

THE DOGMATICS OF SCIENCE

At a recent scientific conference in New York, a student asked a panel of scientists, "Can you be a good scientist and believe in God?" To which a Nobel prize winner in chemistry, Herbert A. Hauptman, thundered, "No!"

Unfortunately, Hauptman's ignorance is not uncommon. "For the last fifty years," writes Church chronicler Thomas E. Woods, Jr., "virtually all historians of science...have concluded that the Scientific Revolution was indebted to the Church." Sadly, people like Hauptman never seem to recognize the dogmatism that occurs in their own circles. Three recent stories in the news prove this point.

Scientists are said to be engaged in the pursuit of truth. At a minimum, this should mean that they are receptive to new ideas. Yet when it comes to ideas that challenge the Darwinian theory of evolution, many scientists not only recoil at the suggestion that they may be wrong, they actively seek to punish those with whom they differ. Just ask Richard Sternberg.

Sternberg is the former editor of a journal published by the Smithsonian Institution. In the August 2004 edition of *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, an article by Stephen C. Meyer appeared that made the case for intelligent design (ID); ID holds that life is so complex that an unspecified intelligent agent must be responsible for the design of the universe, not natural processes.

When the article was published, many in the scientific community were rip-roaring mad and wanted the head of Sternberg for allowing the piece to be published. Never mind that Sternberg holds two doctorates in evolutionary biology, or that the work by Meyer was peer-reviewed by three outside scientists (meaning it was approved as being worthy of

publication). What mattered in the end was that Darwin's theory was challenged.

"I was singled out for harassment and threats on the basis that they think I'm a creationist," said Sternberg. Smithsonian officials, of course, denied these accusations. However, a preliminary federal investigation by the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) supported Sternberg's complaint of bias; the case had to be dropped because of the OSC's jurisdictional authority.

Vicious rumors were spread about Sternberg and attempts were made to dig for dirt on him—they did everything they could to destroy him. All this because he allowed one article to be published that ran against the grain of conventional wisdom in the scientific community.

As the next case shows, some scientists are not above engaging in Catholic bashing, even in professional journals. Thanks to Catholic League member Dr. Judith McGuinn of Pueblo, Colorado, we learned of a cheap shot that appeared in the June edition of the *Archives of Dermatology*.

In an article co-authored by four scientists (the lead one being from Denmark, Dr. Kaare Weismann), it was maintained that a 55-year-old man's intestinal tract was infected with *S marcescens*, a bacterium that produced a reddish stain on his clothes. The bacterium was also named *Monas prodigiosum*, "the miracle bacterium"; the first reported account of this in Denmark occurred in 1169 and was found in a bleeding host.

So what's this got to do with anti-Catholicism? Dr. Weismann, et al., wrote that the bacterium "thrives on starchy matter such as polenta, bread, and sacramental wafers and apparently flourished in the damp churches of medieval times." That's fine, but what is not is their conclusion: "No doubt, *S marcescens* has contributed to human death more because of religious fanaticism than because of pathogenicity."

Over the summer, Dr. Bill Donohue wrote to Dr. Weismann asking her one question: "Could you please submit the source you used to come to this conclusion, as none was cited?" As expected, she never did.

A much more disturbing story emerged in late summer over an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) that held that unborn babies cannot feel pain before they are 29 weeks old. Appearing on "Paula Zahn Now" was Dr. Beverly Winikoff of Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health, a pro-abortion group.

Dr. Winikoff was asked to respond to Doug Johnson, a National Right to Life Committee official; he contended that the fetus can feel pain much earlier than 29 weeks. "People can believe what they wish," Dr. Winikoff said. "People have reasons for believing aside from science." In other words, trust her—she's a real scientist.

"I think this study is extremely non-controversial among real scientists," the good Dr. said. "This is the science. So from the point of view of good science, this study meets all the standards."

But the "real scientist" is wrong: no sooner had the media reported on this "scientific" article when we learned that two of the five authors are connected to the pro-abortion industry. The study's lead author, Susan J. Lee, is a former NARAL Pro-Choice employee; NARAL is the most radical pro-abortion organization in the nation. Another author, Eleanor Drey, directs an abortion clinic in San Francisco.

The dogmatists in the scientific community must be watched. The degree of certitude they entertain is disturbing, and may even be dangerous to your health—or at least to the health of the unborn.