

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

Weird Japan

• Sachio Kawabata, 61, was awarded the equivalent of about \$5,000 by a court in Kagoshima in January because the police abused him during interrogation over possible violations of election law. The judge found that Kawabata suffered “great mental anguish” when police wrote his family name and derogatory messages on pieces of paper and forced Kawabata to stomp on them.

• The house specialty at the 800-year-old Yasui Konpiragu Shrine in Kyoto, Japan, is the prayer for strength to end a marriage or other relationship, mostly offered by female visitors who crawl into a “wish tunnel,” but also available from on-site priests for the equivalent of about \$50. Parents, also, may pray that a son or daughter ends a bad relationship. ■

Latest religious messages

• While the California Assembly debated an open-hand-only spanking bill for parents this spring, the Bethel Baptist Church in El Sobrante continued to demand that spanking by flexible rod is the only punishment acceptable to God and that will produce wisdom in the child. No sturdier weapon may be used, nor the open or closed hand, nor even mere yelling, according to a church pamphlet cited by InsideBayArea.com for a May report. Said one parishioner-parent, “With my girls, the spanking relieved them of their guilt, which allowed them to be happy in a very short time afterward.” Said another, “We disagree with timeouts. ... That’s an attack on spanking.”

• In May, The Times of London, interviewing witnesses in Diyala province in Iraq, described scenes from the hard-core Salafist version of Islam being enforced (similar to what the Taliban imposed in Afghanistan). Punishments included breaking the fingers of those who repeatedly smoked cigarettes, prohibiting grocers from displaying bananas (as “obscene”), and requiring them to screen cucumbers from tomatoes (as the latter are “feminine vegetables”). One local man said he assumed that another restriction that farmers modestly cover their goats’ “nether regions” was just a rumor, until he saw a goat wearing boxer shorts. ■

Rough religion

• In April, Bishop Michael Babin, for 25 years a leader of Genesis Ministries International in Oceanside, Calif., was charged (along with his son) with beating a golfer unconscious after accusing the man of stealing his ball at a local course. (Two years ago, Babin was nominated for a Martin Luther King Jr. Civic Award.)

• In April, rival factions of nuns brawled, along with priests, in an Old Calendarist convent in Avdellero, Cyprus, leaving a church floor covered with blood. One faction said that a recently deceased bishop’s will gave them control of the convent, but Mother Superior Markella and her nuns had been living there for decades and feared removal. ■

Great Wall problem

China’s Xinhua news agency reported in May that the country is sponsoring an Internet blitz for votes for the Great Wall in the current international contest to name the new “Seven Wonders of the World” (among, for instance, the Acropolis, Stonehenge and the Taj Mahal). Leaders are worried that if the wall fails to be

voted in, the country will be shamed. China’s other Great Wall problem, though, is how to stop the growing number of mining-company truck drivers who break holes in their Seventh Wonder in southern Inner Mongolia in order to avoid the pricey tolls the government charges at the authorized crossings. ■

Least competent criminals

• Lolita Bullock turned herself in to sheriff’s deputies in Jacksonville, N.C., in May, confessing to robbing a Bank of America a week earlier. She then immediately requested the “crimestoppers” reward money, which (since she was then under arrest) she asked be given to her friend who accompanied her.

• Elevator vandals should do their work from

the outside, not as two men in their early 20s did when they entered the elevator at the Lillestroem Train Station near Oslo, Norway, in May and then repeatedly kicked the door. The men essentially captured themselves when the damage jammed the motor, locked down the elevator and sounded an alarm, summoning the police. ■

Monkey business

The international movement to anoint apes with “human rights” suffered a slight setback in April when an Austrian judge refused to declare a chimpanzee a “person” (which, under Austrian law, would have entitled it to a legal guardian and allowed individuals to donate money to it). The chimp, Hiasl, and a companion are in limbo after their sanctuary went

bankrupt, and their supporters say a guardian is necessary to keep them out of zoos or research labs. Said one activist: “We mean (by human rights) the right to life, the right not to be tortured, the right to freedom under certain circumstances. We’re not talking about the right to vote.” Austria’s neighbor, Germany, prohibits using apes for research. ■

Fine points of the law

Benoit Derosiers, 51, who police said was so inebriated that he could barely speak when stopped for DUI and who had trouble standing, beat the charge in Provincial Court in Sudbury, Ontario, in April when he

proved to the judge a “legal necessity” for driving drunk: He had just attempted suicide and thus was forced to rush himself to the nearest hospital in order to get psychiatric care to head off another attempt. ■

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