kagin Treasurer: Joe Levee

Remaining Board Members: Nurit Bowman, Martha Ferguson, Michele Grinoch, Lyse Hurd, Helen Kagin, Tim Kelly, Inez Klein, and Gary Weiss. The board wishes to express special thanks to outgoing president George Maurer who has devoted so much time and energy to the FIG board since the beginning of the organization.

September Meeting

The Free Inquiry Group welcomed Babu Gogineni to its monthly meeting at the Geier Center on Tuesday, September 5th. Babu is the executive director of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). A native of India, he lives in England and travels extensively to promote humanism worldwide.

Babu set out to answer some common questions about humanism, such as "Is humanism a religion?" and "How can humanism claim the moral high ground?". He began by defining humanism in terms of its beliefs and goals. First and foremost, he stated, humanists are skeptics, not cynics. They believe in rebuilding the world through democratic action, one individual at a time.

Babu observed that humanists ponder many of the same mysteries as religion, but humanism is an enterprise of questions, not of answers. Getting to the truth is more important than holding a constant position on every issue. The philosophy of humanism is distinct from the theology of religion. Science is the tool that creates knowledge and sheds light on truth. Humanists have a greater appreciation of nature because of the depth of their understanding.

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Superstition Bash

The Free Inquiry Group has joined forces with the Association for Rational Thought (ART) and the University of Cincinnati Skeptics to throw a Superstition Bash. Dare to come! We will meet at St. John's Unitarian Church at 320 Resor Avenue in Clifton on Friday, October 13th at 7:30. It will be an adults only event. Fingerfood and snacks will be served. You are welcome to bring beer or wine for your own consumption. No hard liquor, please. We will examine some of society's long held superstitions and explore their origins. The brave may choose to have their futures bared before them through the terrible powers of several psychic wonders.

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Superstition Bash

Friday, October 13, 2000
St. John's Unitarian Church
320 Resor Ave., Clifton
at 7:30 p.m.

Potluck Dinner
October 10 at 6:30

THE NEW AMERICAN PLUTOCRACY

by Paul Kurtz

I AM DEEPLY TROUBLED by the fact that in the upcoming presidential and congressional elections there is little or no debate on what I consider to be a CENTRAL issue for the American future: the emergence of a new and powerful plutocracy wedded to corporate power. Regrettably, none of the major candidates will deign to even discuss this vital question. Only Ralph Nader has identified it. But he has largely been ignored or parodied by the mass media. Typically, Paul Krugman, op-ed columnist for the "New York Times," has ridiculed Nader precisely for his attacks on "corporate power." Senator John McCain did raise the issue of the special interests and soft money corrupting the political process. But he has been rebuffed and has climbed into the same bed with Bush. Many do not consider Nader to be a viable candidate, for the Green Party does not represent an effective political coalition. Neither "Free Inquiry" nor the Council for Secular Humanism can endorse political candidates, but this should not preclude me from presenting my own personal views about the deeper humanist issues at stake.

A plutocracy is defined as "government by the wealthy." The critical question that should concern us is whether the United States is already a plutocracy, and what can be done to limit its power. This question, unfortunately, will not be taken seriously by most voters - but it damned well ought to be.

Ancient Greek democracy lasted only a century; the Roman republic survived for four, though it was increasingly weakened as time went on. As America enters its third century we may well ask whether our democratic institutions will survive and if so in what form.

As readers of these pages know, I have been concerned by the virtually unchallenged growth of corporate power. Mergers and acquisitions continue at a dizzying pace, as small and mid-sized businesses and farms disappear; independent doctors, lawyers, and accountants are gobbled up by larger firms; and working men and women are at the mercy of huge global conglomerates, which downsize as they export jobs overseas.

I have also deplored the emergence of the global "media-ocracy," whereby a handful of powerful media conglomerates virtually dominate the means of communication. A functioning democratic society depends upon a free exchange of ideas; today fewer dissenting views are heard in the public square, as diversity is narrowed or muffled.

Most recently the Tribune Company, publisher of the "Chicago Tribune" and other newspapers and radio and television companies, bought the Times-Mirror, publisher of the "Los Angeles Times," etc.; the Gannett chain purchased Central Newspapers, publishers of the "Indianapolis Star," the "Arizona Republic," and other newspapers. News Corporation (Rupert Murdoch) has announced its intention to take over Chris-Craft's extensive television holdings. And Viacom has offered to buy out the remaining stock it doesn't own in the giant radio network, Infinity Broadcasting. Although Clinton's Justice Department has been attempting to stem the merger juggernaut by questioning a limited number of acquisitions, this may be viewed as mere window dressing, as too little and too late.

This trend toward the concentration of ownership should be of special concern to secular humanists and rationalists. The regnant corporate outlook increasingly espouses a spiritual/religious/supernatural mystique, and it seeks to marginalize iconoclastic viewpoints. Unfortunately for secular humanists, "pro ecclesia et commercia" (for church and commerce) has become the ideology not only of the Religious Right, but is being marketed daily to consumers in the mainstream.

CORPORATE DOMINATION OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS by means of campaign contributions blocks the emergence of independent voices willing to defend the public interest. Lobbyists subvert the integrity of the Congress and of state legislatures throughout the land by buying influences and votes. Big oil, media, pharmaceutical, tobacco, gambling, insurance, and financial companies thus dominate the legislative process. For example, the banks and credit-card companies charge usurious rates and use deceptive marketing practices, fleecing millions of unwary consumers and

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FIG Leaves Volume 9, Issue 9, September 2000 - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in electronic format via Internet to figeditors@fuse.net or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 8128, Cincinnati OH 45208. Contributions received before the first Tuesday of the month will be considered for publication that month. All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the author. Opinions expressed in FIG Leaves are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., its board, or officers. © 2000 The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. FIG Board of Directors: President Bob Riehemann, Vice President Edwin Kagin, Secretary Philip Ferguson, Treasurer Joe Levee, Members: Nurit Bowman, Michele Grinoch, Lyse Hurd, Helen Kagin, Tim Kelly,





Rationally Speaking

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

N. 2, September 2000 -

"The Place of Science"

"Science bumps the ceiling of the corporeal plane... From the metaphysical point of view its arms, lifted toward a zone of freedom that transcends coagulation, form the homing arc of the 'love loop.' They are science responding to Eternity's love for the productions of time." This grandiose bit of poetical nonsense concludes a chapter of Huston Smith's *Forgotten Truth* dedicated to put science in its place. Smith is one of the world's foremost authorities on religions, and his aim is to demonstrate that science is not an omnipotent force that can answer all questions posed by humanities. That is, science needs to be put in its place.

Fair enough, although I don't know of any scientist who would claim otherwise. Contrary to what many anti-intellectuals maintain, science is by nature a much more humble enterprise than any religion or other ideology. This must be so given the self-correcting mechanisms that are incorporated into the scientific process, regardless of the occasional failures of individual scientists.

But what is most astounding in Smith's essay is his attempt to develop a parallel between science and mysticism in order to "demonstrate" that the world's great religions are capable of insights at least as powerful as science's because they actually use similar tools. Let us then briefly examine this alleged parallelism and in the process try to understand what the proper place of both science and religion ought to be.

Smith's first insight is that science and religion both claim that things are not as they seem. For example, you have the perception that the chair on which you are sitting is solid, but modern physics will tell you that it is made of mostly empty space. This, apparently, is analogous to the following bit from C.S. Lewis: "Christianity claims to be telling us about another world, about something behind the world we can touch and hear and see." Never mind, of course, that physicists can bring sophisticated empirical evidence to support their claim about the emptiness of space, while Christianity is made up of a series of fantastic and contradictory stories backed by no evidence whatsoever.

Second, according to Smith, both science and religion claim that the world is not only different from what we perceive, but that there is "more" than we can see, and that the additional part is "stupendous." Of course, electrons, quarks and neutrinos are "more" than we can see, although they are stupendous only to those few scientists who spend their lives working on them. Well, this is apparently the same as Shankara's "notion of the extravagance of his vision of the *summum bonum* when he says that it cannot be obtained except through the merits of 100 billion well-lived incarnations," a cornerstone of some Indian sacred text. I hope you are starting to appreciate the depths of the similarities between science and religion. But wait, there is more.

The two quests for truth also share the quality that this "more" that they seek to explore cannot be known in ordinary ways (otherwise, presumably, one would need neither science nor religion to get there). Science's ways lead to apparent contradictions, such as in the case of some aspects of quantum mechanical theory. To which Smith juxtaposes some gems from the Christian literature that he says uncannily resemble modern notions of quantum physics. For example, did not Nicholas of Cusa (*De Visione Dei*) write that "the wall of the Paradise in which Thou, Lord, dwellest is built of contradictories," pretty much like the dual particle-wave nature of light? And did not Dionysius the Areopagite (*The Divine Names*) say "He is both at rest and in motion, and yet is in neither state," thus anticipating Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle? I am not making the examples up—these are Smith's very own.

Fourth, both science and religion have found other ways of knowing this "more" which cannot be accessed by our ordinary senses. The language through which science accomplishes this is mathematics; the one of religion is, of course, mysticism, which Smith describes as a "comparably specialized way of knowing reality's highest transcorporeal reaches" (whatever that means). This, according to Smith, is "not a state to be achieved but a condition to be recognized, for God has united his divine essence with our inmost being. *Tat tvan asi*; That thou art. *Atman is Brahman*; *samsara, Nirvana*". Yes, of course.

The fifth parallelism is that in both science and religion these alternative ways of knowing need to be properly cultivated. A scientist needs to dedicate a lifetime to her education and research if she wants to make a contribution. This is apparently similar to the asceticism of saints because, as Bayazid 'correctly' pointed out, "The knowledge of God cannot be attained by seeking, but only those who seek it find it."

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Finally, in both science and religion profound knowing requires instruments. In science, these are microscopes, telescopes and particle accelerators. In religion, the equivalent is provided by the Revealed Texts, "Palomar telescopes that disclose the heavens that declare God's glory." If gods who dictate texts are not palatable to you, there is an alternative: "Spirit (the divine in man) and the Infinite (the divine in its transpersonal finality) are identical—man's deepest unconscious is the mountain at the bottom of the lake." Get it?

I would not have bothered the reader with this mountain of nonsense if it came from the local televangelist screaming bloody hell against the humanists' corruption of the world. But this is Huston Smith, one of the most respected intellectual exponents of modern religionism, one who is hailed as offering the deepest insights that not just one, but *all* the world's religions can offer!

This is a maddening example of what Richard Dawkins (in *Unweaving the Rainbow*) called "bad poetry." Metaphors make much of the world's literature a pleasure to read, but they can also be exceedingly misleading. There is no parallel whatsoever between science and religion. One can practice one or the other or both, but to pretend that they yield common insights into the nature of

the world is an intellectual travesty. To go further, as Smith and so many religionists do, and assert that science is arrogant because it claims to provide the best answers to a circumscribed set of questions is astonishing, especially when the alleged alternative is so obviously the result of Pindaric flights of imagination. Now, here is my modest proposal: what if religions would treat themselves to a little dose of humility? Imagine what the world would be like in that case.

**Next Month: "Whence Natural Rights?"
a fundamental and difficult question for humanists
© by Massimo Pigliucci, 2000**

Further reading:

Forgotten Truth
by Huston Smith

Unweaving the Rainbow
by Richard Dawkins

Web links:

Visual Quantum Mechanics (<http://phys.educ.ksu.edu/>), where you can learn about real physics

Thinking Allowed interview with Huston Smith (<http://www.thinkingallowed.com/smith.html>), for some more nonsense, if you can stomach it

The World of Richard Dawkins (<http://www.world-of-dawkins.com/>), as a welcome antidote to the site above

**Published by permission from Massimo's Website:
<http://fp.bio.utk.edu/skeptic/Rationally%20Speaking/>**

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People have asked Babu if humanism needs to criticize religion in order to promote itself. His retort is "How can the end of ignorance be a negative thing?" Critical inquiry is a positive action that needs no apologies. He then quoted Voltaire: "People who believe in absurdities will commit atrocities". Humanists have a duty to protest violations of human rights no matter where they occur. Fundamentalist religion is indeed a threat to human rights, but humanists must avoid becoming God-obsessed atheists. A return to traditional humanism is needed.

Babu noted that the Western economies have promoted global consumerism without consideration of its affect on non-Western societies. He feels that Western levels of consumption are incompatible with humanism, especially since many of the natural resources are being taken from the developing countries. The capitalist system has created a worldwide marketplace for all types of goods and services, but this also includes the weapons that allow despotic regimes to stay in power. International humanism needs to concentrate on the support of democracy and human rights rather than on the creation of Western-style consumer economies.

Humanism supports the moral values of equality, liberty, and fraternity in a democratic society. It

promotes the politics of freedom, not of power. People become self-reliant when they are free. Babu stated that we must be open to all humanizing trends, even if they occur within a religious organization such as the Roman Catholic church. Humanists need to be tolerant and inclusive as they strive to improve the human condition. The one thing that we should not tolerate is intolerance itself.

Babu then explained how the IHEU works with the United Nations as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). The IHEU acts as a global representative of humanist principles, and is not constrained by state or religious boundaries. It speaks out against the tendency to accept human rights violations when they occur within the prevailing culture of a country. The IHEU will file a complaint against any country that violates basic human rights, including the right to be free from religion.

Babu concluded by saying that despite the relatively small number of people active in the movement, humanism has the power to change the world. It has a rich tradition and appeals to the best aspects of human nature. Humanists must not be afraid to get their hands a little dirty in the political process, imperfect as it is.



FIG Leaflets

"The Fangcheng Church is not a cult," the pastor said. "They are moderate and sound Christians. Its members are very faithful and fearless, and they want to save everyone for Jesus. That's why we want to help them."

from China Arrests Evangelicals, "Including 3 From the U.S.", *The New York Times INTERNATIONAL*, 8-25-00

It was the Enlightenment unbeliever Denis Diderot (1713-1784) who coined the phrase about religion and tyranny perishing together "when the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest."

"... she would pray to all the gods she believed in that her daughter might be spared. She turned to the Christian god, to the spirits of her ancestors, to her dead mother, to the *songoma* her father always used to talk about. But she was never completely convinced they had really heard her. The prayers made her feel better by dint of tiring her out.

Henning Mankell, *The White Lioness* (1998) p. 268

Newspapers are fond of referring to the "dustbin of history," a notion they borrow not from Karl Marx, as they think, but from an English writer and member of Parliament, Augustine Birrell. On inspection the bin is much less full than is commonly believed. The repeats and returns in the last five centuries have been frequent. To cite an example, one need only note the present resurgence of intellectual interest in the text of the Bible and the life of Jesus. Or consider another survival that could qualify for the dustbin but has been overlooked: the newspaper column on astrology.

Jaques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence* (2000) p. xviii

World Wide Web

<http://www.star-telegram.com/news/doc/1047/1:RELIGION23/1:RELIGION230911100.html>, ***Secular humanists offer alternative to non-believers***, by Gustav Niebuhr

Our Humanist Family

For many years I have tried to understand how my husband Philip managed to reject religion at the ripe old age of 7, when I struggled with the issue at 17. Our six year old son Jack has offered some clues recently. His personality is much like Philip's. Last year when Jack was in kindergarten he was surprisingly obedient. When the teacher told them to sit on the carpet and be quiet, he immediately sat down with his finger on his lip. I asked him why he was so well-behaved and he said that he would do whatever was necessary to get a piece of candy out of the jar on the teacher's desk.

Jack's school has mixed primaries so he has the same teacher for first grade that he had for kindergarten. It came as quite a shock to him that there was no candy jar upon her desk this year. She attended a conference over the summer that emphasized other methods of class control. There is not enough room here to tell you how much trouble he managed to get into the first two weeks of school. Without the candy jar, he had no motivation to behave. Punishment has never been very effective with him. He sees punishment as a personal insult rather than an effort to make him behave.

So perhaps religion had nothing to offer Philip at age 7. The candy jar was a trip to heaven after he died...and children don't usually anticipate their own deaths. He couldn't plan his whole life based upon a reward that he would not receive for hopefully 70 years or more. He was very well behaved, but his reward was the immediate approval of others, not some pie in the sky in the distant future.

The threat of hell held no meaning for him either. He couldn't see why a god whom everyone said loved him would send him to hell. My parents' church talked about hell a lot, as most Southern Baptist Churches do. I don't remember a lot of discussions about god's love, but hell was a very clear concept. My focus as a child was to avoid punishment, so fear of hell kept me in line for a long time.

Philip says that I'm searching too hard for answers to this puzzle. He says that he rejected religion because he wanted to sleep late. I guess that was an even more immediate reward!

Martha Ferguson



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forcing them into bankruptcy, yet effective legislation to protect consumers was blocked in Congress by the banking industry. Surreptitiously, large companies are now reducing retirement benefits with nary any political opposition. Corporations today - such as General Electric and Exxon-Mobil - are earning huge profits.

Some may say that my appraisal is too pessimistic, for stock ownership is widely distributed, and that corporate efficiency contributes to the current American prosperity. Granted, we do not wish to undermine our economic prosperity, but much of this is due to new scientific and technological discoveries and to an educated labor force, not simply corporate oligopolies.

We need to ask the questions: should corporations be the primary arbiters of the public will, and should "market forces" alone determine the conditions of social justice? Unfortunately, a relatively small number of corporate managers and stockholders of the new plutocracy control the corporate state, and it is the incestuous relationship between corporate economic power and politics that is most disturbing. Today a corporate-military plutocracy rules virtually unchallenged, manipulating and manufacturing the news and safeguarding its position of power.

THE ATTEMPT BY THE OUTGOING CONGRESS to get rid of estate taxes is only the latest brazen effort to advance the interests of the plutocracy. Unfortunately, there is now a strong majority of the Congress for repeal, and this includes many Democrats - although President Clinton has vetoed the measure for the session. Those who rail against estate taxes mislabel them "death taxes." But one can make a persuasive ethical case for estate taxes as fair - and I am arguing only the ETHICAL, not political issue - for they would provide a more level playing field for the disadvantaged and equalize, however modestly, the widening gap between rich and poor. One CAN argue that it is in the public interest to reduce estate taxes on small businesses and farms in order to protect them from extinction at the hands of larger corporations, but to exempt the huge fortunes of multimillionaires and billionaires is morally unconscionable. Repealing the estate tax would expand the financial wealth of the plutocracy that now rules this country. It would ensure the perpetuation of the existing financial elite with very few limits on its economic and political power. In 1998, the top one percent of the population, according to an article in the "Wall Street Journal," owns 38.1 percent of the wealth of the country; the top 20 percent - 87.4 percent; the rest of the population - 80 percent - own only 12.6 percent of the wealth! These disparities are growing. In the past twenty years, the after-tax income of the wealthiest 1% of the population increased by 119.7%, whereas the bottom 60%

by 12%.

Hypocritically, the Religious Right supports the elimination of estate taxes. Incredibly, it has sought to enshrine Greed by Divine Sanction: "God rewards the thrifty and virtuous," ideologues assert; "those with wealth deserve to keep it" - even if they made their money in speculation or by inheritance. The Religious Right opposes gun control, is for capital punishment, and is against legislation to extend medical care to the millions who cannot afford it, or prescriptions for the elderly, yet it supports for aid to the affluent.

A century ago Teddy Roosevelt helped enact and enforce the Sherman Anti-Trust Law, and later Woodrow Wilson introduced the progressive income tax. Where are the political leaders today, willing to restrain corporate trusts and the new plutocracy? Who will speak out for the ordinary citizen? Who will defend the humanistic principles of equity and fairness?

SECULAR HUMANISTS ARE INDEPENDENT-MINDED PERSONS who will most likely support a variety of candidates in the upcoming elections. They will in their evaluations of platforms no doubt appeal to humanist values. A vital test will be how well candidates support the separation of church and state and the First Amendment.

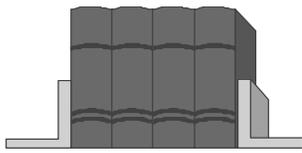
The recent political conventions - heavily supported by corporate money - at times looked like religious-revival meetings; for most of the major candidates praised the Lord and religious faith repeatedly.

There is a fine line that ought to be drawn between private conscience and public professions of religious belief. Major candidates - Bush, Gore, Lieberman, and Cheney - have every right to hold their religious convictions or practice the rituals of their traditions; but is it too much to ask that they restrain professions of their personal piety in the public square? Our President and Vice President represent ALL the people, not simply the Judaic-Christian tradition; and this includes Unitarians, Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Scientologists, infidians, nullfidians, and just plain backsliders. Rationalists, skeptics, atheists, agnostics, and secular humanists are American citizens too!

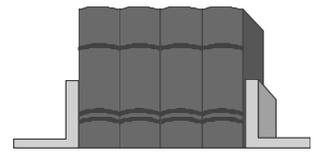
There is widespread moral diversity in America. To simply assume that faith in the Old or New Testament is the only basis of "morality" is blindsighted. Had the candidates take an introductory philosophy course at their universities, they would have seen that there is within Western civilization an historic nonreligious and rational humanist basis for morality. Moreover, humanist values are central to American civic virtues - a commitment to human rights, including freedom of conscience, autonomy of choice, the right to dissent - none of which is easily

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Book Reviews



Jesus Matters: 150 Years of Research

by Cees J. den Heyer, trans: John Bowden
(Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997)

This very brief volume, 175 pages of text, is a survey of the history of research into the reality of the life of the first century person Jesus. Many issues are at stake in the question. Was he a Galilean or Judean, was he thought to be human, a son of god, or god himself, a messiah or a rebel against Roman occupation, could he possibly have risen from the dead? What did he accomplish in this life, what did he think he was doing, or could he possibly have been a redeemer of humankind?

To accomplish his task, the Dutch author recounts the history of this research. In fact, the beginning of rational study of Jesus can be timed rather precisely. It started in May 1778 with the posthumous publication of *The Intention of Jesus and his Disciples* by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768). In it the author is merely the first to argue the historical Jesus was a rebel who intended to liberate his people from Roman oppression. Which is why the colonial power nailed him to the cross. And, having failed, explains his cry "My god, my god, why have you forsaken me" (Mk. 15:34).

The nineteenth century brought a host of insights. David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) argued the gospels were mythical and theological, not history. Holtzmann (1832-1910) found that Mark not John or Matthew was the earliest gospel, and that he and Matthew and Luke must have used a second source, *Quelle* or Q, for the confabulation of their stories. Ernest Renan (1823-1892) published the first demythologized *Life of Jesus* which described him as a human being of flesh and blood. This became a "best seller" which brought the discussion into the arena of an educated public.

Two important scholars gained insights at the very end of the century, but published only in the twentieth. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) considered the quest for an historical Jesus in vain. We can not know the authentic man, we must settle for the "apocalypticist."

The Jesus of the gospels was mistaken, he clearly expected the end of the world and of time in the immediate future. Adolf von Harnack (1853-1930) described Jesus as a teacher of exalted ideals and a prophet of enlightenment. But he threw out all belief in miracles, the virgin birth, and the resurrection.

Quite slowly the realization penetrated that all the documents of the New Testament were written years after the events they recount. They were written by believers who were making theological points, not presenting history. The sources of the historian proved less than reliable and lacked all corroboration from outside the canon.

Thus slowly the awareness penetrated New Testament scholarship that historically speaking exegetes were groping in the dark. Jesus lived, but the historical Jesus remains unattainable and it is impossible to portray him. In the end the historian stands with empty hands. (P. 51)

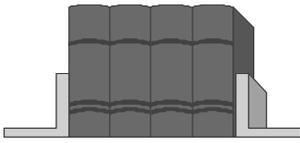
Discovered by Martin Kähler (1835-1912) but really explained by Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) was a remarkable insight. The synoptic gospels consist of a collection of independent sayings or pericopes which each evangelist strung together in a different way providing various narratives of when, where, and under what circumstances these words had been uttered.

The sayings likely existed before the gospels themselves were written, but this were not confirmed until the discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas* at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945.

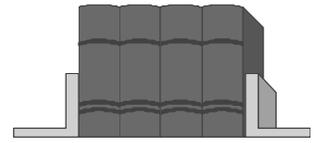
In the twentieth century it became increasingly clear that Jesus did not intend to be the Messiah, that he interpreted and observed the Torah, was a characteristic Rabbi, i.e. teacher of the time, intended his message for the lost sheep of the family of Israel, and had no intention of founding a new religion or splitting from Judaism. He was willing to include Samaritans, Galileans, servants of the colonial power, and other sinners within his circle and within the faith. He was a careful and competent student of the Torah, a serious

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Book Reviews



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scholar and sage. It was the Roman power, not the Jewish priests who considered him dangerous and were his executioners. "Christian faith does not go back to Jesus, but to Paul and the other apostles of the first days. They founded the Christian church. This had not been Jesus' aim at all." (p. 116) He was a human being, a man of flesh and blood, he liked to eat and drink, he had human emotions of irritation, sorrow, and joy.

Ultimately it is a controversy between historians who search for fact and theologians who examine the Jesus of faith. In the last chapter den Heyer sums up what is known with some certainty and in principle about the Jesus of history. This mini-biography occupies all of three pages. The book is packed with data about the history of research and an excellent reference on who wrote what when.

Wolf Roder

***Mollie's Job: A Story of Life and Work
on the Global Assembly Line***

by William M. Adler
(New York: Scribner, 2000)

Among the various beliefs which make up the American civil religion surely the dogma of Free Enterprise is dominant. Business and enterprise have made us the best, richest, freest, and most just country in the world. Almost any action can be explained and excused as an economic necessity; whether downsizing, i.e. firing your workers, or moving the plant or polluting the environment. The company must remain competitive, and the firm profitable. Free Enterprise is good for you, ever and always. As Ivan Boesky put it, six months before he went to prison for three years: "Greed is alright. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself." (P. 241)

This story deals with

the effects of American industrial progress over the past fifty years, not in abstract terms and numbers, but in the history of what happened to Mollie James' Job as it went south to more liberal climes, where wages are low, unions weak, environmental laws unenforced, and workplace safety nonexistent. The book reads very well, almost like a novel, but it deals with real people, names, and places. In fact, it is a good idea to keep a map handy to follow the action from Paterson, New Jersey, to Mendenhall and Gallman, Mississippi, to Blytheville, Arkansas, and Matamoros, Mexico.

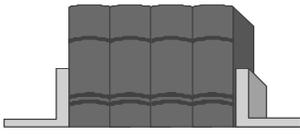
The action begins at the end of the War with an immigrant, go-getter, entrepreneur who builds an electrical components company from nothing. A classical, paternalistic workplace in which the boss works alongside his employees and knows everyone by name. He even welcomes organized labor for electricians will not install his product unless it bears a union label. Yet, neither he nor his workers can rid themselves of a crooked and corrupt Teamster local.

In the early sixties the company expands into rural Mississippi, a county without equal rights, without NAACP, much less CORE or SNCC. It is a place where the whites celebrated the assassination of President Kennedy. Yet, it is the company which in many ways escorted the region into the late twentieth century. In control of the only work and wages and backed by federal law the company could defy the Klan, the Sheriff, and the white newspapers, by insisting on an integrated workforce. Which, incidentally, helped to hold down wages as well.

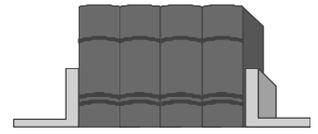
The founder's death in 1968 marked the passing of an era of management by men who thought as industrial manufacturers. While he venerated the bottom line as much as any capitalist, he achieved success by "a steely-eyed focus on high quality and customer service"(p. 220). The company was sold to a multi-branched electrical products company, which soon after was swallowed whole by another conglomerate. It thus fell into the hands of people who had no idea of the realities of production, nor

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Book Reviews



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did they have any interest in the nuts and bolts of the operation. In fact, the company, now a mere subsidiary, changed hands several times in the financial go-go years of the eighties.

By now the personal relationships and life long job security of the early days were well forgotten. A cavalier attitude infected all aspects of the company. A director of human resources fired many of the old line leaders and executives. The company used their new *maquiladora* plant in Mexico to hold a loaded gun to the union local's negotiation committee. Reduce hourly pay or we close the plant. None the less, the reprieve was brief. Workers in Mexico earned as much in day as Americans in an hour, and by 1997 all manufacturing operations in the U.S. were shut down.

Wages in Mexico were insufficient to raise a family. Workplace conditions are described as stiflingly hot, with air unbreathable from polluting chemicals, and without break, cafeteria, or adequate toilets. Living conditions were not one whit better. Yet, young women workers continued to stream in from the rural areas. At the end, ironically we may all "Thank God for NAFTA" the title of the epilogue.

Wolf Roder

The Library Card
by Jerry Spinelli
Scholastic Inc. 1997, 148 pages

A book can change a person. In this collection of four short stories for middle school students, libraries play important roles in changing four appealing, sympathetic, and contemporary characters. Each story uses a library card as an important symbol---of intellectual independence, learning, and critical thinking. This is not the kind of card which identifies a patron, but the blue card upon which the due date stamp is

applied when checking out a book.

In the first story two 12 year old boys are just learning to shop lift and mark their territory with graffiti. Mongoose is a little more clever than Weasel and as they start down the road of delinquency, a blue library begins appearing near them. It finally appears in Mongoose's room and won't go away. He winds up at the library and finds a science book, *I Wonder*, which describes the life cycle of the 17 year locust, the size of the great blue whale, a hummingbird's breathing rate, and other curious facts. Mongoose is fascinated and becomes absorbed in trying to make the facts his own---pacing out the dimensions of the whale and using a stop watch to breathe as fast as the hummingbird. Weasel could care less.

The consequent painful dissolution of the relationship of these best friends is the source of dramatic tension. Weasel keeps trying to get his friend back, but Mongoose is not noticing the problem because of his absorption. This is well described by Spinelli and it is at a level which is intelligible to middle school students. Eventually the characters move along separate paths.

In the second story, Spinelli describes Brenda. She mainlines TV and the story begins when all of the parents in the community remove televisions for a week. Spinelli opens this story with Brenda's unnamed fear. She is counting down the minutes and compares herself to a prisoner awaiting execution. Only at the last moment does the reader learn that she is waiting for her father to turn off the TV. This is well written and I can say that my 10 year old, Sophia, literally sat up on the couch and leaned toward me as the tension increased. Brenda goes into shock, of course.

Eventually Brenda notices a library card in the place where her TV used to sit and she begins to feel better. Late one night she winds up in the library and finds a book containing her biography. It is charming, but it stops abruptly when it gets to the sentence, "One day Brenda turned on the television." After

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some serious reflection, she realizes that immersion in TV fantasies has removed her identity and she then proceeds to recover it and simultaneously drive her mother to wit's end.

There then follows the heart breaking story of Sonseray, a child living in a car with his uncle after having lost his mother to drugs. He was very young when his mother died and continually tries to get information about his mother and motherhood generally. His anger and constant search for this information make him mean. When he winds up at the library with a blue card, he finds the one book that his mother repeatedly read to him as a child; in it was the character after whom he was named.

Finally we meet April who has moved to a mushroom farm in Pennsylvania from New York City. Her most valued possession is a blue library card. She hates her new life and decides to walk as far as necessary to get away from the smell of horse manure in which the mushrooms grow. It's a long walk and eventually she is picked up by a bookmobile. In the van she meets Nanette, a young woman enamored of body piercing and Walt. Nanette is running away to elope with Walt, believing that she has hijacked the bookmobile because she flashes a switchblade. The librarian is playing along, having noticed that Nanette has slash marks on her wrist. April and Nanette become friends before Nanette exits to meet Walt, and April offers the library card as a wedding present. Upon it was April's hastily written address.

April later receives a letter from Nanette and

SPIRITUAL SUMMIT: A BALANCE SHEET

Sweet harmony wobbled through the lobby of the United Nations when exotically clad religious and spiritual leaders from all faiths tuned up a great unison, hymns of love, tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation. One of the highlights was the address of the high priest of capitalism, Ted Turner, honorary chairman, inventor and sponsor of this event with the ambitious name "Millennium World Peace Summit." Entertaining the enlightened assembly by ridiculing the Christian claim of the monopoly of heaven, which once left him "pretty confused and turned off", Turner evoked much laughter. The pope, if he was there, would not have enjoyed such jokes!

The pope was not there, nor were Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei, the Taliban leaders, the Dalai Lama or the Hindu Shankaracharyas. The delegates of the summit comprised mainly of the small fries of the spiritual world. That explains why the concluding document, solemnly affirmed by more than a thousand signatories, did not trigger any controversy. It is a no-holds-barred commitment to global peace, proclaiming equality of all religions, condemning all forms of violence, upholding gender equality and lambasting poverty.

How serious these heartening commitments can be taken is, however, even doubted by a section of the signatories: The few women delegates of the summit decided to form their own "international religious council" to ensure equal representation in follow up meets. Godwomen, female spiritual leaders and their disciples showed displeasure over the fact that they were kept out from delegations and complained that the conference was a monopoly of men.

THE Church of England and all other Protestant churches are not "proper" churches because they suffer from "defects", according to the Roman Catholic Church.

In a declaration approved by the Pope, the Vatican will also state that followers of all non-Christian religions are "gravely deficient" and their rituals constitute "an obstacle to salvation".

The statements are contained in *Declaration Dominus Iesus*, to be published in Rome tomorrow. Although not in the name of the Pope, it was approved by him and "reflects his thinking".

Churches stunned by Pope's attack on 'defects' , BY RUTH GLEDHILL, *The Times*, September 4, 2000

<http://www.the-times.co.uk/news/pages/tim/2000/09/04/timfgnfgn01010.html>

