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(SORT)**

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For past issues, bibliography, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website:

[www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html](http://www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html)

For more about the co-founders of SORT, see

[www.spangenburgandmoser.com](http://www.spangenburgandmoser.com)

**November/  
December  
SORT Meeting  
Wednesday,  
December 3, 2003  
7:00 P.M.**

Room 1, Library  
Kinney High School  
2710 Kilgore Rd., Rancho Cordova  
(See driving directions)

# The **SORTified NEWS**

**“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”**

—Clarence Darrow

## December 3rd Meeting **THE RIGHT TO DIE**

By now most of us are familiar with the sad and difficult case—becoming uglier by the day—of Terri Schindler Schiavo in Florida. For those of you who may have missed it, for the past 13 years Schiavo, now 39, has existed in what her doctors call “a persistent vegetative state.” Though she may be dead by the time you read this, at present Schiavo is the center of another heated “right to die” controversy. Her husband Michael seeks to have her feeding tube removed so she can “die peacefully,” while her parents struggle to prevent hospital personnel from removing the tube. The resulting high-profile case involving the courts, the Florida Legislature, and Florida Governor Jeb Bush, has elevated the bitterly personal and tragic story to the national headlines. Terri’s parents have been aided in their fight by a slew of conservative politicians and “right-to-life” groups. Her husband Michael has found support from the ACLU and other “right-to-die” groups. The powerfully emotional and painful story has become a media circus and talk show fodder. Ugly and careless accusations have surfaced from both sides.

Deeply personal battles among Terri’s family have once again

pushed a difficult moral and legal issue into the nation’s consciousness. We will be taking a look at this issue at our special November/December meeting of SORT. Is there a “right to die”? While many of us have already made our decisions and left instructions as to our wishes, should a circumstance like Terri’s befall us there are many others who see decisions to “pull the plug” as morally and even legally wrong. It’s an issue that strikes deep into our most personal and fundamental philosophies and values. Increasingly also, as demonstrated by the Schiavo case, this issue is becoming a complicated legal battleground. Does an individual have a right, legally, to make a decision about the circumstances of his or her own death? Since attempted suicide may harm no one else, why is it a crime in most states?

Join us at our open roundtable discussion as SORT takes a look at this difficult and controversial issue on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7:00–9:00 p.m., at the Kinney High School library in Rancho Cordova. (See driving directions on page 3.) Free coffee, soft drinks, cookies, and other refreshments will be on hand, too.

Please remember that due to holiday conflicts this special December 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting will replace our usual December “last Wednesday

of the month” meeting. We will return to our regular schedule with our next meeting, Wednesday, January 28, 2004.



### WHY IS SANTA CLAUS CARRYING THAT BIBLE?

While we are on the subject of the holidays you might want to take a look at the U.K. *Guardian* website at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1081349,00.html>. It’s a very interesting story of “Operation Christmas Child” which the *Guardian* describes as “a unique ministry that brings Christmas joy packed in gift-filled shoe-boxes to children around the world.” According to the *Guardian* story, “Over the past 10 years, 24 million shoes-boxes have been delivered, making it the world’s largest children’s Christmas project.”

The *Guardian* also points out that “every President since Ronald Reagan has packed a shoe-box for Operation Christmas Child.” In the U.K, according to the *Guardian*, “thousands of schools, churches and youth clubs are doing the same. Some fill their boxes with dried-up felt pens and discarded Barbie amputees. Others spend serious money on the latest Gameboy or Sony Walkman.”

The problem, according to the

*Guardian* is that most of the people who contribute to or take part in Operation Christmas Child don’t know that the power behind the project is the “evangelical charity Samaritan Purse” which the *Guardian* points out is a “particularly toxic version of Christianity . . . the same outfit that targeted eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and was widely condemned for following U.S. troops into Iraq to claim Muslims for Christ.”

In its tough-hitting story the *Guardian* points out that Samaritan’s Purse “is run by the Rev. Franklin Graham—chosen by George Bush to deliver the prayers at his inaguration.” And who, according to the *Guardian* “has called Islam ‘a very wicked and evil religion.’” The son of evangelist Billy Graham, the younger Graham, according to the *Guardian*, “is from the same school of thought as General William Boykin, U.S. deputy under-secretary of defence for intelligence, who described America as waging a holy war against ‘the idol’ of Islam’s false god and ‘a guy called Satan who wants to destroy us as a Christian army.’”

The *Guardian* goes on to report that recent protests in the U.K. about the use of Operation Christmas Child to promote Christian evangelical ideas that are “deeply offensive to Muslims” has led the project to discontinue inclusion of its literature inside each box. Instead it will now be “distributed alongside shoe-box parcels from the U.K.,” a solution that the *Guardian* sees as making little difference.

### The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT). . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.

### Toward these ends we . . .

- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation--the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions-- is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from “alternative medicine” to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

According to the *Guardian* many groups and organizations have recently voted to suspend their involvement in the project. “What was most resented about Samaritan’s Purse is the way it links aid and evangelism. The article quotes Hodan Hassan, a spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations as saying, “We have no problem with people going into a country to do evangelical work....But when you mix humanitarian work in a war-torn country with evangelisation you create a problem. You have desperate people and you have someone who has food in one hand and a Bible in the other.”

### LOOKING FOR WORK?

And, finally. The News of the Weird website this month has an interesting little story from October’s issue of *Popular Science*. The story lists the 15 actual “worst” jobs in science. Among them, number (15), counting fish (one by one) for hours as they swim by dams in the Pacific Northwest. Slot number (11) goes to “the only two government bureaucrats whose job is to convince Americans of the merits of the metric system,” and number (7) to “researchers who reach into a cow’s rumen to pull out an analyze the stomach contents.” For placement as number (3): “researchers who extract sperm from animals for study or artificial insemination.” And finally the worst, number (1)—and you might not want to

think about this much—flatus odor judges “working for gastroenterologist Michael Levitt, who feeds subjects pinto beans, then gathers gases in plastic collection tubes direct from the source, and then has judges sniff as many as 100 samples, rating them for strength.”

### ... THIS GUY BETTER CHANGE HIS JOB!

Hot off the Associated Press comes this little tibit from Modesto, California. Seems that a masked man who held up a Modesto bank got just a little confused. He forgot to cut eye-holes in his mask. According to the AP he spent most of the time during the holdup lifting the corners of his mask “to see his feet as he fumbled his way through the heist, and crashing into the Oak Valley Community Bank’s steel doorframe on his way out.”

### AND THAT ABOUT WRAPS UP THIS ISSUE

Have a good holiday season! Remember that the commercialization of Christmas really isn’t such a bad thing, especially for Brights and other assorted non-Christians. You know. If you are

#### BOARD OF ADVISORS:

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#### About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 52 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

For more information, contact:

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lucky you get a couple of neat, fun gifts; you make a few people happy by giving some gifts to them; and you get to drink mulled wine and eggnog and chomp on a lot of food goodies. All the rest is theater.

#### GETTING TO KINNEY HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY (SORT MEETING PLACE)

Just off Highway 50: Traveling east, Zinfandel Exit to Folsom Boulevard; traveling west, Sunrise exit to Folsom Boulevard. Then:

- (1) Traveling west on Folsom Boulevard, turn left on Kilgore Rd., just past Sunrise. Or, traveling east on Folsom Blvd., turn right on Kilgore.
- (2) Turn right into the Kinney High School parking lot. The library is in the building just south of the parking lot, and the entrance is on the west side of the building.

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## THE RATIONAL COMMUNITY

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# CALENDAR

### **November/December: December 3: *SORT Meeting***

*Topic:* The Right to Die

*Time:* Wednesday, 7:00–9:00 p.m., Room One (Library),

*Place:* Kinney High School, 2710 Kilgore Road, Rancho Cordova

Everyone is welcome and all meetings are free.

### **December 14: *Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF)***

*Topic:* Miracles and Historical Method

*Speaker:* Richard Carrier, a graduate student at Columbia University, where he is currently writing a dissertation on Roman science, will discuss a “tool kit” for examining miracle claims; he is also currently working on a book:

*Sense and Goodness without God.*

*Time:* Sunday, 12:00–2:30 p.m.

*Place:* Sierra 2 Community Center, 2791 24th Street, Room 10. (South of Broadway).

Visitors welcome. *Cost:* Free

### **December 2003: *Sacramento Skeptics***

*Topic, Time, and Place:* To be announced

For further details, contact Richard Kowaleski at

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# SORT

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*Educating Ourselves  
and Educating Others*

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED