

types: recent advances and challenges,' was held during 10–12 April 2006 in Villefranche-sur-Mer, France. Full details of the program and a participant list can be found at the Web site: http://lmgmacweb.env.uea.ac.uk/green_ocean/workshops.shtml

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FORUM

On “‘Walking on Water’ and the Geoscientists’ Fear of Social Controversy”

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In “‘Walking on water’ and the geoscientists’ fear of social controversy” (*Eos*, 87(39), 2006), Doron Nof describes how he and two colleagues published an article in the *Journal of Paleolimnology* offering a ‘natural explanation’ for the legend that Jesus walked on water. He argues that “the more light we shed on whatever the rest of society thinks and does, the more appreciated science will become.”

I can think of at least two objections to that view. The first has undoubtedly occurred already to Nof himself. He writes that of the thousands of e-mail messages sent to him following publication of the article, “most were hate mail from those who think that science and religion should be kept separate.” He says he received death threats as well. It would seem that religious fundamen-

talists do not want their miracles to have a scientific basis and do not appreciate any science that provides one.

The second objection is that the phenomenon Nof is trying to account for is, to put it bluntly, not well documented. In the New Testament there are only a few lines that refer to it, for example, John 6:18–19 (accounts in the other Gospels are similar): “And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh onto the ship: and they were afraid” (King James translation). The reported observations are thus vague at best, and the phenomenon in question was observed neither repeatedly nor reproducibly. To cite just one shortcoming of the biblical account, it calls attention to prevailing wind conditions but says nothing about freezing temperatures, which at that location are less

common and hence more noteworthy. Nof is therefore engaged in explaining an event which, if it happened at all, was for all practical scientific purposes unobserved.

It is not hard to find natural explanations for other traditional beliefs besides those in the Bible. For example, in northern Europe there are many folk legends about a race of trolls. Perhaps these arose from early contacts between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthal man. Or perhaps they did not. Does such speculation advance our knowledge?

I am afraid Nof is only one step away from a journey down the path taken by the late Immanuel Velikovsky, who argued (among other things) that “the sun stood still” (Joshua 10:13) because of the gravitational force exerted by a great comet passing close to the Earth, on its way to becoming the planet Venus. If Nof is willing to spend time examining other phenomena for which one written account is the sole evidence, then I would like natural explanations of how Sauron’s ring conferred invisibility on Bilbo and Frodo and why kryptonite disables Superman.

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M E E T I N G A N N O U N C E M E N T S

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■ 19–20 October 2006 **Risk Management Practices for Nanoscale Materials**, Washington, D.C., U.S.A. Sponsor: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (Col. Lintner, Regulatory Coordinator, Environmental Assistance Division, 7408M, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C., U.S.A. 20460-0001; Tel.: +1-202-554-1404; E-mail: TSCA-Hotline@epa.gov; Web Site: <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-MEETINGS/2006/October/Day-04/m16385.htm>)

The EPA is convening a public meeting on risk management practices when using nanoscale materials; the rationale for, and effectiveness or efficiency

of, using these practices; and issues to consider when including such practices in a proposed stewardship program.

■ 22–25 October 2006 **Geological Society of America Annual Meeting**, Philadelphia, Pa. Sponsors: Subaru; ExxonMobil; U.S. Geological Survey; others. (A. Cairns, Geological Society of America, Director of Communications/Marketing, 3300 Penrose Avenue, Boulder, Colo., U.S.A. 80301-1806; Tel.: +1-303-357-1056; Fax: +1-303-357-1070; E-mail: acairns@geosociety.org; Web Site: <http://www.geosociety.org/meetings/2006/index.htm>)

The meeting will include discussions of geoscience research and public policy. Topics include

global warming, biotic response to global environmental change, land remote sensing, and Afghanistan reconstruction.

■ 31 October–1 November 2006 **Gulf of Mexico Program Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting**, Waco, Tex., U.S.A. Sponsor: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (G. Car, Designated Federal Officer, Gulf of Mexico Program Office, Mail Code EPA/GMPO, Stennis Space Center, Mass., U.S.A. 39529-6000; Tel.: +1-228-688-2421; E-mail: car.gloria@epa.gov; Web Site: <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-MEETINGS/2006/October/Day-05/m16519.htm>)

Topics include updates on the EPA’s Gulf of Mexico program, a non-regulatory partnership providing a broad geographic focus on the major environmental issues in the Gulf.