Bush Coddles Creationists

Republican Presidential candidate George W. Bush supports Creationism, the fundamentalist Christian theory of how the earth, life, and humankind were formed and developed.

He does not directly denigrate science, which is a major enterprise in Texas, where Bush is governor. But the candidate supports a two-theory, local-choice educational policy that is presently the spearhead in religiousists' drive to replace Darwinian science with biblical teachings on life's origins.

Bush's views were reported in a Nov. 8, Reuters dispatch from Wilmington, Del. It says he thinks schools should teach "different forms of how the world was formed," with evolution taught alongside Creationism.

Bush went on to say, according to Reuters, that he favored "morality-based" education in public schools.

Local Choice Lauded

"I have absolutely no problem with children learning different forms of how the earth was formed," Bush declared.

He added, significantly, that it was up to local school boards to decide on curricula.

What Reuters did not report is that Bush's formulation is identical to Creationists' strategic plan to beat back the scientific worldview, particularly on biology, but also on astrophysics and other disciplines whose evidence contradicts Creationists' belief that the world was created, recently, in six 24-hour days.

IQ Seen Up There

The creationists' strategy has two prongs, according to a newly released report — "Sabotaging Science: Creationist Strategy in the '90s" — by People for the American Way (PFAW), in Washington, D.C.:

Since the U.S. Supreme Court (in 1968) struck down state laws to prevent evolution from being taught in public schools, Creationists have regrouped to insist that "Creation science" be taught side-by-side with ordinary science — a possibility sanctioned by the Court. To circumvent the secular objection that Creationism is a religious belief, the Creationists have now substituted an "intelligent design" for God in their Creationist myth.

Obviously, as PFAW points out, "intelligent design" implies an intelligent designer, i.e., God. But this formulation has not been disallowed by the courts.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), a creationist fount, recently acknowledged that intelligent design theory is a "wedge" to get religion back into science and the schools (SBC Life, Feb./March, '98).

This effort is gussied up with appeals to let the children make up their own minds, First Amendment Rights, free expression, and other pleas for tolerance, diversity, and individual choice.

The National Academy of Sciences has countered this position, stating that "to reintroduce [Creationism] into the public schools . . . would be akin to requiring the teaching of Ptolemaic astronomy."

The second prong of the Creationists' approach, favored by candidate Bush, is local control: working from the bottom up. Says Mary Douglass Brown, a member of the Kansas Board of Education, which last year voted to delete evolution from the state's teaching standards:

continued on page 3

How To Teach Kids

Candidate Bush has said recently:

"The people of Kansas can figure how best to teach all subjects . . . . Children ought to be exposed to different theories about how the world started."

— USA Today, Aug. 19, 1999

"I believe children ought to be exposed to different theories about how the world started."

— Washington Post, Aug. 27, 1999

"I'd make it a goal to make sure that local folks got to make the decision as to whether or not they said Creationism has been a part of our history, and whether or not people ought to be exposed to different theories as to how the world was formed. This is not a federal initiative."

— AP, Oct. 22, 1999

Source: Bush for President

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Our ‘Errors’ Critique Knocked by Panelist

Editor’s note: We sent copies of the March PROBE, containing our critique of the Institute of Medicine (IoM) report on medical errors, to IoM officials.

We also sent copies to the authors of the two studies whose findings are reflected in the IoM’s dire warning that up to 100,000 Americans die each year as the result of medical errors. We invited their comment. None replied.

But one of them, internist Troyen A. Brennan, M.D., has now written his own critique of the IoM document, which was published by the New England Journal of Medicine on April 13. He covers many of the same problems that we reported in PROBE (see story, facing page).

We also sent the issue to our friend Arthur Levin, MPH, the consumer health activist, who is Director of the Center for Medical Consumers, in Manhattan. He was a member of the IoM committee that wrote the report. Levin has replied as follows:

I frankly was surprised by the tone and content of your coverage of the IoM report “To Err Is Human.” In your front page story, you charge that the IoM’s estimate of deaths from medical error is based on “stale, veiled and skewed” data.

Evidence Is Strong

While it is true that the two studies you cite, the 1991 Harvard Medical Practice study and the more recently published Colorado and Utah study (1999), are based on observations that took place some time ago, they are the most comprehensive studies available today. But it is important for your readers to know that the IoM report is based on an exhaustive review of all the available studies of medical errors, which are cataloged in Appendix C-1 of the report.

These other studies strengthen, not weaken, the evidence of the incidence of preventable patient harm which the IoM cites . . . . In fact, there is general agreement that these findings are, if anything, likely to be an underestimate.

Despite your florid suggestions to the contrary, there is simply no empirical evidence that would support your claims that the IoM has misrepresented or misreported or misinterpreted the evidence in support of the claim that there are 44,000-98,000 deaths due to preventable errors each year in the U.S.

As to the argument you raise about the appropriateness of using “medical errors” or “medical mistakes” interchangeable with “adverse events” or “negligent adverse events,” I respectfully suggest you re-read the IoM’s definition of error and adverse event which appears on page 23 of the soft-cover edition of the report. The report’s use of “error” does not require an adverse outcome. But the assumption is made that all “errors” are potentially “preventable.” Thus an error that causes harm is a “preventable adverse event” — the two terms are interchangeable.

Health Care Lags on Safety

Many of us working around issues of quality have long been aware of the amount of harm caused by medical mistakes — but unlike other industries, health care has seen fit, and has been allowed to bury its mistakes rather than work to solve the problem. There are exceptions of course, for example anesthesiologists got serious about reducing human error over a decade ago, and the results have been impressive, saving many from death and permanent disability.

With regard to John Bailar’s comments [that the problem’s dimensions are unclear] the IoM report clearly states (also on page 23) that “we do not yet have a complete picture of the epidemiology of errors.” But, we do have the experience gained in other industries and sectors to help us understand both the cause and cure for problems in safety. Do we allow preventable deaths and injuries to continue while we wait for a more complete picture of the epidemiology of error? I hope not.

— Arthur A. Levin MPH
Director, Center for Medical Consumers

This issue closed on April 24, 2000
IoM Report on ‘Medical Errors’ Is Erroneous, Key Source Says

Well now. Who should come out against the recent Institute of Medicine (IoM) report’s findings on medical errors but the very researcher upon whose work the report is based!

His name, which we have reported, is Troyen A. Brennan, M.D.; he is an internist at the Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. He lodged his complaint at the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM), which published it on April 17, under the provocative heading: “The IoM Report on Medical Errors — Could It Do Harm?”

Yes it could, declares Brennan. He is a co-author of the Harvard studies in New York and Colorado and Utah from which the IoM extrapolated its charge that errors cause between 44,000 and 98,000 deaths every year in American hospitals (PROBE, March).

 “[A] careful reader must have some reservations about the IoM report,” Brennan declares.

Malpractice Suits Foreseen

He says the worst risk (which we didn’t cover) is IoM’s call for mandatory reporting of errors. Such a move, Brennan says, would only raise the burden of malpractice lawsuits. This in turn would drive the reporting of errors even further underground than it already is, i.e., medical omerta.

As the researchers’ figures and our analysis showed, medical practice is in fact getting safer. Extrapolating from the New York and Colorado-Utah data, Brennan says, it now is possible to say — as we indicated — that the number of deaths due to errors had fallen to 25,000 in 1992 — and may still be falling, as we projected.

The IoM report and the scare headlines it generated drove Brennan to look up the word error in a thesaurus. He found synonyms like blooper, boner, and blunder, and he says:

“The combination of the strikingly large number of errors cited by the report and the connotations of the word ‘error’ create an impression that is not warranted by the scientific work [his work, with colleagues] underlying the IoM report.”

Brennan, in other words, rejects the conclusions that the IoM panel (which included his Harvard co-investigator Lucien L. Leape, M.D.) had drawn from their studies. (Brennan also acknowledges, as we reported, that the Colorado-Utah study wasn’t published until this year, after everyone, including President Clinton, had made up his mind, from IoM summaries, about what it meant!)

Reports Were Error Free

Brennan now takes up a point that we made: The word error scarcely appears in the two reports of which he is author. Its use was the decision of the IoM panel that wrote the report. This use of it made no sense to us. It makes little sense to Brennan, either. He points out that IoM labelled many operating room errors “as preventable . . . even though in most cases there was no apparent blunder or slip-up by the surgeon.”

Adds Brennan, with a hint of sarcasm: “The IoM report refers to these cases as medical errors, which to some observers may seem inappropriate” — as it did to us. (But, also see letter, facing page.)

Brennan says:

“[N]either study cited by the IoM as the source of data on the incidence of injuries due to medical care involved judgments by the physicians reviewing medical records about whether the injuries were caused by errors. Indeed, there is no evidence that such judgments can be made reliably.”

Finally, Brennan protests, “The IoM calls for a 50% reduction in medical errors.” The problem is that no one’s ever figured a way to measure the incidence of errors. But without such a baseline, there’s no way to know if you’ve succeeded in reducing it by half.

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In short, the IoM report, and the multi-billion dollar reforms trailing behind it, should be largely discounted. You read it first in PROBE! — D.R.Z.

Coddles...

continued from page 1

“We just handed the baton to the locals. I am very pro-local control.”

The scientist co-chairman of the Kansas science standards committee, which had recommended that the board not endorse Creationism, has pointed out, according to PFAW, that the Board has been anti-local control on most other educational issues.

Board Does an About Face

“The Board has been very pro-active in creating state standards in all of the subject areas,” John Staver said. “To single out one theoretical framework, evolution, [for local control] represents a major inconsistency.”

While one local school board’s incorporation of “intelligent design,” may seem trivial, PFAW points out that it can affect how science is or is not taught throughout the state. Textbook publishers, for example, can’t sell books to communities that demand Creationist content without watering down the evolutionary material. What is more, in many states, including Texas, textbooks are ordered on a statewide basis.

Candidate Bush thus supports the thrust of Creationists’ current strategy, which, as one of its leaders, John Morris, says is “to see science return to its rightful God-glorying position . . . removing roadblocks to the Gospel.”

If elected, Bush has pledged to help.
The *National Geographic* never tires of proclaiming its allegiance to science. But when it comes to *medical* science, the Geographic appears all too willing to disregard facts, and point its readers toward folly.

Case in point: the April issue. It carries a long and disingenuous piece called "Medicine in Nature," which panders shamelessly to the public's current fascination with herbs and other "natural" remedies. To do so, the mag's editors, including Joel L. Swerdlow, who wrote the piece, blur the boundaries between science and superstition. They do this in a dangerous way.

**Clay Eater Depicted**

The thrust of the piece is to use the story of unproven natural remedies among people who have little or no access to safe and effective modern drugs, to validate the marketing and use of similarly unproven (although milder) natural remedies, such as herbs, by people who do have access to safe and effective drugs.

The piece opens with a double-page photo of a grinning black woman in Georgia. She is happily munching a chunk of clay to relieve "morning sickness." The "doctors warn against it," the Geographic acknowledges, "but some women crave it." This suggests — as does much of the rest of the article — that users and practitioners of what the magazine calls "Nature's Rx" may know more about what works and what doesn't than doctors. It's folk wisdom!

The cause of this clay-eating urge, which is similar to the urge that prompts many poorly nourished children to chew lead-based wall paint — which can kill them — is not discussed; neither is the medical name for this disordered behavior. It's called pica.

Our *Stedman's Medical Dictionary* (25th ed.) notes that pica is named for a bird, the magpie, an indiscriminate feeder, and means: "A perverted appetite for substances not fit as food or of no nutritional value, e.g., clay, starch, ice."

Pica is caused by iron-deficiency anemia. The safe treatment is simple: iron supplements. The Geographic ignores this less colorful, but more reliable information.

**Which Herbs Work?**

Several herbal products have, in fact, been approved as safe and effective by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), based on scientific data, according to pharmacognocist Verro E. Tyler, Ph.D., of Purdue. He is the academic guru of the nature-as-medicine field. Tyler told a recent conference at the University of North Carolina that all of these substances should be regulated as drugs, not as foods, as they presently are under 1994 federal legislation, to ensure their safety and efficacy.

Tyler says FDA has rated six classic botanicals as safe and effective. They're listed below, along with the FDA's approved indications for their use (as described in our *Complete Guide to Nonprescription Drugs*, the last and only such reference work on OTC drug products, which was published in 1993 — and so may now be a bit out-of-date).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Approved Indications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capsicum [red pepper]</td>
<td>counterirritant in liniments to relieve aches and pains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elm Bark</td>
<td>soothers in lozenges to relieve sore throat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniper tar (oil of Cade)</td>
<td>itch and pain relief for the skin, including hemorrhoids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karya gum</td>
<td>laxative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psyllium seed and husk</td>
<td>laxative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witch hazel</td>
<td>astringent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nature Is Non-prescriber**

The whole premise of the piece — that Nature has Rx's — is faulty. Nature indeed has millions, perhaps billions of chemical compounds. But it is not Nature, but local practitioners who provide the Rx — instructions to use a plant, say, that might work.

Sometimes they're right, as with the Indian shrubs that yield rauwolfia, the antipsychotic substance that now is synthesized as thorazine. But all too often they're wrong, since their bases for selecting a particular plant product may be thoroughly irrational: For example, the plant is *shaped like* the human body part it will be used to treat.

Swerdlow starts his text with sentiment and with science: A Washington, D.C. teenager is celebrating her cure from leukemia — thanks to a drug, vinblastine. It is derived from an unprepossessing looking flower, rosy periwinkle, that comes from Madagascar. On the facing page, a dramatic photo shows an herb gardener in Maine watering her crop of what the magazine's caption writer calls "healing herbs — valerian, echinacea, and hyssop."

**Herbs' Value Unproven**

*That*, however, is not science. It's folklore. This is because none of these herbs has been shown to be safe and effective according to scientific standards. Juxtaposing the periwinkle picture and text with the herb gardener lends a false patina of science to folk remedies — as does the clay-chewing photo.

The text threads its way through the science vs. nonscience conflict, quoting, approvingly, ex-*New England Journal* editor Arnold Relman, M.D., who declares that plants contain potent

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This coverage continues on following page →
Minnesota Bill Promises New Life For Old Frauds; Ventura OK Seen

Quackbuster Robert W. McCoy, in Minneapolis, has assiduously collected fake and fraudulent medical devices for a couple of decades now. As we have reported (PROBE, Jan. ’99), he has assembled these quackery exemplars in his Museum of Questionable Medical Devices.

McCoy has just sent us an anguished communiqué:

He writes that a bill, already passed by the Minnesota Legislature, will legalize, legitimize, and protect, for the future, the devices and methods he has been collecting as artifacts of the bad old past! These are methods that science, medicine, health reform, and state and federal health regulations have — slowly, painfully — banned, outlawed, and turned into museum pieces over the last century.

Law is Described

The regressive Minnesota legislation is called the Complementary and Alternative Health Care Freedom of Access Act. According to McCoy:

"Enactment of [it] would permit unlicensed alt/med practitioners to engage in many unproved and untested practices. And, it would permit modalities of treatments that have been shown to be worthless in the treatment of serious diseases."

More colloquially, he and an associate, Shawne FitzGerald, charge:

"Minnesota is about to become the ‘quackiest’ state in the nation, with less consumer health care protection than any other..."

Opposition Is Scant

Except for a few quackbusters like himself, McCoy told PROBE, there has been no opposition to this bill — which was introduced and is being promoted by alt/med practitioners and their shills.

The Minnesota Department of Health has not opposed the bill, McCoy says. When he phoned to ask why the state would allow this, he recounts, an agency spokeswoman said of the alt/med practitioners:

"They do it anyway!"

If the bill passes, it will go to Gov. Jesse Ventura (Reform). He’s not said yet if he’ll sign it. But why shouldn’t he.

Minnesota once was a leader among the states for consumer protection. Now, it is tipping precipitously in the opposite direction.

"If this becomes law," McCoy notes, "everything in the museum will be legit!!!!!" •

Hokum...

continued from previous page

chemicals, whose value must be demonstrated in research. But Swerdlow carefully backs away from Relman’s rigor, to uphold vox populi:

"Relman insists on scientific testing before he’ll believe in an herbal remedy, but people use hundreds of plants, not all of which have been tested by science, to combat ailments ranging from cancer to colds."

Of course it’s “few of which,” rather than “not all of which have been tested by science...” Beyond this misstatement, Swerdlow’s view is rooted in the belief that, at least in poor countries, the ethnobotanists and healers who make and sell these plant concoctions have firm traditional and empirical bases for what they are doing.

Some Plants Are Helpful

With some remedies, like white birch bark, which contains aspirin, they do. With many others, he reveals, they don’t.

The rosy periwinkle, for example, is sold medicinally in Madagascar to relieve diabetes, not cancer. Swerdlow declines to say whether, in fact, it helps against diabetes, or whether the medicine men use it against cancer.

Visiting Madagascar, Swerdlow is ecstatic when he discovers a marketplace where hundreds, perhaps thousands of botanical medicines are sold. Despite the severe deforestation that mars this island, medicinal plants still are everywhere at hand, he reports. One kills viruses. Another boosts the immune system, an African ethnobiologist assures him.

Given this pharmacological cornucopia, it’s hard to understand why infant mortality in Madagascar is 91 per 1,000 births, compared to 8 per 1,000 in the U.S. Similarly, according to UN statistics, life expectancy on the tropical island is 20 years lower than in the U.S., where (at least until recently) sick people were treated with safe and effective medicines, not unproven herbs.

The idea that wild nature can provide sources of important new drugs is appealing, especially to conservationists. But recent reports in the science press indicate that ethnobotanic companies that were started to pursue this path have mostly been stymied. Scientific interest is currently focused on efforts to model new drugs based on the configuration of the human and foreign molecules with which the drugs must interact. This is indoor biology — not as colorful as bushwhacking for vines.

This coverage continues on following page ➔
Mythos Vs. Logos:
Science’s Foes Take the Offensive;

Confession: As a newsman, we like to cover stories once, when they’re topical — or should be. Then, it’s time to move on, to new news or deeper views. Not for us, then, the repetitive batting down of one, then another, and still another unproven remedy or irrational viewpoint.

So:
We’re growing bored with alt/med and irrational anti-scientism. We want now to dig at — or out — their roots. What is to be done (as Lenin once asked)?

Scholar Looks at Religions

Pondering this dilemma last month, we came across a new book that deals directly with the underlying problem: the religious, historical, and psychological underpinnings of the fierce global conflict between faith-based fundamentalists and science-based modernists. The book is by English historian Karen Armstrong, a former nun, who took a literary degree at Oxford, and now teaches at a Jewish college. She keeps close tabs on all three major Western monotheistic religions in her role as a secular historian. Her book, The Battle for God (Knopf) examines the long and comparable warfare between what she calls mythos and logos as it has been — and is now being — fought out in the United States, Iran, and Israel; that is to say in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Fundamentalists, Armstrong says, are people who fight modernity. But contemporary fundamentalism is a new, 20th century phenomenon:
“It is a reaction against the scientific and secular culture that first appeared in the West, but has since taken root in the rest of the world.”

She elaborates:
Fundamentalists have no time for democracy, pluralism, religious tolerance, peacekeeping, free speech, or the separation of church and state. Christian fundamentalists reject the discoveries of biology and physics about the origins of life and insist that the Book of Genesis is scientifically sound in every detail. At a time when many are throwing off the shackles of the past, Jewish fundamentalists observe their revealed Law more stringently than ever before, and Muslim women, repudiating the freedoms of Western women, shroud themselves in veils and chadors.

Why?
Mortal fear is the imperative, says Armstrong. Existential terror! Fundamentalists’ beliefs are shaped to seek God by ritualistic religious practices, starting in childhood. If, as secularists aver, God doesn’t exist, then the fundamentalists don’t, either. They are soul dead. Armstrong says fundamentalists fear the secular world that excludes God with the same terror — and fervor — that Jews and others fear the Holocaust.

Conflict between secularists and fundamentalists has been a main thread of American history, Armstrong reminds us. While Jefferson and his supporters won the major battles with the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the Salem elders, and Cotton Mather and his crowd won many of the succeeding skirmishes.

Retreat Is Temporary

They took a bad fall — to science, ridicule, and common sense — at the Scopes Monkey Trial, then withdrew, nursing their wounds and their anger through much of the midcentury. But as scientific understanding continued to crowd them out of public discourse, they fought back, forcefully and cleverly, in recent decades led by southern Protestant preachers.

The fact that the Creationist battle is still being fought in the schools, and that one presidential candidate in this millennial year supports them politically, is a

Hokum...

continued from previous page

and herbs — but conceivably much more promising.

The selection and use of photos in the article is duplicitous: The folk-medicine photos are sharp, clear, and dramatic. But there also are a few photos from science, and they are dull and unclear. One shows two unidentified National Cancer Institute researchers in a witchy-looking tableau with glass retorts that looks like a scene from Act I of Macbeth. Two pages are given to a wholly blurred photo of a frog exuding antibiotic skin chemicals that contain an antibiotic.

Photo Selection Is Biased

No big deal there: Dog saliva, and for that matter human spit, contain antibiotic compounds. It’s hardly news! But these pictures do reflect, unfavorably, on the scientific study of plants, vis-a-vis the much more colorful folkloric uses that are depicted in other pictures with the piece.

So what is this all about, in the end?
It turns out that the article is a come-on for a book on herbs by article writer Swerdlow that the Geographic is publishing this month. It’s commerce, not science!

We’ll get a copy of this book, and review it shortly.

Consumerists Lower Their Standards

Meanwhile, up at Consumers Union, in Yonkers, N.Y., similar pandering is in progress: Their magazine, Consumer Reports (May) surveyed readers, and found that a
An Historian Foresees No Peace

sign of the staying power these beliefs have and the fear that drives them. (see story, p.1)

Armstrong eschews eschatology. But — like most of us — she’s attracted to it. She writes that fundamentalist beliefs and actions come to the forefront during periods of major social change, such as the long “Axial Age” from 700 to 200 BCE, when improved agricultural methods freed peoples’ time and minds to build the first great civilizations. The modern scientific era is a similar Axial Age, she declares, with scientific advances fostering new — and for religious reasons, threatening — belief systems.

Modernizing Role Elucidated

Fundamentalism, surprisingly, does play a modernizing role, she says. While they fight modernity, the fundamentalists in the countries whose histories she traces in The Battle for God also provide a bridge through which religious can accommodate their beliefs to the changing new social reality; in her view, it’s a dialectical process.

As examples, she cites the Ayatollah Khomeini, in Iran, whom she says was not a religious recidivist as he was depicted in the West. Rather, his ideology was populist and democratic, within a religious matrix that may yet help lead Iran from a feudal and colonial past to religiously sanctioned participation in the modern world. Similarly, ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, who had shunned Zionism and the political process, formed fundamentalist political parties in the ’60s and ’70s. They have gained immense power in shaping the Israeli political and social agendas. U.S. fundamentalists, similarly, have seized the tools of modern communications technology — particularly radio and TV — to reinvigorate their movement. But, in co-opting these tools of Satan, Armstrong says, they also are being forced to realign their beliefs to accommodate modernity.

No Peace Talks Foreseen

Nevertheless, the struggle continues. No end is in sight. So the question remains: Should scientists, secularists, and political liberals simply ignore the fundamentalist threat, as many are doing? Or fight them — which is what we favor? Or try to find new syntheses of mythos and logos — which we think is a fool’s mission that the fundamentalists and other true believers will endlessly manipulate for their own purposes?

“Each, the religious and the secularist, gazes at the other with horror,” Armstrong says. “Both recall the excesses, cruelties, and intolerance of the ‘other side’ and, wounded to the core, they cannot make peace.”

“Given the global dynamics of this implacable struggle, Armstrong, understandably, offers no easy solutions. The fundamentalists must become more tolerant, she says. And so must the secularists — who might learn to treat fundamentalists’ fears as a sickness — neurosis — rather than a reactionary political threat. Here’s her last word:

If fundamentalists must evolve a more compassionate assessment of their enemies in order to be true to their religious traditions, secularists must also be more faithful to the benevolence, tolerance, and respect for humanity which characterizes modern culture at its best, and address themselves more empathetically to the fears, anxieties, and needs which so many of their fundamentalist neighbors experience but which no society can safely ignore.

Armstrong’s analysis is excellent. We’re less enamored of her proposals. But this much is sure: PROBE readers will find much information and insight in The Battle for God.

— D.R.Z.

May 2000

Dispatches From the Front

Here are a few key observations from Karen Armstrong’s The Battle for God:

“Fundamentalists feel that they are battling against forces that threaten their most sacred values. During a war it is very difficult for combatants to appreciate one another’s position. . . . [M]odernization has led to a polarization of society, but sometimes, to prevent an escalation of the conflict, we must try to understand the pain and perceptions of the other side.” — p. xvi

“Protestant fundamentalists and Christian conservatives . . . seem to have felt unmanned by the evil forces of secular humanism. They appeared deeply concerned about male importance.” — p. 312

“[T]he desire for a militant virile Christianity also explains [the] Moral Majority’s hostility to gun control legislation.” — p. 312

“Fundamentalism is not going to disappear. In America, religion has long shaped opposition to government. Its rise and fall has always been cyclical . . . and . . . has occasionally become frighteningly explicit.” — p. 362

Historian Armstrong counsels conciliation.
Standards...

continued from page 6

third of them used alternative medicine. Readers liked "alternative manual therapies" such as chiropractic and deep massage. But they didn't think herbs and supplements were much help for their ailments; they didn't like over-the-counter (OTC) drugs very much, either.

Soft Safeguards Asked

Based on these findings, Consumers Union president Rhoda H. Karpatin writes, thunderously, up front in the magazine, that there is need for: "alternative-medicine safeguards" for consumers. She says:

We believe the FDA should have the authority and fund-

ing to establish basic rules regarding herbal and nutritional supplements, to require appropriate labeling, to establish consistent manufacturing standards, and to require reasonable evidence of safety.

Sounds great! But what Karpatin doesn't say is the problem: She does not say that FDA should require evidence of efficacy. Because, of course, if — by a miracle — Congress changed its mind, and the law, to let FDA require proof of efficacy, the herb industry would wither on the vine. It ain't likely to happen!

But it's shocking that Karpatin and Consumer Reports, who insist that vacuum cleaners — as well as cars, lawn mowers, and toilet cleaners — must work, must be effective, to earn high ratings, do not think it's important to hold herbs and other alt/med stuff to similar standards.

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