



PANVIEWS

Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., Affiliated with:
American Atheists, the Council for Secular Humanism, Atheist Alliance International

November, 2007

“All of a sudden the Sacred Host began to grow on my tongue, becoming larger and thicker. It seemed to expand and then suddenly it came alive...It resembled a living fish, the way it moved in my mouth. I wanted to take it out of my mouth to see what it was but naturally out of reverence I did not dare.”

--Ida Peerdeman, who
“witnessed” the Lady of All Nations appear in Holland, describing one of her many “Eucharistic experiences.”

We may only speculate at this point in time about what sort of fish the “Sacred Host” may have resembled. Perhaps a bonefish? Was it a muskellunge? Or maybe just the ordinary pet eel of the parish priest?

In any case, the story reminds us that as nonbelievers we do not have delusions of ecstasy to provide gratification and satisfaction. We are left with reality, in all of its harsh and wondrous permutations. One not entirely unpleasant reality is that over the last year or two several atheists have written bestselling books and have become popular media spokespersons for rational thinking and nonbelief in the supernatural.

If there is a downside to this newly found positive exposure it may be that many nonbelievers might think that the more famous among us are enough to bring the ideas of rationality to the believing public.

That attitude unfortunately does not reflect reality.

While the fame of prominent nonbelievers is indeed a great opportunity for us to reach people we ordinarily would not have access to, we run the danger of becoming a group of folks content to sit at our computers, swapping stories about the latest clever remarks by Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris or Dennett.

In fact, we cannot rely on the above mentioned gentlemen to do all the heavy lifting. We need to be out in public making our own clever remarks. When PAN members have booths at street fairs, appear on our TV programs or do other activities in public, we are doing the grassroots work that people like Dawkins and Harris and Hitchens cannot. We are the essential local compliments to their national exposure.

When we appear in public, it doesn't matter if we are ignored or if we are openly scorned. It doesn't matter whether we are attacked or praised. It doesn't even matter how many new members we attract.

It matters only that we are seen repeatedly sitting unflinching in the front of the bus of the American marketplace of ideas, desensitizing more and more Americans to the once shocking idea that we belong in those seats as least as much as anyone else.

Some of us had a very pleasant time sitting in the front of the bus at the PumpkinFest on October 6 and 7. The weather was great (for once) and we not only sold many bumper stickers and buttons but also had many great conversations with visitors to our booth.

On Monday, October 22, we had a table all day in the State Capitol Building in Harrisburg, at a terrific location next to the entrance to the cafeteria. We had many interesting conversations and visited both the House and Senate, where in both cases we were requested to stand for the opening prayer. In both cases we refused, in the House incurring the disgust of a visibly agitated Sergeant-at-Arms. Special thanks to Carl Silverman for organizing the Harrisburg event, and to Carl and Bob Young for working both the Harrisburg event and both days of the PumpkinFest.

On October 20 and 27 we had crews working at our women's shelter renovation project in Lancaster. We will be working there again on upcoming Saturdays November 10 and 17, and we need volunteers for both days (see page six). We invite all to sit in the front of the bus and help out with this community project.

Our next monthly meeting will be at the UUCY Carriage House at 925 S. George Street in York on Saturday, November 3, from 10:00 AM to noon. This meeting will feature Paul Duryea speaking about his “Clean Water for Ghana” project, and we will also be raffling off two tickets to the Planned Parenthood of Central PA Jazz Night (see page six). The meeting will be followed by our informal luncheon which, like the meeting, will feature refreshments designed to wash away any last remaining stale aftertaste of fish.

Similar refreshments are also available at our next Harrisburg area meeting in the back room at the West Shore Plaza in Lemoyne on Thursday, November 8, from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM.

We hope to see everyone sitting up front yet again at our meetings in York on Dec. 1 and in Lemoyne on Dec. 13, and then to begin the new year at our Annual General Meeting and elections on Saturday, January 5, 2008. And don't forget our Tenth Annual Winter Solstice Party on Dec. 22, to be held again this year at the Hubers. It's an event with plenty of refreshment and where nothing is sacred.—*President's Report*

Book Review

by *Priscilla Oppenheimer*

Infidel by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Infidel is a gripping memoir by the Somali woman who came as a refugee to Holland, became a member of Parliament, and wrote the script for the short film *Submission*, over which the Dutch filmmaker, Theo Van Gogh, was killed in 2004. You may remember the shock waves throughout Holland and the West that resulted from a Dutch citizen being shot, stabbed in the chest, and having his throat cut in the street in broad daylight by a Muslim extremist.

Hirsi Ali's childhood and adolescence were spent in Africa, enduring the upheavals of being a refugee in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya, fleeing civil wars and despots and the constraints of trying to live as a good Muslim girl amid the temptations of the world. Part of that time her father was in prison for his political activism. She worked hard under these conditions to get a good education and to perfect her English, planning a life different from that of her bitter mother. She fled a forced marriage that her father had arranged to a distant cousin who lived in Canada, a man whom she despised. On her way to Canada she sought asylum in Holland, where in five years time she had gotten a divorce and become a Dutch citizen, supporting herself as a court translator for Somalis (mostly abused women who were fighting deportation) while attending college, eventually receiving a Master's degree in Political Science, working for a Labor Party think tank, and amazingly, being elected to Parliament.

At the age of five she had suffered the brutalities of genital excision, but as a teenager came under the influence of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood, at that time just beginning to make inroads throughout the Muslim world. She became a fervent Muslim, attempting to outdo others in her devotion to conventions of behavior. In Holland, however, her eyes were opened to the freedoms for women we take for granted, especially those of thinking for yourself and coming to your own conclusions, reinforced by her studies at the university. She became radicalized by the violent treatment of wives and children of the Muslim refugees she had met as a translator, and by the events of 9/11. Gradually, the doubts about her religion she had tried all her life to suppress came flooding in. She realized, she says, that Mohammed was a pervert and a tyrant, the Quran was a bunch of myths written by humans, and admitted to herself in the mirror, "I don't believe in God."

As a member of Parliament, she tried to raise consciousness about the criminal aspects of Muslim custom, ignored by the tolerant Dutch as religious diversity. She insisted that records of honor killings be registered, not just lumped under "murders." The Dutch were horrified to learn that in the space of eight months in only two regions of Holland, eleven girls had been killed on the grounds of family honor. The figures she obtained on wife and child abuse and genital mutilation in an enlightened Western country were equally horrifying. She lobbied for the closing of separate Muslim schools, so that children could be integrated into the expectations of Dutch society.

All this made her anathema to most of the Muslim population, and with the release of *Submission*, which graphically detailed the abuses of many women who follow the rule of submission to men, she became notorious. She planned a series of films which showed the damage to both men and women who obey the master-slave relationship to God, films which will never be made due to the killing of Van Gogh and the subsequent constant threats on her life.

After being hidden away and protected by the Dutch secret service, she has escaped this Salman-Rushdie-like imprisonment by working for the moment at a think tank in the United States. Ayaan Hirsi Ali has just turned thirty-eight. It will be interesting to see what she does next, what she may write, and whether her courage and outspokenness will have any effect on enlightened Muslims--that is, if she can manage to survive.

Book Review

by *Steven Neubauer*

The Case for Christ by Lee Stroebel

(Editor's note: Eight years ago Rick, who is a Christian fundamentalist minister, sent to his childhood and Catholic school friend Steve a copy of the book, *The Case for Christ* by Lee Stroebel, with the request that Steve read the book and send back his comments. Rick was so convinced that the "evidence" presented in the book was decisive and unassailable that he was shocked, SHOCKED! that anyone could offer any sort of disagreeable response. Part two of Steve's somewhat disagreeable response appears this month.)

Rick,

Chapter 7. The Identity Evidence. The expert du jour is Ben Witherington III, with a masters in divinity and a doctorate in theology with a concentration in (surprise!) New Testament.

Within three paragraphs, Witherington explains that Jesus was reluctant to publicly declare himself to be God because Jesus was: A. afraid no one would listen to him; B. afraid someone would listen to him and accuse him of blasphemy; and C. afraid "that wouldn't have made any sense to them." Now we are past doubletalk and into tripletalk. Oh yes, and D. "Jesus didn't want to be pigeonholed into somebody else's" idea of "what the Messiah would look like."

The Messiah is a hopeless neurotic? Sounds more like Woody Allen than the Savior of the Universe.

Witherington then asked: "Is it probable that all this stuff (resurrection, miracles, etc.) was conjured up out of thin air within twenty years after Jesus died, when there were still living witnesses to what Jesus the historical figure was really like? I find that just about as unlikely a historical hypothesis as you could possibly come up with."

Why is this unlikely? People 2000 years ago were just as intelligent, talkative and superstitious as they are now. In fact, it is quite likely that rumors and exaggerated claims were circulating about Jesus, as well as others also mistaken as the Messiah in those times, during Jesus' lifetime.

Unlike today, however, communication over distances was poor or non-existent, most people were

illiterate, and few lived past the age of forty. A wild story about a wondrous “Messiah” might circulate within a given area for some time. Even if these stories did get back to the people actually involved, would they really take the time and effort to travel (by foot, most likely) all over the neighboring regions and talk to everyone who may have heard the stories, just to try to correct any inaccuracies? I don’t think so. Particularly if it was thought those wild stories might help to advance a political agenda against the hated Romans.

And, after twenty years, how many of these actual “witnesses” would be alive and literate enough to challenge written accounts that may have been scattered over a large area and that may not even have been available to the general public? Even if such a person did exist, how do we know that their account was ever listened to or written down? And, given the Church’s well-known history of suppressing and destroying unfavorable evidence, it is likely that any such account would have conveniently disappeared long ago.

Regarding Witherington’s “martyr evidence.” What happened to Jesus’ followers that made them give up their lives rather than renounce their belief? Who knows? What happened to the followers of Jim Jones? Or the Heaven’s Gate people? Dying for a religious belief is to me stupid and suicidal. If you are asking me to explain stupidity or suicide, I have no answer for you.

Chapter 8. The Psychological Evidence. This “expert” is Gary R. Collins, who has a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, is editor of *Christian Counseling Today*, and is president of the American Association of Christian Counselors.

Collins conceded that at least some of the miraculous healings attributed to Jesus may have been due to the placebo effect. Why would the all-powerful God of the universe need to rely on the placebo effect? It doesn’t matter to Collins, “regardless of how he did it, Jesus did heal them.”

After disposing of the straw-man argument that Jesus was a master hypnotist, Collins said, “It’s just amazing to me how people will grasp at anything to try to disprove Jesus’ miracles.” Collins is apparently blissfully unaware of the simple fact that a few words written in an old and much-copied manuscript don’t by themselves prove that the events written about actually occurred. This is particularly true when the events written about describe supernatural events. No one must—or even could—prove that a given event never happened. The burden of proof is clearly on those who say such an event did occur.

But Collins’ unprofessional attitude was evident when he stated: “People who deny the existence of the supernatural will find some way, no matter how far-fetched, to explain a situation apart from the demonic. They’ll keep giving medication, keep drugging the person, but he or she doesn’t get better. There are cases that don’t respond to normal medical or psychiatric treatment.”

So any illness that science can’t yet cure is positive evidence off demonic possession? Don’t make me laugh.

Chapter 9. The Profile Evidence. Profiling Jesus is Donald A. Carson, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of “The

Gagging of God.” One wouldn’t think that God, described by Stroebel on the same page as Carson as omnipresent and omnipotent, could be gagged. In fact, hearing such nonsense as “The Gagging of God” is enough to make me gag.

Maybe somebody should have gagged Carson, because his outright bigotry is evident when he states: “All the things we call ‘social pathologies’—war, rape, bitterness, nurtured envies, secret jealousies, pride, inferiority complexes—are bound up in the first instance with the fact that we’re not rightly related to God.”

I commented on this attitude in my remarks on Stroebel’s introduction, but it never fails to sicken me. Carson goes on to describe Hell as a place that is “filled with people who, for all eternity, still want to be at the center of the universe and who persist in their God-defying rebellion.”

It is amusing in one sense to consider that, from an atheist’s point of view; it is the Christian who is self-centered, prideful and arrogant. When I hear someone talk about how he has a “personal relationship” with the one true God of the whole universe, and how his Jesus is the one true savior, and how anyone who disagrees with him is wrong and going to Hell, I hear someone who takes pride, arrogance and self-centeredness to extremes I could never imagine.

Yep, according to Stroebel, if you’re in the Jesus club, you’re good. If you’re not in the Jesus club, you’re evil—until you smarten up and join the club, at least. At times, the club more resembles a cult. After telling in detail of the “bigoted bile” of a “rabid racist,” Stroebel made the following unambiguous statement: “That’s one of the many examples I’ve seen of the power of the gospel that Carson was talking about—the power to transform vengeful haters into humanitarians, hardhearted hoarders into softhearted givers, power-mongers into selfless servants, and people who exploit others—through slavery or some other form of oppression—into people who embrace all.”

Let’s see if I understand this. Nonbelievers are vengeful, hardhearted (again), power-mongering, exploiting and oppressing slavers. Christians, in contrast, are selfless humanitarians. You know, Rick, I’d like to disagree with that, but I hear one of my poor stupid slaves out in the cotton field calling, “Massa, Massa,” and I feel an irresistible compulsion to go out and whip his sorry ass.

At this point you may be thinking something like: “Aha! That wretched Neubauer has nothing left but sarcastic ad hominem attacks against that living Christian saint Stroebel.” I would like to point out that it was Stroebel and his “expert witnesses,” not me, who raised the issue of the supposed moral superiority of the Christian. It was Stroebel and his experts who described non-Christians in general, and atheists in particular, in the most extremely negative manner in which it is possible to describe one’s fellow human beings. The attitudes and behavior of these “morally superior” accusers are therefore fair game.

Also it should be noted that Stroebel makes an elaborate pretense of structuring and promoting his book as though it were an account of a court proceeding or trial—even to the point of allowing hilariously

biased “deliberations” at the end of each chapter. In a trial, any attorney who fails to probe, question, even attack the relevant behavior and credibility of the opposition witnesses would be considered to be incompetent—and rightly so.

In those “deliberations” at the end of this chapter, Stroebel asked: “What would prompt everyone to someday conclude that Jesus is Lord?” Stroebel has it all figured out and simply takes for granted the inevitability of everyone eventually agreeing with him. And Stroebel thinks atheists are arrogant?

Chapter 10. The Fingerprint Evidence. The fingerprint expert is Pastor Louis Lapidés, with degrees in divinity, theology, and theology of the Old Testament, and a member of the humbly named Chosen People Ministries.

After the inevitable reference to the first court conviction resulting from fingerprint evidence, Stroebel made this grandiose proclamation: “There is another kind of evidence that’s analogous to fingerprints and establishes to an astounding degree of certainty that Jesus is indeed the Messiah of Israel and the world.” The “evidence” Stroebel is referring to is the Old Testament prophecies concerning a Jewish messiah.

Lapidés was impressed by prophecy evidence from Isaiah 53, but, to me, this portrait of the Messiah read like an astrology reading and could be made to fit just about anyone. Lapidés read the account of Jesus’ birth in Matthew and concluded, “I thought, Wow! Son of Abraham, son of David—it was all fitting together!”

So well did it fit together that mathematician Peter W. Stoner computed that the probability of the 48 major prophecies concerning the Messiah all being fulfilled was a number equal to the individual “atoms in a trillion, trillion, trillion, billion universes the size of our universe!” Since Jesus actually fulfilled all of these prophecies, it is claimed, it is virtually certain that he is the Messiah.

Actually, the chances of all of this fitting together are more like one in one when the facts are considered. Stroebel and his experts have already established that Mark was the first gospel and that writers of this era did not include material they thought to be unnecessary or irrelevant to the story they were trying to tell.

Mark did not refer at all to the origins of Jesus. In fact, the gospel of Mark opens with the words, “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” and opens with Jesus being baptized as an adult. If this is the beginning, then where did all of this other stuff about the genealogy, birth and early life of Jesus come from? Mostly it comes from Matthew and Luke.

Matthew was written later than Mark by a person who, even more than Luke, was obviously anxious to fit Jesus with the Old Testament prophecies. Matthew even admits to this after relating the story of Mary somehow becoming pregnant with the son of God through the line of David, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.” None of these references can therefore be considered to be historically accurate.

Throughout Matthew, the story first given in Mark is “adjusted” to fit the ancient prophecies. Some of these eager efforts even turn out to be wrong. For example, Matthew admits that the purpose of the story of Joseph’s family going to Nazareth was to fit a prophecy:

“So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: He will be called a Nazarene.”

In fact, Nazareth and Nazarenes are not mentioned in the Old Testament. The writer of Matthew probably got confused over the reference in Judges 13:5 to an angel telling a woman. “you will conceive and give birth to a son...the boy is to be a Nazarite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel...” A Nazarite is someone who has been set apart for service to God, but has nothing to do with the town of Nazareth.

Luke, who apparently had access to early versions of Mark but not Matthew when writing his gospel, has a different version of the birth of Jesus. While Mark refers to Jesus as from Nazareth, and Matthew invents a story of Jesus’ family as natives of Bethlehem who migrated to Nazareth soon after Jesus birth, Luke concocts an implausible story about Joseph and a very pregnant Mary as natives of Nazareth who must travel to Bethlehem just in time for the birth of Jesus because of some absurd census. Again, this was all necessary to bring the theology of the new church into conformity with Old Testament prophecies. These examples provide ample proof of the errancy of the Gospels.

Regarding the resurrection, the Bible itself concedes that the references to a risen Christ in Mark (16:9-20) were added later, added to a story that had already been written many years or decades after the events recounted in the story were alleged to have occurred. The resurrection stories in the other three gospels were obviously still later variations on that addition, with Matthew focusing on prophetic fulfillment, Luke appealing to potential gentile converts, and John trying to quell the theological disputes that undoubtedly flared up among Christians in the latter part of the first century.

Here again we may find an ineptly disguised admission that the story has been altered to fit the Old Testament prophecies, this time in Luke. Jesus, after mooching a piece of fish (resurrecting oneself must work up an appetite), tells his followers, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Of course everything had to be fulfilled. One couldn’t have very well claimed to know the true Messiah forty years earlier unless all the prophecies had been fulfilled. And notice the interesting slip, “what I told you while I was still with you.” The author is well aware that he is writing fiction since he is admitting, even if unwittingly, that the real historical Jesus, if there ever was one, was no longer with us because he was dead.

Lapidés claimed that these additions were nevertheless accurate because eyewitnesses living at that time would have objected to any inaccuracy. I have already addressed this issue. But since we are playing number games, what is the probability that anyone still alive years or decades after the alleged events would have lodged a complaint? And with whom? Given the lifespans and literacy rates of the times, how many “eyewitnesses” would have even known about the written gospels? Christianity, at the time, was not a major religion. Even if an eyewitness knew of an inaccuracy, who would have cared enough

to make an arduous journey at an advanced age in hard times just to start an argument with a small religious sect over what the witness may have considered a minor discrepancy in the relating of events that happened decades earlier? Who would want to go out of their way to confront and dispute the theology of a sect Tacitus described as “hated for their abominations”?

Even if someone did go to all of that trouble, what is the probability that their complaint was even heard? Or written down? Even if written down, what is the probability that such a document would survive the first eight or ten centuries of the Christian Church protecting its theology by any possible ruthless means?

Of course, the lack of disputing eyewitness accounts can also be explained by the simple realization that there can be no eyewitnesses to events that never occurred.

Given all these facts, I calculate the probability of the gospels being historically accurate as one in a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion...

To be continued.

PANVIEWS FORUM

Letter to *Panviews* by **Jeffrey Brown**:

The unidentified Major in Kathleen Johnson’s letter printed in the September issue of *Panviews* sounds like an ideal poster child for Christians Without Christ, the new religious group I’ve decided to found. Christianity is, after all, the only true religion, but Christ is too namby-pamby to head it. I mean, the guy tolerated heretics and only blew his stack at religious hypocrites! Is that the sort of role model a superpower should have?

Of course it isn’t, and me and the Major know it. That’s why Christ has never had much impact on Christianity. Let’s face it, the guy was a weenie. But under the existing system, smart alecks can still quote Christ to make non-weenie Christians look bad.

Christians Without Christ will change all that. We intend to dump Christ and his loser philosophy entirely. We figure that if the Council of Nicene could rewrite the Bible, we can too. We’ll get rid of that “Do unto others” and “Turn the other cheek” crap, believe me.

Yes, our new improved Christianity won’t be burdened by pious injunctions against trampling those we don’t like. The old injunctions were never heeded anyway, so let’s get those antiquated laws off the books!

Our “housecleaning” of the Bible will bring it into line with modern fundamentalist thinking, but no one should think about doing the same in return. Genesis 1:1 will be revised to state—in **bold print**—that what follows is the official, irrefutable “Word of God” that cannot be changed or challenged by anyone, ever (God forgot that disclaimer the first time around). With that taken care of, we’ll then state that God created the universe 6,918 years ago, in six days exactly twenty-four hours in length, and decree death without legal process for anyone who doubts it. That’s another thing God forgot to do in his first draft.

Death without legal process will also be mandated for anyone who fails to holler “Merry Christmas!” at all persons with whom they make eye contact between Black Friday and December 25th during all future calendar years.

ASK EDNA

Edna answers questions from her posh headquarters at Atheist Station in Gallitzen, PA.

Dear Edna:

Question from Julius Cablestrayer of Level-ledge Flats, West Virginia

IS IT TRUE THAT CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS EXPOSED MOTHER TERESA TO BE A DRIED UP WAIF AND SKINFLINT IMPOSTOR?

Yes, and he was being charitable. She tended to the poor of Calcutta’s spiritual needs while, essentially, stashing millions of dollars donated for their care.

Actually, Mother Teresa confessed to being an impostor to various clergy over the years, but not to Hitchens. Why the Vatican and the clergy allowed her doubts about Jesus see broad daylight is a mystery to me. But then, I only pretend to know everything. Mother Teresa had doubts of her religion and her savior, like most anyone on this planet that has a dozen brain cells within reasonable proximity of each other. But once on that chosen path of supposed grace--doubts or no--the pathetic pious press on, perpetuating the myth. She liked to tell Calcutta’s poor, suffering in pain, that that pain was Jesus kissing them. It should have been evident that her reasoning was suspect! Her explanation offered little consolation to the suffering, some requesting her to tell Jesus to stop kissing, as they waited for death.

Hitchens did bring to light, by way of a few Sisters who had left her Missionary of Charity when they found that the greater majority of donations pouring in from all over the world did not go toward alleviating Jesus’ love bites and kisses. That stashed money was later forwarded to the Vatican’s treasury which then presumably used it to pay out altar boy abuse claims, court costs, and gold plated plumbing fixtures. The Pope now has her on the fast track toward canonization --thousands of times faster than Joan of Arc’s canonization, after that woman had saved France 500 years earlier--and was burned at the stake for wearing men’s armor and clothing.

Which brings up another pet peeve of mine and my dearly beloved, late Elmo: Few, if any, of the great scientists, leaders, and doctors of the world had been canonized by this church. It is like two parallel universes sharing the same space. The world of the Church with men and women under halo saving souls from the devil, and the world of reality where uncounted good men and women labor for the betterment of their fellow citizen. Those who found cures and abatement for yellow fever, malaria, small pox, cholera, and polio weren’t canonized even though souls supposedly made up the persona of those immunized and cured. It’s like taxation, those who work hardest are the least recognized and the most penalized. Though very rare (non-existent), miracles are shortcuts, eliminating otherwise hard work--ask George Bush who obviously prays for them all the time, letting the hard work to incompetent political hacks.

Have you returned your blue form to PAN?

NEWSPAPER FORUM

Letter to the editor by *Janet Factor* sent to the Springfield IL Journal-Register on October 2, 2007:

I was flummoxed by Robert Rani's advice to use the Bible as our only guide in life. Man-made rules, he says, are an insult to God because they imply that scripture is insufficient.

Well, I went to my Bible, but I couldn't find anything in there about how fast I should drive, or what makes drinking water safe, or even if it's okay to have abortions! Those surely existed in Biblical times, because even hunter-gatherers know ways to end pregnancy. Now abortion is a major issue. But apparently God didn't care enough to mention it anywhere.

There's nothing in the Bible about stem cell research, or any problem unique to modern life. It tells us not to wear linsey-woolsey (Deuteronomy 22:11), but not what to do about Terry Schiavo. If God dictated the scriptures, we must either scratch our heads over his lack of foresight, or accept that he expected us to figure these things out on our own.

Alternatively, we can conclude that the Bible was written by men who had only knowledge typical of their era. How could such men even grasp the concept of a stem cell? Why look to them for advice? Shouldn't we instead bring to bear the tremendous store of wisdom we've acquired in the last two thousand years?

The Bible may be a cornerstone of Western culture, but that foundation was laid a long time ago. We've built up a great structure since then. Why insist on dwelling at ground level, when the view from the top is so much grander?

Letter to the editor by *Clifford H. Crain, Jr.* published in the Syracuse Post-Standard on October 17, 2007:

I am sure that Tim and Melissa Glisson have had a positive impact as a result of their work with inner city children. However, their use of the story of Gideon from the book of Judges does not support the other positive aspects of their work.

Judges is a violent book, even by Biblical standards. It begins by chopping off the thumbs and big toes of a captured king and ends with the disgusting story of a man who chops up a dead concubine's body and sends the pieces to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Is this the best material for young minds in an inner city neighborhood?

And Gideon himself is no paragon of virtue. According to the Bible, he had "many wives" and seventy sons. The Bible does not bother to mention any daughters.

I thank the Glissons for the things they've done but urge them to use more suitable material in their teaching.

Want to be published in Panviews?

Send to the editor your published or unpublished letters to the editor, book or movie reviews, or original essays or articles related to religion, nonbelief or church-state separation.

We are also trying to contact non-members who have written favorable letters to the newspapers. Please try to contact such people in your area.

PA Nonbelievers will be raffling off two (2) tickets to The Planned Parenthood of Central PA Jazz Night benefit, featuring Vince Giordano's Hot Six, to be held at the Out Door Country Club of York on Friday, November 16, 7:00 PM to midnight.

To enter we must receive \$10.00 for each entry (each entry good for both event tickets) either by mail on Friday, November 2 or in person by 11:00 AM on Saturday, November 3 at our York meeting, where the drawing will take place.

Notice of our PA Nonbelievers Annual General Meeting on Saturday, January 5, 2008, featuring election of board of directors and voting on any proposed changes to our organization bylaws.

Mark your calendars!

The PAN Tenth Annual Winter Solstice Party

Will be held at the Huber residence in York on Saturday, December 22! Invitations and directions will be included in your next issue of Panviews!

Calendar of Events

Saturday, November 3, 2007 – PA Nonbelievers meeting at UUCY in York from 10:00AM to 12:00 Noon & luncheon.

Tuesday, November 6, 2007 – FSGP meeting at 7:00PM in the Ludington Library in Bryn Mawr. Info: www.fsgp.org.

Thursday, November 8, 2007 – PA Nonbelievers Harrisburg area meeting at 7:00PM in Lemoyne PA.

Sunday, November 25, 2007 – Newsletter assembly at the home of Steve & Yolanda at 2:00 PM. BOD at 1:00 PM.

Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2007 – *The Free Thought Forum* live call-in show, 6 to 7 PM on WRCT, Comcast York channel 16.

Saturday, December 1, 2007 – PA Nonbelievers meeting at UUCY at in York, 10:00AM to 12:00 Noon, plus luncheon.

Thursday, December 13, 2007 – PA Nonbelievers Harrisburg area meeting in West Shore Plaza in Lemoyne.

Saturday, Decmber 22, 2007 – PAN Tenth Annual Winter Solstice party at the Huber residence in York, PA.

Tuesday, December 25, 2007 – The Free Thought Forum live call-in TV show, 6 to 7 PM on WRCT Channel 16 in York.

Saturday, January 5, 2008 – PA Nonbelievers regular monthly meeting and Annual General Meeting with elections at the UUCY in York from 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon.

For our women's shelter renovation project in Lancaster on November 10 and 17, we have a particular need for experienced painters who can paint door frames and molding. If you will be able to help, please contact Steve or any BOD member.

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