Newsletter of CSU, Sacramento Emeritus Association

Spring - 2002

THE SILVER FORUM JERRY TOBEY, PRESIDENT

THE GOD OF THE TOWERS

Immediately after the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961, John F. Kennedy's popularity ratings soared, and he remarked, "It's just like Eisenhower; the worse I_do, the more they like me." I wonder if the Lord made the same remark to the heavenly host after the Twin Towers attacks. He should have because the attacks seem to have increased American réligious sentiment, certainly American religious rhetoric ("God Bless America") I confess that this baffles me.

By "God" I mean the traditional theistic God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam: A God who created the universe, and governs it with omniscience, omnipotence and perfect love. The most important problem accompanying this exalted claim is that of explaining how this God allows the suffering of the innocent and the prosperity of the guilty. (The question of Theodicy).

Admittedly, if we change this traditional definition, we can lessen the problem. For instance, polytheism allows apologists to suppose conflicts among the gods at the expense of humanity, and surrendering the attributes of omnipotence or omniscience or moral perfection reduces the conflict of experience with belief. In fact, the Third Century Christian theologian, Origen, did decide that God could not be omnipotent, that he did his best for humanity but with imperfect success against the forces of darkness. In fact, all of these alternatives have been tried in the history of religious thought, but they seem to be moribund; most believers would not consider such revised deities their God.

The problem, the conflict between this exalted concept of God and experience, increased dramatically with the Judaic claim inherited by Christianity and Islam that a perfect God not only governs the universe as a whole, but also all social groups and each individual. The Hebrew Bible provides examples of God promising justice at the two levels. For the "Deuteronomic Historian," the author/editor of the history of Israel comprising Deuteronomy through Kings II, the Lord judges Israel by a strict merit standard -- perhaps tempered by some fatherly mercy. Nothing bad happens to Israel that it does not deserve. God, however, promises nothing to the individual; the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. On the other hand, later Judaic writings claim that God attends to each individual, that He gives them their desserts -- although He may work His justice in mysterious ways.

I do not think that following the Deuteronomist, to argue that God only guarantees justice for societies solves this problem of theodicy, for societies enjoy no even playing field. (Consider the uneven distribution of resources in the world.) And when we try to reconcile God's goodness with experience at the individual level, the conflict is so striking as to make the continued existence of theism so inexplicable that it's time to invoke Occam's Razor and give up the job.

THE TOWERS AS A PRICE TO PAY FOR FREE WILL

Forgetting the imbecilic ravings of a Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson, the most common explanation for the Towers disaster and other atrocious human actions seems to be the "price of free will" argument. The argument is that God's gift of free will requires that humans have the power, individually and as groups, to obey but also to disobey, even at the expense of other and innocent people. Just as God cannot make a number simultaneously even and odd, so he cannot give freedom of will and prevent evil-doers from hurting innocent people. Perhaps he can get even with them later but only after they have done their damage. I think that the argument is weak:

(continued on page 2)
SPRING LUNCHEON WEDNESDAY

2001 Speaker: DR. METWALLIB. AMER speaks on: Understanding Islam As A Way of Life (Full details on page 7)

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The Towers, continued from page 1

• First, the most important events controlling our lives do not involve our decisions. We do not choose when (the 14th or the 20th century), or where to be born (The United States or Afghanistan), or our parents, our genetic character, or with some exceptions when and how we will die. True, the more fortunate we are with these hands dealt to us, the greater the effective scope of our "free will," our ability to control our lives by our decisions, discipline, and hard work. Globally speaking, however, it's a most unfair system, monstrously unequal in the opportunities for control offered, and in the rewards for reasonable decisions, for commonly people make the right decisions and work hard only to fail. Ask anyone who has lived through the Depression or a World War or in a ghetto or in Afghanistan whether they think that they suffered simply because they made the wrong decisions.

• A crucial second issue involves the distribution of suffering among people born into generally the same circumstances -- people like us and the Twin Towers victims. Traditional theism claims that God rules the universe but also each individual, that he loves and attends to each of us; why then did he allow the terrible death of thousands in the Towers? Were they really worse than we who survived? Did they deserve to die? If violent death is a price for the free will (presumably of the terrorists), why were they the victims instead of us?

A Broader Perspective

• We rightly concentrate on the Twin Towers attacks because they were such horrifically spectacular instances of undeserved suffering. Sometimes when put an event in perspective, the problems it poses seem less important. Putting the Twin Towers attacks into perspective, however, weakens our belief in a loving and just God. True, a comparison with some other instances of terror does make the Twin Towers seem historically less significant. The four thousand dead in New York pale beside the fifty million of World War II, the perhaps thirty million of Stalin's purges, the six million of the Holocaust, and the 200,000 of the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Does that solve the problem for the theist? Of course not; it simply multiplies the plain conflicts between the claim of a Good God and human experience. And when we move to private life, the toll rises, I cannot cite any statistics but surely every hour more people die prematurely and undeservedly than did in the Towers attacks.

Even if we (inhumanely) disregard those who have done stupid things contributing to their death (smoking, heavy drinking, obesity, reckless driving) the remaining number of theologically inexplicable dead is overwhelming. Why doesn't God guarantee us a lifespan normal for our species? Do the thousands who die daily in automobile accidents deserve to die? Are their premature deaths necessary for the exercise of free will or the management of the cosmos? Do the deaths of so many of our friends from cancer serve any purpose or give any supernatural meaning to the universe and life? I cannot believe it.

Present Suffering, Eternal Bliss

I suppose that a second broad defense of God's justice in light of the Twin Towers disaster is the argument that the suffering of the Towers victims and the victims of all other injustices is insignificant compared to the eternal bliss they will then enjoy -somewhere. I find the argument no consolation, partly because the entire idea seems fantastic to me, but also because it does not really address the central issue of why it happened to them, and not to us. Furthermore:

Some proponents of this argument do not believe that the dead automatically inherit a happy eternity. Many believe that heaven is a reward for particular belief and faith, access to which is monstrously uneven -- the penalty for failing to achieve that belief being, not extinction but eternal damnation. Presumably the Towers victims who did not meet these requirements are even now in hell. Such an argument does not save God's justice; on the contrary, it supposes Him a vengeful monster.

• More importantly, the argument does not explain why the Tower victims were snuffed out, many of them in their youth, while we live on to enjoy life -- and possibly come to terms with the vengeful God the argument requires. It will not do to say that our lives are insignificant for no one really believes that; we all act as if they are very significant indeed -- hence the power of striving for self preservation among all of us, rich and poor, good and bad, religious and nonreligious.

I suppose that no direct harm comes from asking that "God Bless America," just as no direct harm comes
from beating drums to generate rain. The danger is that such illusions may distract us from the real
problem, which is to defend ourselves, especially by curing the root sources of the hatred behind the
Towers attack and all other forms of injustice. As for "In God we trust" -- really? A better motto for currency
would be, "We're On Our Own, Let's Get Our Act Together."

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ABOUT BOB BESS

Executive Vice President Emeritus Bob Bess (1991) is spending a bit more time at his Gold River home following a series of post-retirement adventures in Minnesota and Colorado. He reports that his three year term as interim President at St. Cloud State University was a particularly meaningful experience, affording him the opportunity to apply his views on leadership in a very contentious environment. "It turned out to be the most rewarding period of my professional life. In 1995-96 he served as a part time consultant to the Minnesota State University Board during contract negotiations.

In 1996, he accepted a one year assignment as Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. As that assignment was winding down, the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance retired on short notice and he was asked to stay on until that position was filled. Finally, in August of 1998, he decided to put full time positions behind him.

St. Cloud State has an extensive international education program with several overseas centers. This enabled him to begin the extensive travel activity to which he had been looking forward as he anticipated retirement. Beginning in 1995, he designed and co-led a number of tours and wrote brochures and a newsletter for a large Minnesota travel company. With full retirement, this activity increased in intensity and has included too many tours to enumerate. Of particular note, is Bob's love affair with South Africa. He has led a faculty delegation and two group tours and has made four private visits ranging from two weeks to two months. His plans include another major tour in 2002 as well as continuing to provide travel assistance to friends and colleagues, whatever it might be.

On the home front, Bob continues service as the president of College Town, a non-profit which provides housing for more than 260 student families. He is also treasurer of the Capital Public Radio Endowment Corporation and a member of the CSUS Theater and Dance Advisory board and has recently joined the campus emeritus organization.

Anyone interested in renewing old acquaintances or picking Bob's brain concerning travel is welcome to contact him via email at:

Rbess@earthlink.net or by phone at 635-1405.

AN INVITATION

The CSUS emeritus faculty invites emeritus staff to join our Association. The invitation, unanimously approved at the Emeritus Association's Fall dinner, recognizes emeritus staff as long-time colleagues, equally vital to our University. Interested staff should contact the Association president, Jerry Tobey, at 507 Dunbarton Circle, Sacramento, CA 95825 (565-0330; irrytby@aol.com). Membership dues are \$10.00 per year and earn full voting rights and receipt of the Association newsletter. The Silver Bulletin.

The Association meets at least twice a year at a Fall dinner and a Spring luncheon, participates in the statewide Emeritus Association, and has regularly contributed to such University causes as the Faculty Endowment Fund and the Library.
ATHLETE WITHOUT COMPELLING PERSONAL DRAMA EXPELLED FROM OLYMPICS

Skier Concealed Adversity-Free Past From Officials (NBC) A member of the U.S. Olympic ski team was disqualified from competition today when it was learned that he did not have a sufficiently compelling human story line to exploit on the NBC telecast of the worldwide sporting event. Tom Bergen, the expelled skier, was not raised by a single mother, never had a career-threatening injury, and did not overcome a personal tragedy of any kind before making the Olympic ski team, U.S. Olympic officials revealed today. "Had Tom been involved in an organ donation, as either a donor or a recipient, that would have been acceptable to us," ski team spokesman Sandy Harrell told reporters. "However, he was not." According to sources close to the ski team, Bergen had concealed the fact that he comes from an intact middle class family who never lost their home to a flood, tornado, or a typhoon.

But what may have sealed Bergen's doom, sources said, was his utter lack of a gravely ill family member to win a medal for. "Tom did his best to hide his background from team officials," one source said. "But when the truth came

out, he was finished.'

Speaking to reporters in Salt Lake City, NBC Sports Chairman Dick Ebersol was even less charitable, terming Bergen's actions "a reprehensible betrayal." We do our best to check out all of the athletes to make sure that their backgrounds are full of compelling human drama, but we can't catch everything," Ebersol said. "This is a case of one really bad guy exploiting the system."

IN MEMORIAM

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AN INCIDENT FROM WORLD WAR II

During the last week in September, 2001, my wife Ruth and I were relaxing at dinner in the restaurant of the Hotel Galles in Rome, Italy. We shared a table with Dr. Harold Agnew and his wife Elizabeth. Earlier that day, Harold and Ruth had given papers at a week long conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Enrico Fermi, Italy's most famous twentieth-century physicist and Nobel laureate.

Fermi left Fascist Italy for the USA about 1940, Harold, now in his eighties, had been one of Fermi's graduate students and worked on the first atomic pile, built secretly in the squash courts of the University of Chicago in the early forties. When Fermi went to Los Alamos to work on the first atomic bombs, Harold went with him, and also worked as a physicist building the bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For a while he also lived in Fermi's Los Alamos home, doing odd jobs including babysitting.

As a scientist myself, I already knew many aspects of Fermi's Life. But I'd never heard of Harold Agnew until that week in September. I remembered the name of the B-29 bomber that dropped the first bomb on August 6, 1945. The Enola Gay was piloted by Air Force Col. Paul Tibbets. What I didn't know was that there were two civilians on the Enola Gay. One of them was graduate student Harold Agnew and the other was physicist Luis Alvarez.

For that historic flight, Agnew and Alvarez were dressed up in Air Force first lieutenant's uniforms so that if the plane crashed in Japan, they would be held as prisoners of war, instead of being summarily shot as civilian spies. I asked Harold if he felt anything in the airplane at the moment of the explosion He replied that he did not feel anything, but that he heard the explosion. I asked what the sound was like. He said that if you were in a fifty-five gallon drum with the lid on, and someone hit it with a sledge hammer. that s what it sounded like.

So what happened to graduate students Harold Agnew and Luis Alvarez? Alvarez became a professor of Physics at UC Berkeley. He designed the Bevatron, used to discover many new elements in 1968 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics Agnew's career was more political and administrative. He was a science advisor to President's Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jerry Ford, Jimmy Carter and George Bush. Jimmy Carter appointed Agnew Science Advisor to NATO Supreme Allied Commander He served as a state senator in New Mexico. From 1970 to 1979 he was the Director of the Los Alamos Laboratory.

What will I always remember of that week in Rome? Bernini's Ecstasy of St. Teresa in the Coronaro Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria...and Harold Agnew. by Rod Sime

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PETER SHATTUCK'S TRAVEL CORNER

Elizabeth and I continue to enjoy the privilege of travel, but on our most recent trip we were reminded of some of the potential pitfalls of travel after retirement. We had not previously given much thought to the more extreme measures of protection against disaster or catastrophe; surely we would not need immediate rescue from Greenland or Zimbabwe or the depths of London. But on our recent expedition to Easter Island and then the Antarctic, we learned at almost first hand the importance of major evacuation insurance.

On Easter Island, we joined a small group which included a recently retired orthopedic surgeon. He was great company, witty, knowledgeable, and a demon photographer. He hiked up and down the hills and cliffs of the island, taking pictures of the famous statues, and peppering our guide with questions. However, by the time we boarded our ship for the Antarctic, he seemed less enthusiastic. He spent more time in his cabin' his wife confided that something was wrong. Abruptly, the ship's doctor said he must get major medical help. Because he had the most substantial possible insurance, that meant that he could be transferred from one ship to another, from that ship to a Chilean scientific station, and from there, on a Chilean Air Force transport. to Punta Arenas in Patagonia. His Med-Jet policy then provided for a private LearJet flight, with a medical team and successive pairs of fresh pilots, to take him back to Miami, where he had surgery for what turned out to be a fast-growing brain tumor. The cost entirely covered by insurance; amounted to well over \$100000. Happily, our friend is recovering But his experience made us aware of the need to be prepared for a similar situation Without insurance, our friend would have needed to pay up front before he could have left the ship. Medical evacuation insurance may seem expensive -- \$200-\$300 per year -- but if you need help right away it can turn out to be very cheap indeed.

On a brighter note, the same trip introduced us to a scientist with a startling new theory about a major development in American natural history. Scientists have agreed that a great range of large mammals disappeared from the American continents very quickly some 12-13,000 years ago. Giant sloths, dire wolves, sabre-toothed tigers, and woolly mammoths roamed North and South America, only to leave the scene within a few hundred years. Naturalists have quarreled over two possible explanations for this massive extinction: either the climate changed rapidly, thus freezing out the animals; or newly arrived humans, crossing the land bridge from Siberia, ferociously hunted down the great mammals for their protein content. Ross McPhee, Curator of Mammals at the American Museum of Natural History, one of the lecturers on the Antarctic expedition, has a different explanation. taking note of the recent explosion of AIDS, or the African outbreak of ebola, McPhee suggests that a mutated virus killed the large animals. The climate, he says, didn't change that much; and the very few humans couldn't have wreaked that much destruction with their limited weapons. Instead, the humans brought with them from Asia a disease to which the American animals had no immunity.

McPhee tests his theory by searching out fossil mammoth remains on Wrangel Island north of Siberia, and by analyzing ancient sloth feces in a cave in Patagonia. He is cooperating with a New York virologist to analyze DNA and possible evidence of antibodies. He may be on the right track; he may not. At the very least, he reminded us that travels of the mind can be as exciting as physical journeys.

And finally: on the Antarctic trip, we spent hours watching albatrosses soaring behind our ship. One of the lecturers took advantage of our ornithological fascination by recruiting us to read, in front of a hall-full of

lecturers took advantage of our ornithological fascination by recruiting us to read, in front of a hall-full of passengers, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, accompanied by slides of the magnificent Gustav Dore' illustrations. I had remembered the lines about "water, water, everywhere," and the dangers resulting from killing an albatross, but I'd forgotten that the poem ends with "a sadder and a wiser man." Elizabeth got to read, "Unhand me, graybeard loon," a line which she continues to use at every opportunity.

To our fellow travelers: have a good trip, and let us know where you've gone.

Risk Management A New Approach to Health Plan Problems Wilma Krebs

In hopes of alleviating problems such as escalating costs, HMO pullouts from rural areas, and adverse selection in the PPOs (PERSCare and PERS Choice), CaIPERS staff has initiated a major study of the feasibility of using risk management. Most HMOs have been avoiding risk to increase profit margins by pulling out of high cost rural areas, and by seeking younger, healthier members. The older, sicker, or rural members have moved into the PPOs, especially PERS Choice, which is less expensive than PERSCare. This adverse selection has raised costs in the PPOs, so their members who have another choice leave the PPOs, which are then loaded with older, sicker (more expensive) enrollees, higher cost, and higher premiums. The higher premiums (and reduced benefits) cause even more healthy people to leave the PPOs, resulting in a "death spiral."

With risk-adjusted premiums across all health plan vendors, both demographic and geographic risk would be spread across all health plan vendors. Risk adjustment would be accomplished by compensating vendors for higher risk out of the general premium pool. (You will notice that the concept is not unlike a statewide, one risk-pool approach such as found in Universal Health Care proposals for a given state.)

Lunch Bunch looking for Members

The Emeritus Faculty & Staff Luncheon (independent from the CSUS Emeritus Faculty Association) meets for lunch once a quarter (next time in April) either on a Tuesday or Wednesday. Recent meetings have been at the Buggy Whip. We start about 11:30 AM with beverages and talk. About noon we eat and talk. Turnout is usually about 25 and mostly male. We are looking for more members, especially emeritae.

Life on the Inside: A Personal Report Coming in the Fall Issue

Gene Sahs, Professor Emeritus (Social Work), has recently been hospitalized because of a stroke which paralyzed his left side. He is now in his fourth rehab facility, and is writing a series of vignettes informing his family, friends, and emeritus faculty about life in a so-called "skilled nursing facility." With his inimitable wit and charm, he is a keen observer and reporter of life in that environment. These vignettes will be included in the fall issue of the Bulletin. Meanwhile, says Gene, even if you think you are insured to the max, bring money--at least \$5,000. in cash! Following are Gene's comments on insurance and coverage:

CalPERS is looking at two different risk management models

Model 1 is a segmented risk-pool, with 2 to 3 vendors offering statewide coverage, which could include HMO, Tiered HMO or PPO benefit packages. This could be with or without Kaiser. This would spread the risk statewide across all vendors. CalPERS would bear no risk. Standard benefit designs would be required for all products, and vendors would be required to offer coverage in all geographic areas. This should equalize treatment of all members. Members may perceive less choice.

Model 2 is a single risk pool, administered by a third party. CalPERS is at risk for all financial and legal liability. This could be with or without Kaiser. Within the single pool, different products could be offered, such as HMO or PPO, and premium differences would exist among the products. This would avoid adverse selection, since all members are in one risk pool controlled by CalPERS. Statewide premiums would be set by CalPERS, adjusted for relative risk by plan product. This should equalize treatment of members. Some members will perceive less choice.

What are the implications for retirees in both rural and urban areas? Who are the winners and losers in such areas as premium levels and choice of health plans and providers? How would Kaiser and other health plans react? Your comments and questions are welcome. wkrebs@saclink.csus.edu

The Lunch Bunch has no dues or other formalities. Membership is attained simply by submitting your name and address (phone and email address would be appreciated, too) for our mailing list so we can send you lunch meeting notices. Submit the information to: Harold Kerster (916) 363-7837 kersterhw@csus.edu

"if you have a stroke, be sure to bring lots of money. We carried Kaiser Disadvantage (sic) as well as PERS-Long Term Care Policy. To our dismay, Kaiser brown-nosed the Feds by strictly enforcing Medicare policy. They suddenly cut me off from all benefits because I was not making enough progress. Even on appeal from my personal physician, they extended my therapy by only one week. Similarly, PERS paid up only after extensive prompting: call, and call and call. The calls got lost, ignored, etc. For example, eight months after the onset of my stroke they finally notified me that I no longer had to pay the premium and provided a small refund. You should have at least \$5,000 in cash."

LUNCHEON SPEAKER - DR. METWALLI B. AMER

The guest speaker for our March 27, 2002 luncheon is a colleague, Dr. Metwalli B. Amer, who will speak on Understanding Islam as a Way of Life.

Metwalli, a native of Egypt and a Muslim by birth, joined the CSUS Accountancy faculty in 1969, after earning his undergraduate degree at Cairo University, his Master's and Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, and returning in 1966 to teach at Cairo University. He has been one of our most valued colleagues, combining teaching excellence with research and administration.

Metwalli Amer has also been heavily and fruitfully involved in community service. He is the founder and Executive Director of the SACRAMENTO AREA LEAGUE OF ASSOCIATED MUSLIMS (SALAM) and has served as the Association's Imam or spiritual leader. Currently he is President and Public Relations Officer of the SACRAMENTO VALLEY COUNCIL OF ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS, comprising 9 mosques and 2 organizations.

As readers of the BEE know, Metwalli has taken a great interest in interfaith harmony and understanding. To that end he is active in the INTERFAITH SERVICE BUREAU, and serves on both the Board of Directors of the CSUS COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RELATIONS and the BOARD OF CAPITAL UNITY COUNCIL.

We are all looking forward to Metwalli's address, after which he will welcome discussion.

CSUS EMERITUS ASSOCIATION SPRING LUNCHEON

DATE: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2002

LOCATION: Student Union on Campus/University Center Restaurant TIME: Reception and Luncheon from 11:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M.

The Menu: Grilled Chicken Breast or Vegetable Lasagna - Buffet Style
Grilled Chicken Breast topped with fresh tomato concasse, mushrooms, roast garlic and olive oil, or Vegetable Lasagna. Also starring: Long grain and wild rice pilaf; seasonal vegetables, mixed green salad with Italian and Ranch Dressing.
Cheesecake for dessert.
Coffee, soft drinks and wine available.
Please choose one entree offering and write in the number of persons for each choice.
Grilled Chicken Breast:
\$16.00
Vecetable Lasagna
\$16.00
NAME:
STREET ADDRESS
CITY - STATE - ZIP
PHONE: (

Please return this sheet with your payment, which may also include your 2002-2003 dues of \$10.00, to:
Floyd Mullinix - 1539 Gannon Drive - Sacramento, CA 95825

DEADLINE FOR YOUR RESPONSE: SATURDAY - March 23. Please respond as soon as possible.

Emeritus Association #117480 California State University, Sacramento 6000 J Street Sacramento, CA 95819-6026

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

The Silver Bulletin will be much more interesting (and maybe more fun) if more members will send news items (about you and your colleagues) to Alan Wade, Editor - 2916 - 25" Street - Sacramento, CA 95818 (e-mail & fax listed above). Photos from trips etc., can be included and will be used if space permits. Black and white photos are best. ATTENTION: Articles for the Fall - 2002 issue of the Silver Bulletin should be in the editor's hands by: 10-01-02.