

## Briefings

edited by DAVID P. HAMILTON

### The Sin of Rivalry

Biomedical researchers are fond of describing how the intense competition in their field works to the benefit not only of science, but of society as a whole.

A la Adam Smith, they argue that the "invisible hand" of the research marketplace aligns the self-interest of prominent scientists—who often compete fiercely for grants, prestigious appointments, and even Nobel Prizes—with the interests of patients awaiting treatment.

But the Pope isn't buying this argument and seems to feel it's time for some unnamed AIDS researchers to fess up. In a 1 September speech to assembled diplomats in Tanzania, John Paul II castigated instances of governmental indifference to AIDS and discrimi-



**Evil rivalry.** The Pope condemns self-interested competition.

natory practices toward AIDS patients, and then aimed at a surprising target: "self-interested rivalries in the search for a medical answer."

Has someone in the Pope's entourage—or the pontiff himself—been reading about, say, the Gallo-Montagnier feud? *Science* was unable to determine what spurred the Pope or his advisers to denounce such behavior—officials at the Catholic News Service professed ignorance of the specific source of the Pope's concern. Clearly, though, someone in



William Henry Holmes. At the quarry in 1891.

### The Hazards of Backyard Archeology

Southern Methodist University archeologist David Meltzer is used to fighting rattlesnakes and nasty weather in his fieldwork in Texas. . .and winning. But he lost out to an armed guard when he tried to do a little Sunday archaeology during a vacation visit to Washington, D.C., last month.

Meltzer's long-standing interest in the history of archeology led him to spend 2 days hiking around the tony neighborhood of Dumbarton Oaks. His quarry was a long-lost quarry—a spot where prehistoric Indians made quartzite tools. The place had last been excavated in 1891 by renowned Smithsonian anthropologist William Henry Holmes. "Holmes described the site as being in a primitive forest but with suburban avenues threatening all around," says Meltzer. "I couldn't resist going to see what the site looked like today."

Armed with a century-old photo and Holmes' description, Meltzer zeroed in on the site, which turned out to be in the backyard of a huge mansion. He took a few photos of the house and then approached the front door, where a uniformed guard stood watch. "I asked the guard if the owners would mind if I went in the back and poked around," says Meltzer. "She said it wouldn't be a very good idea, since they were somewhat sensitive at this time about their security."

Meltzer asked if he could come back another time. That would be "unlikely," came the response. So Meltzer asked who lived in the house. The answer: the Iraqi ambassador.

the Vatican has been extremely upset by the behavior of one or more AIDS researchers. Said the Pope: such rivalries "should be considered forms of collaboration in this terrible evil." Strong words, indeed.

### Abstract Attack Turns into a War

On 31 August, the American Chemical Society fought back. It filed a long-promised counter-suit against Dialog Information Services over the use of the society's Chemical Abstracts Service databases.

Dialog had earlier filed a \$150-million antitrust suit against ACS on 7 June, charging that Chemical Abstracts was

illegally reserving its most lucrative databases for the exclusive use of its own direct access service, known as STN (*Science*, 3 August, p. 472).

ACS, which has always hotly denied that it is doing anything wrong, is now accusing Dialog of "fraudulent and deceptive accounting practices" that ACS says have deprived it of millions of dollars in royalty payments on those few databases that Dialog *does* license. In its suit, ACS is seeking a formal audit of Dialog, \$10 million to cover the cost of Dialog's alleged underpayments, and \$30 million in punitive damages for Dialog's alleged breach of "good faith and fair dealing."

"Many within the ACS believe that one of the reasons

Dialog filed the suit. . .was in order to frighten the society into a rapid settlement before the full nature of the problems being uncovered in our audits could be known," says James V. Seals, Jr., Chemical Abstracts' director of marketing.

Dialog founder and CEO Roger Summit replies that he doesn't know what ACS is talking about and wonders why the society's leaders aren't willing to talk about an out-of-court settlement. But ACS is apparently not in a talking mood. As Committee on Chemical Abstracts chairman Larry Thompson of Bell Labs thundered at the recent ACS meeting in Washington, "To negotiate now would be capitulation!"

Stay tuned.

### Goring Sacred Cows for Education Reform

Throughout the '80s, a steady succession of reports on the decrepit state of high school education—particularly in science—have been notable more for their plaintive tone than for proposing any innovative solutions to deal with the crisis. But the latest offering from the National Research Council\* is an exception of sorts to this trend. Chaired by biologist Timothy Goldsmith of Yale, this panel's recommendations—which are focused on biology education, although they apply equally well to all sciences—take on several of academia's most sacred cows in order to get working scientists involved in reversing educational decline.

For instance, the panel suggests that universities develop permanent summer science programs for local high school teachers—staffed by university faculty. Universities should also allocate money and faculty positions based in part upon departmental commitments to training prospective science teachers. Given the competitive

\**Fulfilling the Promise: Biology Education in the Nation's Schools* (National Academy Press, 1990).