

By Joel Bleifuss

Nearer My God to Thee

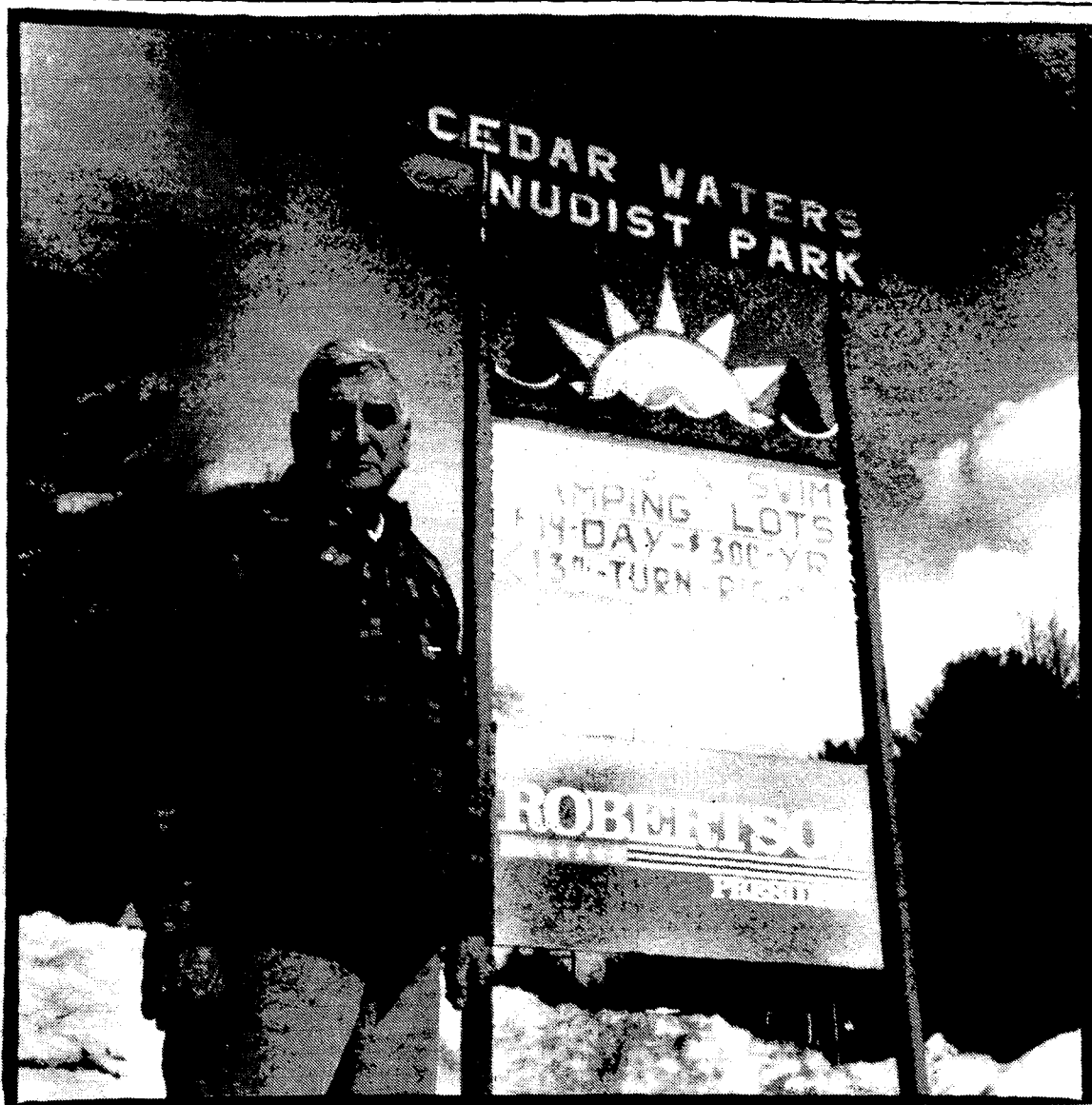
As presidential contender Pat Robertson says, "Unless we have moral and religious people exercising their rights as citizens, those rights will be exercised by the immoral and irreligious." Evangelist Dave Balsiger of Costa Mesa, Calif., has taken these words to heart and begun to counter the sinful influence of the immoral people Robertson further describes as the "tiny 6 percent minority who don't believe in anything." Balsiger publishes the *Presidential Biblical Scoreboard*, a 40-page guide that rates the candidates' stands on "biblical-family-moral-freedom issues." Not surprisingly Pat Robertson gets the top score with a 95 percent rating. The mark against him is that he plans to balance the budget by increasing taxes. But, praise the Lord, he only favors imposing "sin tax" user fees. The other candidates have blemished records. George Bush, 75 percent worthy, is the son of a "wealthy international banker" and stands "accused" of being a member of the "Eastern Establishment." (Bush at one time bragged of how he had only been born once.) Robert Dole, 60 percent away from the Devil, has problems. He is not ready to test everyone for AIDS. The *Scoreboard* also has doubts about his wife Elizabeth, noting that she is his second spouse. The guide implicates the former transportation secretary in problems air travelers face. As for the Democrats, all are zeros, or near zeros. Like Dole, a problem for candidates Simon, Gephardt, Gore and Dukakis is their wives. Jeanne, Jane, Tipper and Kitty all are members of Peace Links, "an advisory council of Soviet-controlled [front groups] or advocates for communist foreign-policy objectives." Last and not least, in the guide's view, is the man who if elected would be the "first Marxist president of the U.S.," the only candidate who has received a "large grant" from the "Libyan government," Jesse Jackson. Not that the *Biblical Scoreboard* is partisan. Balsiger explained to *In These Times* that in his *Congressional Scoreboards* some Republicans have done very poorly. There was even a Jew who scored 100. As for the Democrats, one does catch Balsiger's eye. "If Sen. Sam Nunn were running he would probably have gotten a 75 in our scoreboard." Does anyone read the *Presidential Biblical Scoreboard*? Yes. Members of the thousands of fundamentalists churches have in recent weeks kept the four employees in the Scoreboard's warehouse working 15 hours per day fulfilling bulk orders.

A horde of a different faith

The Christian right's Moslem equivalents, the Islamic fundamentalists, are busy making trouble in Egypt. According to Henri Tincq writing in Paris' *Le Monde*, Egyptian Christians are increasingly suffering persecution from the burgeoning army of Islamic fundamentalists. Coptic Christian bishops and Catholic nuns are being insulted on the street. At secular universities, Christian students are victimized. Classes taught by Christian professors are boycotted and conversations between male and female students are broken up by the bearded fundamentalists. In Minieh, an Upper Egypt city of Coptic origin, Moslem youths wielding bicycle chains stormed the headquarters of a coeducational Christian association and the local Jesuit school was fire-bombed. Not surprisingly Egypt's Copts are beginning to emigrate. Said Monsignor Antonious Nagib, the Catholic Coptic bishop of Egypt who lives in Minieh, "Anything can happen, but I firmly hope nothing does."

A company you'll love to hate

INFACT, the Boston-based group that successfully targetted Nestle, (a company whose infant formula contributed to an increase in third world infant mortality) has set its sights on General Electric. The organization is calling for a consumer boycott of this maker of light bulbs, nuclear bombs, faulty nuclear reactors and NBC television broadcasts. Thanks to INFACT, GE now clearly stands out as one of the great corporate villains of our time. Late last month the group published a 133-page report, *INFACT Brings GE to Light—General Electric: Shaping Nuclear Weapons Policies for Profits*. A potential college textbook on how a giant corporation's greed has historically perverted public needs, the report is crammed with disturbing facts: • In 1984-86 U.S. taxpayers paid GE more than \$11 billion to build nuclear warfare systems. • Today GE pays three former Reagan advisers \$27,000 a year to sit on its board of directors. One of these is William French Smith, the president's current personal attorney and former U.S. attorney



New Hampshire nudist Bob Bonser puts his lot with Pat Robertson.

Pat Robertson's support is broad and bared

Those who think Pat Robertson's "invisible army" is just a bunch of uptight prudes with a fetish for politics should join Robert Bonser some summer Sunday as he, his wife Mary, their two children and eight grandchildren stroll to church dressed in no more than God gave them.

Bob and Mary Bonser own and operate Cedar Waters Nudist Park in Nottingham, New Hampshire—"the largest nudist resort in New England"—in accordance with their evangelical beliefs. At Cedar Waters, up to 1,000 summer visitors are subject to Bonser's interpretation of God's dress code. In this Eden, rock-ribbed morality and unashamed nakedness go hand-in-hand.

"Nudism is not an unpardonable sin [that] couldn't be washed away by the blood of Jesus," Bonser says. Genial, gray and grizzled at 67, the World War II veteran has been letting the breeze blow through his legs, weather permitting, since 1950, when a doctor told him to "get some sun" to help an illness.

A full gun rack hangs on Bonser's office wall. Mentioning the Seabrook nuclear power plant brings his condemnation of "scum-of-the-earth" Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis who, Bonser says, will cause New Englanders to run out of electricity by shutting down the reactor. And when he describes zoning unconstitutional and "communistic seizure of our property," it becomes clear Bonser's not just some acid-

burned Jesus freak cavorting free and naked with angels in shaded glades. This man is serious.

Of the 10 television evangelist shows he supports, Robertson's "700 Club" was not his favorite. But when Robertson took the plunge and announced his candidacy, Bonser's heart told him to pick Pat at the polls. "I wanted a Christian," he explains. "Otherwise I'd have been for Kemp."

After Bonser became a campaign contributor, he called Robertson's headquarters to express his support. Soon thereafter Robertson workers showed up with an eight-by-four-foot Robertson sign to hang beneath the "Cedar Waters Nudist Park" marquee on Route 125, some three miles from Bonser's resort.

Cedar Water's 350 forested acres, traced with roads and hiking trails, are centered on a 30-acre lake and dotted with clumps of house trailers and tiny summer cottages. The summer guests, some third-generation nudists, have made themselves at home by naming their residences with monikers like "Whistle Stop," "Rawhide Valley" and "The Lord's Retreat." One clearing, designated "Bare-It-All Corral," is used for larger get-togethers.

Twenty-five families live year-round at Cedar Waters. Other than Bonser's assertion that "this is Robertson country" and a half-dozen bumper stickers on parked cars, there is no way to tell how many were actually enthused with "God's candidate."

But to stay at Cedar Waters, it helps to be an evangelical Christian. Consider the rules: "sexual promiscuity and excessive physical con-

tact" are banned, as are alcohol, pets, spitting in the lake and denying Jesus.

Swimsuits, too, are against the rules, even when windsurfing. An exception is made for the pathologically modest, who may don bottoms but are enjoined from wading deeper than their knees. Bonser seems epidemic-conscious; guests are told to put their posterior on a towel when sitting on common chairs, benches, picnic tables, in the "Grin & Bare It Restaurant" and in the sauna.

Cedar Waters is supposed to be "families and couples only," but Bonser says he's flexible. "If you bring your girlfriend and talk to us for a while, we'll go ahead and let you in." Cedar Waters literature also makes a point of mentioning dog and horse tracks nearby, perhaps indicating this evangelical nudist has nothing against gambling dens, either.

Bonser is well known in New Hampshire for his refusal to allow the town of Nottingham selectmen to zone his park. He says he's gone to jail four times for a total of 113 days and been assessed \$500,000 in fines for refusing to comply with regulations that Bonser says are designed to put him out of business. "The Constitution says the land is mine," he says, invoking echoes of the state's "Live Free or Die" motto. "I can do what I want on it."

Bonser readily agrees Robertson would shut down Cedar Waters if he could but, he says, shrugging at this crazy mixed-up world we live in, "Jesus says, 'just grin and bare it.'"

—Andrew Galarneau

Treating the victims of torture

They suffer chronic headaches. They can't sleep without agonizing nightmares. They draw pictures of beatings, disembowelments, rapes.

But according to therapists, refugees to the U.S. who were torture victims in Southeast Asia and Latin America, are unlikely to seek help for these debilitating emotional disorders. They are terrified the U.S. will send them back to their torturers. This is a particular problem for Latin Americans who are frequently refused asylum.

Even if they seek help, they may have trouble finding it. That's partly because mental-health workers feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the traumas the refugees experienced, says Dr. Richard Mollica, a Harvard psychiatrist who is one of the nation's leading authorities on treatment of torture victims. He directs the Indochinese Psychiatry Clinic at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Boston, which in its five-year existence has seen 1,000 patients.

Since 1975, about a million refugees have come to the U.S., most of them from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Waves of people also have arrived after fleeing violence and persecution in El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Iran, the Soviet Union and Haiti.

A disturbingly high number, including almost all Cambodians, have suffered torture, rape, or harsh imprisonment, or have witnessed atrocities to family members and



A drawing by a Cambodian refugee depicting atrocities suffered under the Khmer Rouge.

friends. According to Dr. Antonio Martinez, a psychologist who heads the new Kovler Center for Victims of Torture in Chicago, many Salvadorans and Guatemalans were regularly exposed to the sight of "costalitos"—bags full of cut-up human body parts left on river banks to scare people into political submission.

People who have lived these nightmares frequently exhibit depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and physical traumas. They often feel isolated from their ethnic communities and adapt poorly to resettlement. Yet, specialized treatment facilities in the U.S. for torture victims exist only in a few cities around the country, and there are few professionals who know how to treat these unique problems.

It is particularly hard to treat what Mollica says is his most traumatized

patient group—Cambodian widows. These ravaged women, who are primarily Buddhist, understand torture as bad karma, not as a violation of their human rights. They are also loathe to bring up traumas involving sexual violence, which were extremely common in the experience of Southeast Asian refugees. He says establishing trust is extremely important, but is difficult.

Martinez finds that patients tell him exactly what horrors they went through if he asks them directly. The problem is that many therapists won't ask because they are afraid of what they'll hear. This is especially true, says Mollica, for refugee therapists who suffered many of the same atrocities and don't want to relive them.

Both the Boston and Chicago programs rely on refugee staff to translate and serve as co-therapists. It's crucial that the North American therapist and the bilingual worker be co-equals in therapy, says Martinez. "If you use them only as translators, that replicates the colonial mentality, is disrespectful to the patient and destroys trust."

Interestingly, the federal government's asylum policies are one reason the Chicago program was started, says Martinez. Travelers Aid already has a federally funded refugee mental-health program. But the U.S. government won't pay for treatment of refugees who lack official political asylum. This effectively excludes those Latin American refugees who are fleeing torturers who double as U.S. allies.

—Harris Meyer

Excluded voices in Mexico-U.S. summit meeting

When Ronald Reagan met with Mexico's President Miguel de la Madrid last month to discuss trade, debt, immigration and drugs, the fundamental implications of these issues for their peoples remained off the official agenda.

Both presidents congratulated each other for their "realist" and "democratic" approaches. Although each spoke in the name of his people, in Mexico the people speak a different language. As a Mexican writer recently said, "They speak in the royal 'we' of Louis XIV, as if they spoke for the majority. If so, then this is a country of the great minorities, the workers, the peasants, the teachers, the students and the urban poor are the minorities—the small circle in power is the only majority."

Protests by a broad front of opposition parties and organizations were held the day of the presidential summit. More than a dozen massive marches have taken place throughout Mexico in recent weeks protesting the government's austerity policies. In January the nationally known community leader *Superbarrio*, disguised in his superhero mask, led several hundred urban poor to

the Citibank building in Mexico City and pasted a banner across the entrance that read "closed for violations." He explained: "This bank represents the interests of the international financial community and we Mexicans are reaching the limits of our patience in witnessing the plunder of our wealth, our resources and our labor." Many of his companions wore no shirts or shoes to illustrate that the new official list of basic necessities no longer includes these items.

Two days later some 60,000 people representing left parties, independent unions, students, peasants and community organizations marched on Mexico City's main square. They rebuked the president's claim that his economic policy is "the only viable solution" as "false and insulting."

The CIA, meanwhile, foresees "chaos on our border," and policy analysts warn that Mexico will pose "the single most serious foreign policy problem" for the U.S. by the end of the century. But for Mexico, the U.S. has been its primary foreign problem since the U.S. seized half of Mexico's territory 140 years ago.

Over the last six crisis-torn years, Mexico's subjugation to its neighbor's interests has accelerated. The Reagan administration "wants to place Mexico totally within the economic and political orbit of the

U.S.," explains Harvard historian John Womack. "They pursue a complete subordination." Bilateral issues have increasingly been solved through unilateral U.S. initiatives: The Simpson-Rodino immigration law, the U.S.-backed International Monetary Fund's (IMF) debt payment strategies, U.S. trade and Central America policies.

Reagan's policies pit American workers against their Mexican counterparts as cheaper wages across the border allow corporations to pressure employees for givebacks or threaten to run away. Monetarist policies applied on both sides of the border have reduced real industrial wages in Mexico to 1939 levels and the real value of U.S. minimum wage to what it was in the 1950s. Immigration laws now give police unprecedented powers of surveillance and harassment. Government rhetoric exacerbates racial tensions by accusing Mexicans of stealing jobs and threatening "our way of life."

"Reaganomics," translated and exported across the border, differs from our own only by creating wider devastation in a dependent, developing nation. With the failure of the bankers to revitalize Mexico's economy, popular movements demand a democratic solution to rescue the majority from paying tribute to Wall Street and Mexico's tiny elite.

—David Brooks

general. Another is David Jones, former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. • GE was awarded a Pentagon contract to estimate how much the Soviet Union was spending on aircraft engines. GE is a leading aircraft engine manufacturer for the U.S. Air Force. • In 1985 GE pleaded guilty to 108 counts of overcharging the government. The company was fined \$1.04 million and prevented from receiving government contracts for three weeks. The only thing the study seems to lack is a full portrait of GE's controversial CEO, John "Neutron Jack" Welch. This very readable report is available for \$8.45 from INFACT, 256 Hanover St., Boston, MA 02113.

Opportunity knocks

Some-unknown corporate executives know how to take advantage of disaster. On January 2, about 730,000 gallons of diesel oil spilled from a broken tank into Pennsylvania's Monongahela River. The oil then flowed on into the Ohio and Mississippi River system. According to Don Hopey of the *Pittsburgh Press*, as that diesel oil was pouring into the river, some company, or companies, decided to dump three cancer-causing industrial solvents into the Ohio River. Two of those chemicals, chloroform and methylene chloride, have since been found at levels that significantly exceed the federal cancer level for rivers and streams. These two carcinogens accumulate in animal fat, posing a potential risk to folks who eat the exposed fish. Aerial photographs show that as the oil spill was taking place unknown liquids, perhaps these solvents, were being discharged into the river near Wheeling. Those discharges did not appear to be coming from any building or industrial facility, suggesting that the chemicals were perhaps trucked in. Although an investigation is taking place, it will be almost impossible to find the culprit(s). The carcinogenic solvents in question are used by about 85 companies in the Wheeling area.

Acid rain kills more than trees

Acid rain is killing people, especially those living in the northeast U.S. and eastern Canada. That's the implication of a recent study by the University of California-Berkeley's director of cancer epidemiology, Dr. Cedric Garland. The study documents how people living in the "acid rain belt" suffer an unusually high cancer rate. Further the problem seems to be getting worse. In Vermont, for example, on average 16 percent more people are dying from lung disease than died during 1981-85. Further, from 1982-86, deaths from lung cancer in Vermont increased by 28 percent. From 1980-86, deaths from breast cancer rose 34 percent. According to Merritt Clifton writing in the *Vermont Vanguard*, these revelations, though startling, are not so new. Two years ago scientists at the Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York estimated that acid rain annually contributes to the death of about 50,000 Americans and 8,000 Canadians. In 1979, two professors at Yale concluded that acid rain contributed to 187,686 deaths and directly caused another 23,756. And in 1976, Dr. Carl Shy of the National Air Pollution Control Administration testified before a Senate hearing on the Clean Air Act that sulfur dioxide emissions (the smoke released from coal-burning power plants that combines with moisture in the atmosphere to make acid rain) were causing approximately 5 million episodes of respiratory illness each year. Yes, it appears that acid rain is a public health issue to be concerned about, especially since it is a problem that is being handled by the Environmental Protection Agency.

EPA's hot line

Fred Nelson, a founder of the National Network for the Chemically Hypersensitive in Wrightsville Beach, N.C., sent this note to the Pesticide Education Project, a pesticide-awareness group in Carrboro, N.C.:

"An EPA staffer accidentally gave me the number for [EPA] Director Lee Thomas' personal phone. I called and his administrative assistant answered, 'Director Thomas' office.' The response to my query, 'Is the director available,' was 'What company are you with?' I responded, 'I'm not with any company but with a foundation concerned with the health effects of pesticides.' Pause. 'Does the director personally know you?' 'No but he should be aware of the foundation.' Very long pause, followed by, 'The director isn't available; someone will get back to you.'"