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Evolution Sunday

by John Blanton

One more reason to go to church, skeptics. *The Norman Transcript* (Norman, OK), and other news outlets are heralding the coming of Evolution Sunday.¹

Hundreds of churches across the globe will mark Evolution Sunday Feb. 11 with sermons and educational events dedicated to the idea that religion and science don't have to be sworn enemies.

So far, 535 congregations from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Virgin Islands, and five foreign countries are scheduled to participate, including Norman Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

Susan Cogan is a local author and a Universalist member, and she will talk about "Why Darwin Matters." She says "It's a way to fight back." Cogan wants people to know that even believers in God can accept evolution.

Charles Darwin was born on February 12 in 1809, and on February 12 the church will host "Darwin Day." The program will feature the film "Inherit the Wind." The movie is based on the play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee, which was intended to be a statement about overbearing government. However, the plot is a fictionalized recapitulation of the Scopes trial of 1925 and often stands in for a documentary on the trial.

This is the second annual Evolution Sunday. Biology professor Michael Zimmerman of Butler University in Indianapolis instigated the concept. "The fact is that the vast majority of clergy members accept evolution and don't want creationism taught in schools," he says. "These aren't all churches on the east or west coast, or big cities. They are mostly from rural areas and the Midwest."

Brianna Bailey writes:

EVENTS CALENDAR

February program

Saturday, Feb 17, 2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Alchemy

Kristine Danowski, our new Vice
President, will give a talk on
alchemy.

NTS social dinner /board meeting

Saturday, Feb 24, 7 p.m.
at Good Eats, 6950 Greenville
Avenue, in Dallas

Let us know if you are coming.
We need to reserve a table.

Plastics recycling lecture at UT Dallas

At 8 p.m. on Feb 15 in the
Conference Center. The lecture
is free & open to the public.

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Check the **NTS Hotline** for more
information at
214-335-9248.

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

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Zimmerman's efforts to get clergy members active in the public debate on evolution began with the Clergy Letter Project in 2004, an online letter that has been signed by more than 10,000 American clergy members from all denominations. The letter was meant to refute claims by creationists that evolution conflicts with Christian beliefs.

"They want to set up a false dichotomy that if you believe in the Bible then you can't believe in evolution," Zimmerman said.

The letter states: "While virtually all Christians take the Bible seriously and hold it to be authoritative in matters of faith and practice, the overwhelming majority do not read the Bible literally, as they would a science textbook." The letter goes on to state that "the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist."

Eighty-seven clergy members from Oklahoma have signed the letter so far, according to the Clergy Letter Project Web site.

Clergy who have signed the letter say the point "is to reconcile evolution with faith in the public debate over evolutionary theory."

"I think it's perfectly consistent with religious conviction," said Tom Boyd, David Ross Boyd emeritus professor of philosophy and religious studies. Boyd, who signed the Clergy Letter, also is an ordained Presbyterian minister. "You can still believe that God is the creator and accept evolutionary theory, but if you take the Bible as an inerrant historical text, then, well, a lot of Christianity is split along that fall line."

The good news is that evolutionists won't have to slog uphill against deeply-held religious belief to get out the facts of scientific research. The success of such projects will mean it will be hard for the anti-evolutionists to paint teaching evolution in the class room as religion bashing.

Well, not so fast there.

Churches shouldn't buy into Darwinists' ploy

Creationist Jonathan Wells, writing in the *Yale Daily News*, cautions the faithful to be not so hasty to roll over. He explains why.²

Evolution can mean many things. Broadly speaking, it means simply change over time, something no sane person doubts. In biblical interpretation, it can mean that God created the world over a long period of time rather than in six 24-hour days. In biology, it can mean minor changes within existing species, which we see happening before our eyes.

But Darwin's theory claims much more — namely, that all living things are descended from a common ancestor and that their present differences are due to unguided natural processes such as random variations and survival of the fittest. It is not evolution in general, but Darwin's particular theory

(Darwinism) that Evolution Sunday celebrates. That's why it is timed to coincide with Charles Darwin's birthday.

Wells considers Zimmerman's Evolution Sunday to be a maneuver to sidestep attacks on the weaknesses in Darwinism. He continues:

But experiments have consistently failed to support the hypothesis that variations (including those produced by genetic mutation) and selection (natural or artificial) can produce new species, organs and body plans. And what may have once looked like solid evidence for universal common ancestry (fossils, embryos and molecular comparisons) is now plagued by growing inconsistencies. It is actually the Darwinists who brush aside these awkward facts who "embrace scientific ignorance."

Wells' brilliant analysis of the problems with modern evolutionary science is splendidly displayed in his book *Icons of Evolution*. If you haven't given it a look lately, you might want to take some time now to do so. In *Icons* Wells cites his complaints about ten supposed pillars of evolutionary theory. These include the Miller-Urey experiments, the peppered moth studies, and Darwin's finches. Wells seems to feel that demolition of these icons will trip the very underpinnings of the science. Even so, his book does minimal damage to the icons and much less to science. Given a great opportunity to explain scientific evidence against Darwinism, he passed it by in favor of appeals to the ignorance of the reader.³

For the moment dismissing any argument from science, Wells appeals to the personal preferences of his readers in the *Yale Daily News*:

Future Meeting Dates

February 17, 2007	August 11, 2007
March 17, 2007	September 8, 2007
April 21, 2007	October 13, 2007
May 19, 2007	November 10, 2007
June 16, 2007	December 8, 2007
July 14, 2007	

Polls have consistently shown that about 40 percent of Americans believe God created the human beings in their present form a few thousand years ago, while another 45 percent believe that humans developed over millions of years from less advanced forms but that God guided the process. Despite their differences, both of these groups accept a central tenet of Christian theology: Human beings were designed and created in the image of God.

Darwinism denies this.

As a further indictment, Wells reminds us that, according to Darwin, organic variability through natural selection shows no more design than the shifting winds. Darwinist George Gaylord Simpson, Wells says, sees man as "the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned."

If them apples aren't enough:

Less than 15 percent of Americans accept this view. Yet Darwinists depend heavily on American taxpayers for their financial support. Enlisting Christian clergy to defend "science" or "evolution" is a tactic used to perpetuate that support.

Talk about injustice. Not only do the 85 percent remaining have to eat crow, they have to tip the waiter, as well.

Americans reject Darwinism overwhelmingly, Wells says in a remarkable burst of insight. According to him Darwinism "doesn't fit the scientific evidence..." — this scientific evidence being something of which Wells has a vast and passing knowledge. In what I suppose is the interest of real science, Wells continues, "churches should use the day to reaffirm the creatorship of God and the value of good science — which includes studying the strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary theory." Especially the weaknesses, I assume.



References

- 1 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2007-02-04.htm#sunday>
- 2 <http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2007-02-04.htm#wells>
- 3 For discussions of the book and a creationist video, visit the following links to the NTS Web site:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2002/2002october/october2002.htm#icons>

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2006/2006january/january2006.htm#icons>

NTS election of officers

The North Texas Skeptics (the organization) is run by the people who show up for the January meeting.

On January 13 those members gathered at the Center for Nonprofit Management and elected a new board of directors. Even some who didn't show up managed to get their word in by proxy. Here's the new **list of directors**:

Laura Ainsworth
Daniel Barnett
Virginia Barnett
Erling Beck
John Blanton
John Brandt
Kristine Danowski
Prasad Golla
Elizabeth Hittson
Jack Hittson

Claudia Meek

Pat Reeder

Mike Selby

OK, that's not much changed from 2006. Board members selected the following to carry out the routine tasks of the organization:

NTS Officers

John Brandt, President

Kristine Danowski, Vice President

Mike Selby, Secretary

Mark Meyer, Treasurer

NTS Staff

Keith Blanton, Newsletter Editor

John Blanton, Webmaster

Mike Selby, Meetings and Social Director

Check our Web site for full details and for e-mail addresses of some of these.



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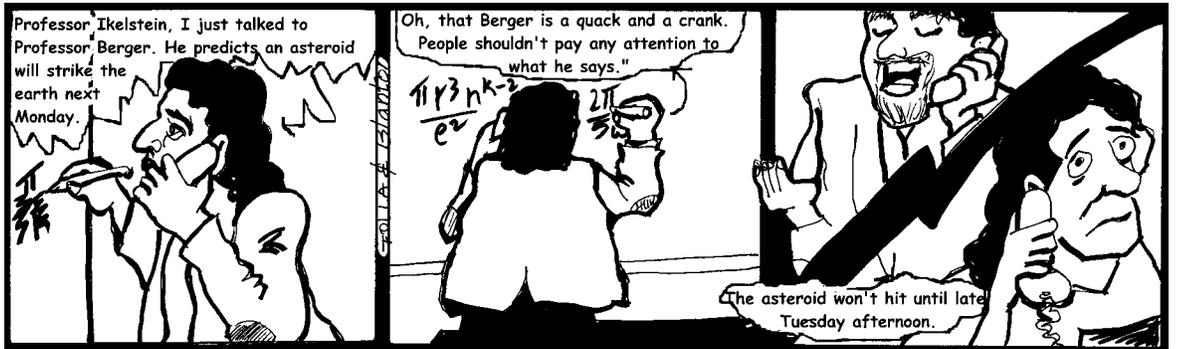
encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

The Skeptical Inquirer

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Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
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What's new

By Robert Park

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

WASHINGTON: THE ADMINISTRATION SUPPRESSES CLIMATE FINDINGS.

On Tuesday, the House Oversight Committee, Chaired by Henry Waxman (D-CA), looked into accusations that the administration interfered in federal climate research. Bipartisan criticism of the White House stance on climate was prompted by a survey conducted by the Union of Concerned Scientists, together with the Government Accountability Project, which turned up hundreds of government climate scientists who had experienced political interference in communicating their findings. Whenever WN cites a Union of Concerned Scientists report, there are complaints that UCS is an advocacy group, and so it is. WN would prefer that the government police itself. While we're waiting, WN will continue to look to UCS to give us the facts. They do it very well.

GRAND CANYON: A GORGE THAT SEPARATES SCIENCE FROM IDEOLOGY.

Three years ago, along with many others, WN covered the story of a creationist book on sale in Grand Canyon National Park that attributed the Grand Canyon to Noah's flood. The book is still on sale, and there are still plaques at scenic overlooks quoting Genesis. A 28 Dec 06 press release from PEER (Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility) charged that Park Service employees are not allowed to give visitors an official estimate of the age of the canyon. What's New, Doonesbury, Skeptic magazine and a host of other sources with skeptical credentials, bought into that story too. This time, however, the charge was apparently fabricated. We are grateful

to Michael Shermer, editor of Skeptic magazine, for ferreting out the truth, and I join him in apologizing for being so easily duped.

TERRORISM 2007: PAT ROBERTSON HAS BEEN TALKING TO GOD AGAIN.

During a recent prayer retreat, God told him that a terrorist attack on the U.S. late in 2007 will result in a "mass killing". Robertson relayed God's message to "The 700 Club" on Tuesday. "The Lord didn't say nuclear, but I do believe it will be something like that." "I have a relatively good track record," he said. "Sometimes I miss." It's not clear whether God mumbles, or Robertson takes poor notes, but maybe in the future he could take along a recorder. He once asked God to unleash hurricanes on sinful Florida, but if sin leads to hurricanes, Florida has been sinful since they began keeping weather records.

EARTHQUACKS: SCIENTISTS IN CHINA OBSERVED BEHAVING STRANGELY.

On Tuesday, an earthquake that shook southern Taiwan damaged undersea cables and disrupted communications across Asia. It's not clear just what scientists at the earthquake bureau in nearby Nanning in southern China saw, but two days AFTER the quake they told The China Daily that snakes can sense a quake up to five days before it happens. How do they know this? The reptiles "behave erratically." To observe this behavior they installed cameras at a local snake farm to monitor the snakes 24/7. The director of the bureau said snakes can sense a quake up to five days before it happens. "Of all the creatures on the earth," the director said, "snakes are the most sensitive to earthquakes." To test this claim I've started monitoring the erratic behavior of Washingtonians from my office window. My initial assessment is that there are far more earthquakes than anyone realizes.

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

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