

Spectrum

The Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums

The Many Faces Of God

A LOT LIKE US

THE QUEST: LIKE CRACKING NUTS
OR PEELING ONIONS?

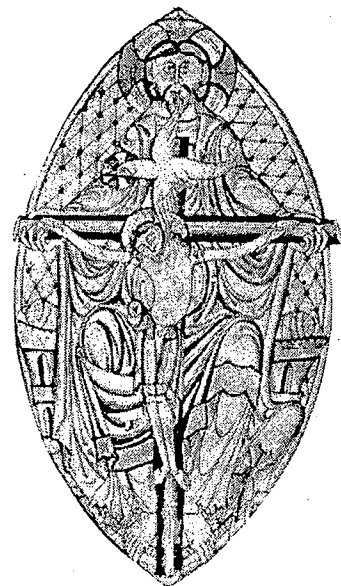
GOD'S GLORIOUS THEATER

THE DIVINE SHE

LETTER FROM SARAJEVO

SDAs—DEMOCRATS
OR REPUBLICANS?

READERS' RESPONSES
(Billboards, Waco,
The Environment, Islam)



October 1993
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Spectrum

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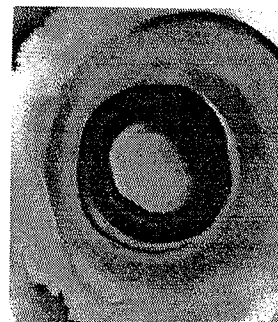
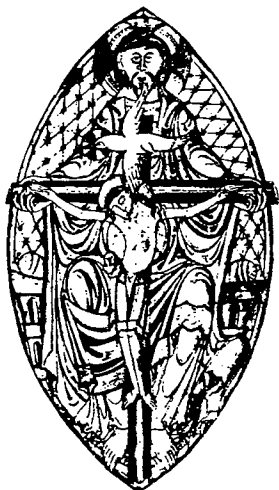
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God Will Out

GOD WILL OUT. A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IS A CIVILIZATION, with its own way of talking, eating, worshiping, governing, and maintaining relations with other cultures. *Spectrum* spends a good deal of time discussing and celebrating the richly varied dimensions of Adventism as an active civilization. But a religious community, whatever exciting things it does, can never escape what defines it—a belief in God.

Adventism, unlike say fourth-century Byzantium, has not been preoccupied with the nature of God. Among the classical topics of systematic Christian theology—revelation, God, creation, humanity and sin, redemption, the church, ethics, and eschatology—Adventism historically, of course, focused on the end, eschatology, the study of last-day events. With the revival of 1888, and more recently the work of Edward Heppenstall, Desmond Ford, Smuts van Rooyen, and others, Adventism became preoccupied with the middle of Christian theology—redemption—with its many subdivisions, including atonement, justification, and imputed and imparted righteousness.

Of course, throughout its brief history, Adventism has heard voices addressing other topics in Christian theology—the nature of revelation and inspiration, for example. For a few years now, the knotty issues within ethics—including race, gender, and medicine—have received formal analysis. The doctrine of the church has been sometimes passionately debated, although much of it has come under the heading of mission.

But God will out—not only in our lives, but in our reflection. The beginning point of Christian faith and theology has been the enduring concern of a few voices within Adventism. Fritz Guy, in many essays,

has outlined guidelines for talking about God. In several books now, Richard Rice has taken us on the most extensive explorations yet attempted by an Adventist of how our assumptions about God shape not only our beliefs, but also our feelings—for example, our anger and despair over the innocent suffering or premature death of a parent, spouse, or child. Graham Maxwell, in his lifetime of lectures, classes, and writing, has perhaps demonstrated most influentially how the question, “What does this say about God?” can dominate all inquiries into faith, Scripture, and action.

That questions about God lie just under the membrane of our entire life as a religious community is suggested by the fact that the essays in this issue’s special section were adapted from presentations addressed to a variety of audiences. John Hoyt talked to educators in Canada. Iris Yob contributed to a book articulating feminine perspectives on Adventist belief. Charles Scriven spoke to an annual meeting of Adventist teachers and students of Bible and religion. David Larson led his Loma Linda Sabbath school class on the assigned topic of Job. John Baldwin, the one writer in this issue both trained specifically in systematic theology and the author of a dissertation on the existence of God, first directed his comments to readers of the *Harvard Theological Review*.

This *Spectrum*, like all its predecessors, is a snapshot of the civilization that is Adventism. Through the differing perspectives of the special section we realize that in the creative diversity of the Adventist community we glimpse the many faces of God.

Roy Branson



Letter From Sarajevo

Neither guns nor ethnic cleansing . . . An eyewitness report on Adventists running Sarajevo's postal service.

by *Tibomir Kukolja*

"It is a moving experience to see an elderly woman overcome by tears when she receives the first letter since the start of the war from a daughter or son, and hear her cries of thanks," says Veselinka Baban, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) post office supervisor in Sarajevo; "Wherever we go, we meet with respect and gratitude."

A senior religious official in Sarajevo is more direct in his praise. "Adventists have captured the hearts of those people," he says.

Pastor Radomir Nikolic, ADRA director in Sarajevo and president of the Adventist Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, explains, "Sarajevians appreciate Adventists because of their strict fairness, honesty, and practical display of love toward everyone in the city, regardless of religion or nationality."

Since last March the Croatian and Serbian humanitarian transports of ADRA, two branches of ADRA International working in the area, have become Sarajevo's principal postal service. Adventists have delivered more than 60,000 aid parcels and as many letters to the 300,000 people fighting for survival in the besieged city.

Tibomir Kukolja is chairman of AdventPress—an Adventist press service in Zagreb, Croatia—and head of Adventist Radio in Croatia. The news brief on the following page is excerpted from an article by James Rupert, © 1993, the Washington Post, reprinted with permission.

The 30 Adventists who have chosen to remain in Sarajevo and operate the one effective postal service have been part of the same tragedy faced by all who remain in the dying city. Some of these Adventists have been wounded, their homes destroyed or damaged. "Like others, every day we look death in the face," says Pastor Nikolic. "I was only a few meters from the place where a mortar hit, killing seven people. The dead and wounded were everywhere. A woman that was walking only a step in front of me was killed instantly. I received only a minor injury. I can only conclude that the Lord saved my life."

Under the circumstances, the Adventist postal service delivers such essentials as food. The heavy artillery positioned in the hills around the city constantly threatens the supply lines that bring necessities to the city.

But food is not the only thing that Sarajevians hunger for, and here, too, Adventists meet an urgent need. Nikolic says, "Sarajevians do not live on the food parcels alone. They hunger spiritually, too. They need a sense of God's providence in a hostile environment where life means little. We have had to introduce two church services every Sabbath, since the church hall is too small to accommodate the 300-plus people who often attend the services."

After a brief lapse while the church balcony and the roofs of attached buildings were restored following devastating explosions from mortar rounds,

church services have been held regularly since June of 1992. Mira Nikolic, another active ADRA worker and wife of the church pastor, says, "We were on our knees, praying, in the basement of the church when the building was hit. This was the worst night I have experienced in my life. Throughout the night explosions shook the city. It was a horrifying experience, but it never shook us in our decision to carry on with regular church services."

Evidently it hasn't discouraged many others, either. When the author visited in March and April of 1993, the church was packed each Sabbath and Sunday, and often filled an hour before services began, with Moslems, Serbs, and Croats quietly waiting together.

A regular worshiper in the Sarajevo Adventist church explains: "I come to the Adventist church because in it God fills me with peace." Another regular visitor adds, "I believe that Jesus Christ,

whom I have come to know better here, has helped me to face the deadly realities of life in this city in a rational manner. I don't know how on earth I would have survived this ordeal otherwise."

In addition to distributing mail and providing a place for Sarajevians to worship, Adventists have found another way to minister. Every Thursday, Adventists broadcast a 15-minute program entitled "Voice of Hope," which is produced by members of the ADRA team in Sarajevo. Although Adventists are not the only religious group with regular air time on Bosnian state radio—Moslems, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Jews also broadcast religious programs—Radmilo Zurovac, the non-Adventist chief producer of the "Open Programme" in which "Voice of Hope" airs says that he is "pleased with the enthusiasm and professionalism of the Adventist youth who produce a program that is not only interesting to the Adventist audience, but to listeners at large."

Sarajevo's SDA Postal Service— "Nobody's and Everybody's"

by James Rupert

Washington Post Foreign Service

All day long, the besieged people of Sarajevo troop into a dank warehouse basement beside the rusting rail yard, looking for a sign that they have not been forgotten.

For more than 300,000 people trapped by artillery and sniper fire in this narrow strip of the city held by the Muslim-led Bosnian government, isolation is nearly complete. There is no regular telephone line to the outside, no road, no escape.

But in the musty former wholesale market down by the tracks, a once obscure religious minority here—Sarajevo's tiny Seventh-day Adventist community—keeps alive one of the last means of contact with the outside. The city's 35-member Adventist church, working with the Washington-based Adventist Development and Relief Agency, maintains a mail and parcel service that has delivered up to

300 tons of packages and 30,000 letters to Sarajevo in one month.

As 14 months of war has sundered Bosnians into groups full of fear and hate, the Adventists are laboring to build bridges not only across battle lines but also across communal and personal divides among the warring Serbs, Croats and Muslims.

At the half-ruined warehouse, Sarajevians crowd around posted lists of parcel recipients, hoping their individual isolation has been broken by a letter or food package from a loved one.

Last fall, the Adventist churches and the Adventist relief agency offices in Zagreb and Belgrade—the capitals of neighboring Croatia and Serbia—began sending parcels of canned or dried food to Sarajevo, mostly from refugees from the Bosnian capital trying to help the family and friends they left behind.

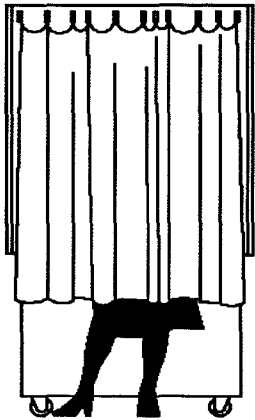
"Over the winter, the convoys got bigger. . . . We imported 16 big

trucks, and we started the postal service," said Milan Suslic, an Adventist pastor and director of its relief office in Belgrade. As the Adventist relief operation grew, it recruited hundreds of Serb, Croat and Muslim volunteers in Zagreb, Belgrade and Sarajevo.

The nationalistic violence of the Bosnian war has made Slavic Muslims, Roman Catholic Croats and Eastern Orthodox Serbs feel more acutely their religious identities and historical rivalries. But this is a war into which the Balkans' religious minorities—Seventh-day Adventists, Jews, Baptists, Pentecostals and others—do not fit. The Adventists have worked hard to turn their minority status into an asset.

"As Seventh-day Adventists . . . we are not part of any nationality or on any side in the war," Suslic said. The conflicting sides "know us to be non-political people. We belong to the region, but not to the conflict."

Suslic said the Adventist relief agency tries to keep the confidence of the warring factions by constantly reminding them that it is helping people of all groups in Sarajevo. "We are nobody's and everybody's," he said.



Do Adventist Voters Lean Left or Right?

Seventh-day Adventists in the United States present an unusual political profile.

by Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez

DID THE 1992 AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS have any special interest for Seventh-day Adventists? Another way to ask the question is: Were there religious issues underlying the campaign? Consider some interesting facts:

In the general elections on Tuesday, November 3, 1992, Governor Clinton received 43 percent of the popular vote to 38 percent for President Bush (the other 19 percent voted for Ross Perot). Of course, Clinton won the election. But suppose the whole electorate had been composed of conservative Christians? According to an election analysis by the *New York Times*, among Caucasians who claimed to be born-again Christians, Clinton received

only 23 percent of the vote and Bush garnered 61 percent.¹ A landslide re-election victory for the president!

Certainly, conservative Christians have been drawn to the Republican Party as the best vehicle for establishing their values in the laws of the nation. The political arm of this group is generally known as the New Christian Right (NCR) and is exemplified by the Christian Coalition, led by television evangelist and one-time presidential candidate, Pat Robertson. NCR was a power at the Republican nominating convention in Dallas—injecting planks into the party platform on religion, abortion, marital stability, and school prayer.²

Another religious issue lurking beneath the surface of the campaign was the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). If passed by Congress, this act would have restored the protections of the “free exercise” clause of the First Amendment, which were greatly weakened in the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Smith vs. Oregon*. RFRA was generally op-

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posed by leaders of NCR who felt that it might be used as a justification for abortion. President Bush then threatened a veto, so the appropriate committees did not bring the bills to the floor for a vote. On the other hand, Clinton pledged to sign RFRA if it passed Congress.

We do not know how Adventists voted in 1992 (although we hope to investigate this question in the near future). Did they consult their conservative religious values and vote Republican? Did they consider religious liberty issues and go Democrat? Or did they choose a separatist position and not vote at all?

While the number of Adventists voting for the President is not yet known, we do think we have some idea of what policies of the new administration Adventists will support or oppose. This article shares with you information we have gathered on Adventist attitudes toward a wide range of public issues.

A National Study

To collect the necessary data we designed an 82-item Religion and Public Issues Survey. Since our main purpose was to compare various religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors with positions on public issues, the survey contained a number of scales to measure different aspects of religiousness. Since this article is limited to a description of the public stance of American Adventists, only that part of the survey will be described here.³

The Public Issues scale consisted of 18 statements on public issues, with responses on a five-point continuum from strongly oppose to strongly favor. A list of more than twice this length was originally prepared and, because of space limitations, was reduced to the present size by attempting to select a battery of items that would be representative (rather than exhaustive) of the most-debated public concerns of the day. In addition, re-

spondents were asked their preference for political party, their political orientation (conservative, moderate, liberal), and how they voted in the 1984 presidential election (data collected in the summer of 1988). Standard demographic questions were also included.

The sample was created by drawing 800 households by a random sequential method from the mailing list of the North American Division edition of the *Adventist Review*, the general church paper of Seventh-day Adventists. While this journal is published weekly and sold by yearly subscription, church administration subsidizes the sending of the first issue of every month on a complimentary basis to every Adventist household in the United States as far as the list is complete. Some 250,000 names are on the monthly list.⁴

Copies of the questionnaire, letters of appeal and instruction, and a stamped envelope addressed to the researchers were mailed to the 800 households.⁵ Of these, 419 completed usable instruments, resulting in a response rate of 56 percent. The following analyses are based on these 419 subjects.

Attitudes Toward Public Issues

To measure positions held on various current issues (in 1988), 18 statements were finally selected. One major issue that is missing is abortion. After much consideration it was decided not to include this topic (a mistake to be corrected in the future) because the study focuses on *public* issues.⁶

The responses to the various items may be read from Table I. For ease of interpretation we have combined *strongly oppose* and *somewhat oppose* into an *oppose* category, and *strongly favor* and *somewhat favor* into a *favor* category. The extent to which the percentages fail to total 100 percent represents the *uncertain* response.

Conservative-Liberal Trends

In order to perceive some sort of pattern to these findings, they can be organized into a conservative-liberal framework. Nine of the statements are worded as typically "liberal" statements; the other nine as typically "conservative." Below are shown the liberal statements arranged in the order of support suggested above (total responses of "somewhat favor" and "strongly favor"). Statements are abbreviated to their kernel idea.

On seven of these nine issues the majority favored the statement—an indication of incli-

nation toward liberalism on the politico-social front. Note that American Adventists are most likely to favor the liberal stance on socio-economic and peace issues and most likely to forsake it on strictly political concerns. The least support was given to churches becoming involved, with 70 percent opposing this item. It is as if the members were saying: "We may agree that some of these positions are good and worthwhile if they are put into operation by 'secular' people, but we are not sure that Adventists should help to make them a reality, and we are quite certain that the church should not take sides." This seems to reflect

Adventist Attitudes Toward Public Issues

	Oppose	Favor
• United States-Soviet "freeze" on the development of nuclear weapons	10 percent	72 percent
• Establishment of normal, peaceful relations with Russia	6 percent	79 percent
• Increased government aid to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minorities	24 percent	52 percent
• Elimination of all racial restrictions in housing, education, and employment	7 percent	81 percent
• The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution which guarantees equality to women	22 percent	62 percent
• Christians as individuals becoming involved in political action (run for office, work for a candidate, etc.)	35 percent	41 percent
• Churches as corporate entities becoming involved in political action (e.g., issuing position statements)	70 percent	14 percent
• A constitutional amendment to permit prayer and/or Bible reading in public schools	47 percent	38 percent
• Increased spending for national defense	49 percent	21 percent
• Military aid to the Nicaraguan "Contras"	44 percent	23 percent
• Government-sponsored insurance for elderly in nursing homes	7 percent	75 percent
• Construction of Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) to ward off possible nuclear attack	35 percent	34 percent
• Appointment of conservative, strict-constructionist justices (like Rehnquist, Scalia, and Bork) to the U.S. Supreme Court	35 percent	22 percent
• Control of crime by tougher laws and "stiffer" sentences	8 percent	81 percent
• Withdrawal of the United States from the United Nations	55 percent	14 percent
• Registration of all firearms	21 percent	63 percent
• Regarding capitalism or free enterprise as that form of government most in harmony with biblical Christianity	11 percent	53 percent
• Capital punishment (the death penalty) for certain classes of dangerous criminals	18 percent	62 percent

the historic Adventist stance on separation of church and state. It also echoes the theme that the work of the church is primarily to save sinners and prepare them for the world to come, not to improve their lot in this world.

Despite this general feeling on the part of the membership, officials of the church have made recent forays into the realm of position papers on public issues. A good example is the statements released at the quinquennial World Session of the General Conference held in Indianapolis in July of 1990. They dealt with bans on selling assault weapons to civilians, pornography, affirmation of the family, homelessness and poverty, ecology, the Christian response to AIDS, and chemical use, abuse, and dependency.⁷ Incidentally, the involvement of churches in the political process has historically been considered a liberal stance, but with the rise of the New Christian Right, conservatives have entered this arena *en masse*. Thus the rejection of this statement by the majority of Adventists should be seen not as political conservatism but as theological separatism.

The fact that government aid to improve the position of minorities gathered only a very narrow majority while at the same time strong support was given to eliminating racial restrictions and providing government insurance for nursing-home care suggests that it is not latent racism that held down the percentage favoring aid to minorities. More likely, this development reflects the Adventist (and generally conservative Protestant) self-help theology with its emphasis on individual salvation. "Each person relates to God individually, and God helps those who help themselves."

The statement on the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution (ERA) is especially pertinent in view of the current struggle in the Adventist Church over the role of women. Questions raised in the struggle include whether women may be properly ordained to the gospel ministry and whether

they may serve as pastors or elders of local congregations. While the questionnaire statement did not address these issues directly, earlier research has shown that pastors in North America who support the equality of women in the public arena are more likely to affirm their full equality in the ministry of the church.⁸ If the same is true of lay members, the response to this statement may provide some clue as to the strength of support for women in pastoral ministry.

In light of the current relevance of this issue to the church, it may be worthwhile to give a complete breakdown on the support for the statement.

The Equal Rights Amendment

Strongly oppose	13 percent
Somewhat oppose	9 percent
Uncertain	16 percent
Somewhat favor	22 percent
Strongly favor	40 percent

It seems obvious that those who take either position are more likely to feel strongly than mildly about it. Thus the polarization in society—and in the church if this statement provides a clue to attitudes concerning women in ministry. The measure of support, then, suggests that women will become more acceptable as ordained pastors (at least in the United States (in the future).

This seems especially likely in view of the age grouping of this sample. Nearly half (48 percent) were over 50 years of age, and a quarter were over 65. Only 28 percent were 35 years or younger. Yet a constant finding in all research is that younger people are more likely to favor the rights of women and minorities than are older ones. If this "more mature" sample is as supportive of ERA as the results indicate, one could predict even higher support as the younger generation moves into leadership roles in the church. However, po-

sitions on this issue are not significantly different among different demographic groupings in this sample.

Favoring Liberal Positions

	Percent
• Eliminate racial restrictions in housing, etc.	81
• Establish peaceful relations with Russia	79
• Government insurance for elderly in nursing homes	75
• U.S.-Soviet freeze on nuclear weapons	72
• Registration of all firearms	63
• Equality for women (ERA)	62
• Government aid to improve positions of minorities	52
• Individual Christians becoming involved in politics	41
• Churches becoming involved in political action	14

If the remaining nine issues are arranged in a similar manner, the following picture emerges.

In contrast to the "liberal issues" the majority of Adventists favored only three out of the nine "conservative" issues. The support was much less here, although it must not be inferred that the subjects necessarily *opposed* these other issues. The "uncertain" response was high on several of them, especially the last five (all over 30 percent). The two most highly favored issues deal with law and order—perhaps reflecting the heavy law orientation prominent among Adventists. The third-favored position deals with approval of capitalism as the economic system most in harmony with Biblical Christianity. This may again reflect the work ethic that grows out of a strong sense of righteous behavior. Majority support for these three statements may also indicate the increasing alignment of Adventism with the American social system—"an alternative to the Republic in the framework of Bull and

Lockhart."⁹

A conservative cause that fails to gain majority support is a constitutional amendment to permit prayer and Bible reading in public schools. This finding is easily explained by the historical opposition by the church to entanglement of the state with religion. Adventists believe in making religion the foundation of education, and they support a massive parochial school system, from the kindergarten to the university levels, to do just that. But they are wary of any government-endorsed religion. In their historic scenario of the lamb-like republic that turns into the persecuting dragon (Revelation 13), government-sponsored prayer and Bible-reading in the schools may be the foot in the door that eventually leads to other religious legislation, government control of churches, and persecution for dissenters.¹⁰ The same reasoning may be operating in the meager support for the appointment of conservative, strict-constructionist justices to the United States Supreme Court. Traditionally, it has been "liberal" justices, rather than "conservative" ones who have championed individual liberties and the separation of church and state.

Favoring Conservative Positions

• Tougher laws and stiffer sentences on crime	81
• Capital punishment for dangerous criminals	62
• Capitalism in harmony with Bible Christianity	53
• Prayer/Bible reading in public schools	38
• Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars)	34
• Military aid to Nicaraguan "Contras"	23
• Conservative justices on U.S. Supreme Court	22
• Increased spending for national defense	21
• Withdrawal from the United Nations	14

The other conservative items that gathered only minority support are all military and defense issues. In general, conservatives support a strong defense to protect America from “godless” systems like communism that would destroy its traditional moral and family values. Adventists would have reason to take a similar position except that they have historically been a semi-“peace church.” Because of their high regard for the Ten Commandments—of which the sixth prohibits killing—and problems involving Sabbath service, Adventists have tended to eschew service in the military. While the church does not enforce pacifism, it recommends that its young people do not enlist in the armed services and, if drafted, serve in the unarmed medical branches. It is not surprising that given the tension between concern for values threatened by communism and historical noncombatance, majorities neither favored nor opposed the military and defense items, but that large proportions were undecided.

An interesting finding that we are not able to develop in this paper is that ethnic minorities tend to be more liberal on public issues than are Caucasian Adventists, even though they are generally more conservative on religious matters.

Political Party Preference

In addition to attitudes toward public issues, we asked three questions requiring the respondent to consider directly his or her relationship to political matters. The first was: “With which political party do you most closely identify?” The answers were as follows:

While most Adventists did not consider themselves Republicans, those who did con-

Democrat	24 percent
Republican	44 percent
Independent	12 percent
No interest in politics	20 percent

stituted the largest grouping of any political identification. Democrats were considerably behind, doing only a little better than half as well.

Since Republicans are generally considered the more conservative party, and since Adventists in this survey tended to favor more liberal issues, this finding presents somewhat of a puzzle. It seems likely that the Republican party in general may be viewed as the party of stability of the status quo—the one most likely to preserve traditional moral and family values. Thus, Adventists may identify with it in general although they feel free to disagree with it on specific issues such as church-state concerns and military build-up.

It is also important that nearly a third did not identify with either party and that a fifth took no interest in politics. Again, this may reflect the historic trends in the church that lead members to conclude that Christians should not be involved in government at all but dedicate themselves to the spreading of the gospel.

Political Orientation

Perhaps not all see a connection between a conservative-liberal framework and a choice of political party. So we asked the question more directly: “Which of the following terms best describes your political orientation?”

If we compare the 34 percent who rated themselves as conservatives with the 44 per-

Conservative	34 percent
Moderate	37 percent
Liberal	5 percent
No opinions	24 percent

cent who identified with the Republican party, it becomes evident that a number of Republicans do not consider themselves to be conservative; a conclusion anticipated in the discus-

sion of the preceding section. The largest group claimed to be moderates—a somewhat surprising finding given the almost sacred character of the word *conservative* among Adventists. Only 5 percent were bold enough to claim the “L” word. Here again, nearly a fourth showed unwillingness to engage in the political arena by expressing “no opinions.”

Recent Voting Behavior

It is one thing to ask for political opinions or political self-identification. It is another to chart a particular political behavior. Perhaps the behavior by which Americans best reveal their political leanings is voting for the president of the United States. This national rite sweeps the whole nation into its lengthy process and allows for more comprehensive discussion of national issues than does any other event.

Therefore, we asked: “For whom did you vote in the last presidential election?” The choices were “Reagan,” “Mondale,” and “didn’t vote.” It might be asked why 1984 rather than 1988 candidates were listed. This is because the questionnaire was constructed and data collection begun prior to the 1988 elections and, indeed, even before it was determined with certainty who the candidates would be. While we might have asked: “For whom do you intend to vote?” we felt that some might be unsure until closer to the election date or might change their minds. The accomplished fact seemed a more stable measure. Also, the Reagan-Mondale contest was clearly perceived in conservative-liberal terms, given the past records and associations of each candidate.

Only about 60 percent of the Adventists voted, with Reagan, at 46 percent, outpulling Mondale (15 percent) three to one. Either all the Republicans voted, or a fair share of the Democrats and independents went for Reagan. The latter certainly seems likely.

Why did Adventists who favored “liberal” causes and who identified themselves as moderates vote for Reagan, the conservative candidate, especially when he supported actions that would seem to bridge the separation of church and state (e.g., school prayer amendment, ambassador to the Vatican, etc.)? Several reasons may be suggested.

For one thing, Reagan swept the country at large, winning the electoral votes of all but two states. Adventists are certainly influenced by surrounding opinions and tended to agree with their fellow Americans. For another thing, other factors probably played a larger factor than religion in the Adventist vote. The economy had risen from its earlier slump, and many members were doing quite well financially. The incumbent always has a large advantage in such cases. Moreover, Mondale let it be known that he felt a tax increase was necessary. Adventists may well have voted their pocketbooks rather than their principles.

Also, Reagan was a master at articulating traditional moral and family values. These would be shared by most Adventists, many of whom might not consider by what means such values would or could be integrated into public life. Given two different candidates and a different social ferment, the election might not have been so one-sided, although, in view of the political-party identification, it is likely that the Republican would still have drawn a plurality of Adventist votes. And it is well to remember that a sizeable minority (39 percent) of Adventist members did not vote at all, apparently preferring to abstain from the political process.

Conclusions

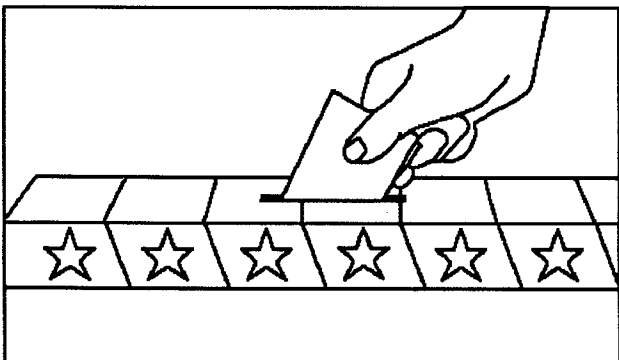
Adventists then present an unusual—perhaps unique—case among religious groups in the United States. As they face political issues and decisions, at least three

religious factors play a part in their attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, these three tend to be contradictory so that Adventist positions on public issues and political actions do not fit neatly into a conservative-liberal typology, but may seem inconsistent.

Adventists generally have traditional moral values. They believe in family, prayer, and Bible reading. They tend to oppose abortion and are generally against pornography and homosexuality. They reject communism with its inherent atheism. These are conservative positions and have been most strongly entrenched in the Republican party. Thus pluralities of Adventists identify themselves with this party and vote for its candidates. They also tend to favor those social forces that seem to support these values, such as strong, toughly enforced laws and capitalism.

Adventists oppose government interference in religion. They believe in separation of church and state. Given their eschatology, especially in their interpretation of the United States as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13, they have always been champions of religious liberty. This leads them to be suspicious of government-sponsored prayer, to give high regard to the first amendment to the constitution, and to generally oppose "morality" legislation even though they might agree with the values behind it. This factor may incline them to certain "liberal" positions and even, in some cases, to support Democratic candidates.

The tension between these two factors may



be illustrated by the "Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion," voted on October 12, 1992, at the Annual Council of the General Conference.¹¹ The statement makes plain that "abortion is one of the tragic dilemmas of human fallenness," and that "abortions for reasons of birth control, gender selection, or convenience are not condoned by the church." It definitely presents a high and sacred view of life. On the other hand it affirms that "the final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not should be made by the pregnant woman after appropriate consultation. . . . Any attempts to coerce women either to remain pregnant or to terminate pregnancy should be rejected as infringements of personal freedom." Here we see the conservative pro-life balanced with the liberal pro-choice.

Adventists tend to be separationists. Their kingdom, like that of their Lord, is not of this world. They are citizens of heaven. Much in Adventist literary history has encouraged them to refrain from the political arena. Therefore, many do not vote, do not identify with any political positions, and do not participate in attempting to change the social order. Since this world is doomed to destruction, they prefer to concentrate on the next one.

These three factors are present in the experience of every Adventist. Their relative strength and the resulting mixture are influenced by variations in their religious orthodoxy, experiences, and practices. The pieces must be fitted together in a way that makes sense in the life of each individual.

At least that's the way it has been. Have changes in the religious liberty outlook and the insurgency of the New Christian Right moved Adventists farther from moral order issues and closer to freedom issues? Only future research will provide the answer. What is clear is that Adventists live in society. If faith is to have any value, it must give some guidance as to how the Christian is to relate to that society.

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1. *New York Times* (November 5, 1992), Sec. B, p. 9.
2. See Carlos Medley, "Putting God on the Ballot," *Adventist Review* (December 10, 1992), p. 4.
3. For a complete description of all the findings, including an analysis of religiousness and theological and ethical implications, see Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics Among American Seventh-day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1992), 332 pages.
4. While the North American Division includes both Canada and Bermuda, public issues are somewhat different in these countries. Therefore, Canadian and Bermudian addresses were eliminated from the sample, and only households in the United States were selected.
Since several members may comprise a household, the instructions accompanying the questionnaire contained a further sample selection procedure. Recipients were told that the survey must be completed by a baptized member of the Adventist Church who was at least 18 years old. In case more than one member of the household met these criteria, the one whose birthday came first in the calendar year was to complete the questionnaire.
5. Two additional mailings followed several weeks

apart. Each included another questionnaire and another stamped envelope. It was found that 52 of the letters were undeliverable due to incorrect addresses, thus reducing the sample to 748.

6. While abortion certainly has a public face, it is also greatly involved in private morality and might become confused with the public issue. For example, some might be morally opposed to abortion but against laws prohibiting it on the grounds that government should not interfere in moral and religious issues. Also some might favor laws to restrict abortion generally but permit it under certain circumstances (such as incest or rape). It would have taken several questions to clarify these issues, and space did not permit.

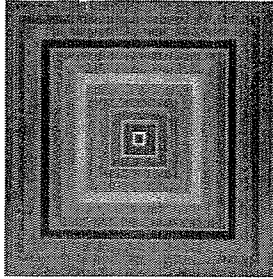
7. Neal C. Wilson, "SDA Position Statements: GC Leaders Target Concerns for the Adventist Church," *Adventist Review* (July 26-August 2, 1990), pp. 10-12.

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9. Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

10. See Dudley and Hernandez, Chap. 4, "Adventism and Politics in Historical Perspective."

11. "Guidelines on Abortion," *Adventist Review* (December 31, 1992), pp. 11, 12.



Adapted from Frank Stella's
"Sacramento Mall Proposal"

Cracking Nuts or Peeling Onions?

Beyond the search for truth is the quest for God.

by John Hoyt

NAN-IN, A 19TH-CENTURY ZEN MASTER, ONCE received a university professor coming to inquire about Zen.

As Nan-in silently prepared tea, the professor expounded at length on his own philosophies and insights. Nan-in quietly filled his visitor's cup *and then went right on pouring*. Alarmed at the tea spilling all over, ruining the immaculate ceremony, the professor exclaimed: "It is full, no more will go in."

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are already full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"¹

I was raised in a community that was deeply suspicious of the trackless swamp, the temporal abyss, that modern science seemed to open before us. Attending a conservative Protestant grade school in the late '50s and early '60s, I was offered the traditional Western account of

our creation by the hand of God in the relatively recent past. This chronicle began, so we were taught, as the first human being, created in the literal image of God himself, stepped forth into the shadowless light of that first morning.² Having a fixed beginning and ending, time was understood as an unfolding drama, a narrative whose outcome was reassuringly known in advance, yet in which each of us could aspire to play a significant role.³

Our understanding of the story of God creating humans served to define our relationship with the world around us. The biblical narrative, by reducing historical time to human dimensions, gave a familiar face to a cosmos that might otherwise be perceived as a menacing void.

Drinking Up the Sea

As a young college student, I became increasingly aware (as did many of my friends) of the inconsistencies that arise when religious faith is relegated to historical and

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prophetic time and banished from the living present. The institutionalized obscure God that I was offered in church and classroom seemed a shabby substitute for the dynamic, even surprisingly unpredictable deity that I had discovered in the pages of Scripture. Here was a God whose creative power could never be restrained by the covers of a book, but who acted in the eternal *now* of each of our lives. My teachers were, of course, compelled by their own educational background—firmly rooted as it was in the tradition of Protestant rationalism—to affirm the historical accuracy of the Pentecost experience, the vision of Ezekiel, and other such “mystical” texts. Yet, paradoxically, they were bound by this same tradition to an understanding of Truth that served, as I have now come to see more clearly, to bar the path to a knowledge of God.

Personal experience has led me to suggest the need for a reconsideration of our relationship with the text. Given the evident decline into which our biblical heritage has fallen, given the inability of many students to discover its meaning for themselves, it is not surprising that a number of educators have emphasized that *reading* must be a fundamental aspect of this relationship.⁴

Yet traditional models of reading lead us once again toward the fundamental paradox inherent in our understanding of the original creative act. Central to these “realistic,” or “common sense” models is the understanding that reading will lead the student, through an encounter with the mind of the author, toward a more accurate picture of the real world, one that will lend cohesion and meaning to the often-frustrating chaos of day-to-day experience.⁵ “Reading . . . becomes a search for historical certainty, a nostalgic activity in which one attempts to recapture the original act of creation.”⁶

The Western understanding defines “truth” as the opposite of “fable” and “fiction.” *Truth* is a fixed, immutable Reality. In this model

truth is a hidden gem waiting at the end of a straight and narrow path. Because of the narrowness of the path, creative, imaginative thinking tends to lead the student astray. The teacher who has accepted this model seeks to guide the student along the most direct path toward this Reality, as embodied in the original intention of the author or, more plausibly, toward the only available substitute: the meaning of the text as defined by the experts whose views are currently accepted as authoritative.

The “realistic” model of reading, with its emphasis on the primacy of the text and the passivity of the reader, continues to dominate our approach to education. It was clearly encouraged by Newtonian science. In this model, the cosmos is but a vast machine, entirely reducible to the sum of its parts. Proponents of this model suggest that at last we have discovered the underlying grammar of the universe. Once an indecipherable tome of arcane lore, the deepest secrets of the cosmos have now been laid bare, and we have access to the mind of the Creator himself.

The Newtonian model may seem to work well enough on a macroscopic level, and it does seem to have produced results which confirm our illusions of control over the world around us. However, it tells only part of the story. Mystery is banished and with it play, creativity, and finally God himself. Both post-Newtonian science and literary criticism have begun to impress upon us that this model represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of the reader.

There is no mystery in a machine-universe. The concept of “mystery” itself is reduced to the level of an “unsolved problem.” Mystery as the dark silence behind all being and the deep, unfathomable presence that grounds all being is banished.⁷

In reducing the cosmos to our own dimensions we have ultimately *lost* the cosmos, “wiped away the horizon,” “drunk upon the sea.”⁸

Stepping Into the Void

Western religion has generally accepted this narrow, "common sense" definition of truth and allowed it to guide our search for God. This has led, on the one hand, to our reassuring emphasis on the historicity of the traditional reading of the Genesis story, which focuses on humanity as an object of God's special interest, and grants them a key role as players in the drama of cosmic history. On the other hand, this same definition has ensured the incompatibility of our biblical heritage with the more "rational," scientific story of the Origin which has, for most of the Western world, eclipsed the traditional narrative, dethroning God and casting human beings adrift in a decentered world. The elaborate historical structures that we have built around us are constantly threatening to collapse, leaving us alone and unprotected, staring into a dark abyss.

To those of us who stubbornly refuse to give



Adapted from Frantisek Kupka's
"Organization of Graphic Motifs II"

up our belief in the ultimate meaningfulness of the beautiful universe in which we find ourselves, this void may in itself offer a key. The void may lead to a deeper, if less innocent, reading of the texts that have come to define us.

Western religion has taken a particular interest in the *word*. As we enter our churches, the relative absence of decoration and the orderly arrangement of the pews serve to direct our attention toward the pulpit: the service itself is, with rare exceptions, centered around the *kerygma*, the declaration of the Truth as embodied in the word. Yet this same tradition reflects, with some anxiety, an awareness that this Truth has come to us in a flawed vessel. Though the Hebrew text suggests that God once spoke to human beings face to face, this original transparency was gradually replaced by other, increasingly opaque, forms of communication. Language itself, struggling under the curse of Babel, serves as a veil that obscures our view of reality. These familiar biblical stories evoke our preoccupation with the "fallenness" of human discourse, which we too often overlook in our urgency to anchor our lives to an immutable "bedrock."

Language is, indeed, remarkably "shifty," subject to limitless plays of meaning that make truth itself the object of a seemingly endless search. Language is made up of words whose meaning can be fixed only by referring to other words (or "signs," in the parlance of the semiologist), which in turn derive their definitions from yet other words. The search for ultimate meaning would seem to lead to an infinite regress.

The writer and theorist Umberto Eco makes this point clearly in his account of a dialogue between a medieval scholar and his aspiring young student, who are pondering the historical reality that lies behind the myth of the unicorn.

[Teacher:] True learning must not be content with ideas, which are, in fact, signs, but must

discover things in their individual truth. And so I would like to go back from this print of a print [an image of a unicorn in an ancient manuscript] to the individual unicorn that stands at the beginning of the chain. . . . But it isn't always possible in a short time, without the help of other signs.

[Pupil:] Then I can always and only speak of something that speaks to me of something else, and so on. But the final something, the true one—does that never exist?

[Teacher:] Perhaps it does: it is the individual unicorn. And don't worry: one of these days you will encounter it, however black and ugly it may be.⁹

Eco is not alone in suggesting that our preoccupation with the historical reality that underlies our traditional narratives leads, ultimately, to a black hole. As Alan Watts writes,

In spite of the vital power of its myth, Christianity began to die in the moment when theologians began to treat the divine story as history—when they mistook the story of God, of the Creation, and the Fall for a record of facts in the historical past. For the past goes ever back and back into nothing.¹⁰

Such reminders may well appear, at first glance, rather unpalatable to many conservative Christians. Christianity is, after all, generally understood to be a historical religion, one that promises certainty regarding future events to the same degree that it offers an accurate, reliable picture of the past.

While a thoughtful consideration of past and future does indeed have a place in a balanced religious education, we have too often allowed our pursuit of history to rob us of the meaning that our tradition offers for the present. Students who are asked to base their religious experience on a naively realistic reading of a historical text may take an initial pride in the knowledge that this reading seems to grant them a central role in the unfolding drama of cosmic history. But as thoughtful

students pursue their quest for historical truth, their initial illusions are gradually stripped away. "I thought it would be like cracking a nut," a young theology student told me recently. "I would break through the shell [the 'veil of language'] and find a kernel of truth. But it turned out to be more like peeling an onion. I kept pulling off layer after layer, until I was finally left with nothing but my own tears."

The "black hole" that the theology student found at the end of his quest for historical truth represents, not a dead end, but an "event horizon," a threshold which leads into a new dimension of time.¹¹ Just as Moses, Jesus, Paul, and other great teachers felt the need to begin their work with an experience of emptying (Exodus 2:15, Matthew 4:12, Galatians 1:17), so we must learn to enter into and learn from the encounter with nothingness that is essential to the educational process.

A visit to the desert is a letting go of all things that occupy one; therefore the desert represents a "no-thing" or a nothingness experience. One is refreshed in this desert; there one derives energy to carry on the struggle for greening and liberation. . . .

It is important that we make contact with our origins, and our origins are quite literally *ex nihilo*, from nothing. Every experience of nothingness, then, can prove to be a healing experience for us, one that makes us whole and returns us to our primary origins.¹²

Within the darkness of this no-time, the original act of creation occurs as a now, a present reality that banishes the illusion of past and future. Too often, like Nan-in's guest, we live in an endless flow of words that serves only to disguise our inner emptiness. In our eagerness to fill our cups, we have too often forgotten the lessons of the desert, the place where, as Scripture teaches, our illusions of knowledge and control are stripped away in preparation for a new act of creation.

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1. Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Exploring the Crack in the Cosmic Egg* (Markham, Ontario: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 13, 14.

2. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 79.

3. In Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 153, 154, we read: "History . . . is essentially narrative. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The history of the West unfolds between limits set by the garden and the kingdom. . . ."

"Instead of a random sequence of meaningless occurrences, history assumes coherence as an intelligible pattern, comprising logical and lawful events."

4. As Allan Bloom observes in *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 60, "a life based on the Book is *closer to the truth*, [in] that it provides the material for deeper research in and access to *the real nature of things*. Without the great revelations, epics, and philosophies as a part of our natural vision, there is nothing to see out there, and eventually little left inside. The Bible is not the only means to furnish a mind, but without a book of similar gravity, read with the gravity of the potential believer, it will remain unfurnished." (Emphasis supplied.)

5. In Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen and Company, 1980), p. 2, we read, "Common sense assumes that valuable literary texts, those which are in a special way worth reading, tell *truths*—about

the period which produced them, about the world in general or about human nature—and that in doing so they express the particular perceptions, the individual insights, of their authors." (Emphasis supplied.)

Understood in this way, as Mark Taylor (somewhat ironically) observes in *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, p. 84, the book "points beyond itself to the intention it embodies. To comprehend the work, it is necessary to return to the source from which it originates—authorial intention."

6. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

7. Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 77.

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann, Trans. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 181.

9. Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (New York: Warner Books, 1980), p. 382.

10. Alan Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), p. 67.

11. In *ibid.*, p. 113, the following appears: "Look!" said Meister Eckhart. "The person who lives in the light of God is conscious neither of time past nor of time to come but only of the one eternity. . . . Therefore he gets nothing new out of future events, nor from chance, for he lives in the Now-moment that is, unfailingly, 'in verdure newly clad.'"

12. Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, pp. 151, 152.



Adapted from Henry Moore's "Rocking Chair"

God's Feminine Roles

Female metaphors for God abound in Scripture. Without them, our God is too small.

by Iris Yob

FEMININE METAPHORS IN SCRIPTURE PROVIDE more prevalent and powerful interpretations of the nature of God and our relationship to the divine than they do within our present religious consciousness. In exploring the nature of God, any single metaphor is inadequate, as is any set of metaphors too exclusively drawn. An inclusive theology, one that approaches God through images drawn from the experiences of all believers, both women and men, is a richer theology.

Theologians admit and believers concur that God is invisible, and indeed that no one can see God and live. Yet they not only continue to talk *to* God, they also insist in talking *about* God.

In language developed in and drawn from common, ordinary, finite life, religious people

presume to talk about the Uncommon, the Extraordinary, the Infinite. With their relatively small cognitive capacity and limited experience of the universe, humans discuss Omnipotence. Confined in time, space, and matter, people dare speak of Spirit. Restricted by sin and falling short, they attempt to articulate holiness. Some skeptical moderns have asked how such talk can be responsible and meaningful. Yet, even in the face of the most relentlessly skeptical asking, talk about God has persisted, enhancing the lives of believers with faith, hope, and love.

How can our talk about God be responsible and meaningful? Only if its terms are employed somewhat oddly. When we call God "loving" or "powerful" or "just" or "merciful," we implicitly compare God with other things to which these predicates already apply. The odd part is that we know all along these predicates apply to God differently—ideally, infinitely, supremely. But, even terms and categories "stretched" to encompass the divine appear to be inadequate, for God is more than love, more than power, more than justice,

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and more than mercy as we know these qualifiers even when raised to the highest degree imaginable. God is "Wholly Other" in the sense that the Holy One is not only better than anything else we know, but at some level, different from everything else we know.

Because such comparisons between finite reality and infinite reality are inadequate to express God, responsible and meaningful talk of God is largely, if not completely, metaphorical. A metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament or an artistic device. Rather, it is a way of entering the relatively unknown and mysterious. In technical terms, the metaphoric process involves the transfer of a system of concepts from a more familiar setting to a novel one. Guided by the networks of understandings of its past usage and the present context in which it is applied, we use this system of concepts to organize the new realm along the same lines as the old.¹

When we speak of God as Father, for example, we apply to the nature of God all that the term *father* suggests to see what insights such applications might contribute to the sum total of all that we know of him. The metaphor suggests that if God is Father, we are his children. We bear a resemblance to him. He not only gives being to us, but also sustains and protects us. We may approach him with confidence that we will find acceptance. He has authority over us, and we can choose to submit to this authority or rebel against it. He disciplines us. We love and respect him. He also intends for us to grow

and gives us a measure of freedom to do so. And even when we disappoint him, he never rejects us. The possibilities suggested by the metaphor are virtually limitless and have occupied religious thinkers for centuries. And each metaphor we add to our lexicon of talk about God brings additional depth and breadth to our theistic understanding.

But we do not say that God is *literally* our father. There has been no mother, no procreative act, no sins of the God-Father to be passed down from generation to generation, no aging and death that we associate with our literal fathers. Rather, the metaphor has given us the words, structures, and relationships of

a known domain (fatherhood) with which to talk about an esoteric other (the God-head). That is to say, the metaphor does not merely make comparisons. It also gives us a way of talking about the realm of the divine that provides us with terms and categories familiar to us. It suggests conceptual possibilities, each of which must be evaluated to see how it fits within

our present understandings and how it is relevant to our experience. It gives God a form familiar to us so that we may know how to relate to Him.

The use of metaphors does not make talk of God untrustworthy or undependable. Rather, literal language may very well be our only means of access to one we long to know better. Unlike literal language, metaphorical talk carries the implication that the knowledge it yields is suggestive and approximate, and therefore not necessarily infallible, exhaustive, or unrevisable. It is, however, sufficient

Our collective metaphors for God have been predominantly masculine. But feminine metaphors are being rediscovered and reclaimed in ways that promise to enrich and complement our present understandings of God and those created in God's image.

for a faith seeking understanding.

Over the course of time, numerous metaphors for God have caught the human imagination, forming the basis for theological development. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God has been recognized in terms of the Good Shepherd, the High Priest, the victorious Warrior, the righteous Judge, the powerful King, the Fisher of Men, the faithful Bridegroom, and, of course, most enduring of all, the loving Father. All these metaphors draw from the experience of those who have used them. Since the notable writers, preachers, and theologians preserved in our tradition have been male, our collective metaphors for God have been predominantly masculine. But feminine metaphors are being rediscovered and reclaimed in ways that promise to enrich and complement our present understandings of God and those created in God's image. We shall here explore briefly just four of these images, drawn from what we have come to regard as the typical—though, we must immediately add, neither necessary nor the only—experiences of women.

God as Helper

In Genesis 1,² we discover the first role given to women. It appears that God intended women and men to “rule over” the natural world and to do so in a way consistent with their creation in the image and likeness of God. In Genesis 2, the story tells how the first human-creature was “formed . . . from the dust of the ground.” “The breath of life” was breathed into this creature and it was placed in the garden “to work it and take care of it.”

But when God placed the human in the garden,

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.

“I will make a *helper suitable* (*ezer neged*) for him” (v. 18).

The first task was to name “all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.” But in all the parade of creatures, “no *helper suitable*” was found until Eve was made “from the rib . . . taken out of the man” (v. 22).³

Ezer, notes Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, is found 21 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. Three times it refers to vital help in times of extreme need; twice it refers specifically to Eve's role; and 16 times it speaks directly of God's assistance to human beings. Reflecting on this, Mollenkott makes two important points: first, a word used 16 times to describe divine action must be “an exalting and glorious word that carries no connotations of secondariness”; second, since only Eve and God are specifically identified as *ezer*, there is a sense in which woman's role as the *ezer neged* of mankind serves as a metaphor of God's relationship with humankind.⁴ One way to understand and know God, then, comes through the terms by which we understand and know woman: the helping partner.

What kind of helper does *ezer* suggest? Moses named one of his sons Eliezer, for he said: “My father's God was my *helper*; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh” (Exodus 18:4). Later, in his parting blessing on the tribes of Israel, Moses reminded Asher: “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to *help* you and on the clouds in his majesty” (Deut 33:26). David picks up the same theme: “I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my *help* and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay” (Psalm 70:5). The same metaphor appears again in Paul's writing: “In the same way, the Spirit *helps* us in our weakness” (Romans 8:26). Taken together, these references suggest that the helper uses her power in service, not as a slave or subordinate but from a position of strength and willingness. To regard the helper as weak, exploitable, or secondary is to misconstrue the role of women

and the person of God, for our understandings of the two are inseparably connected by the metaphor.

God as Female Lover

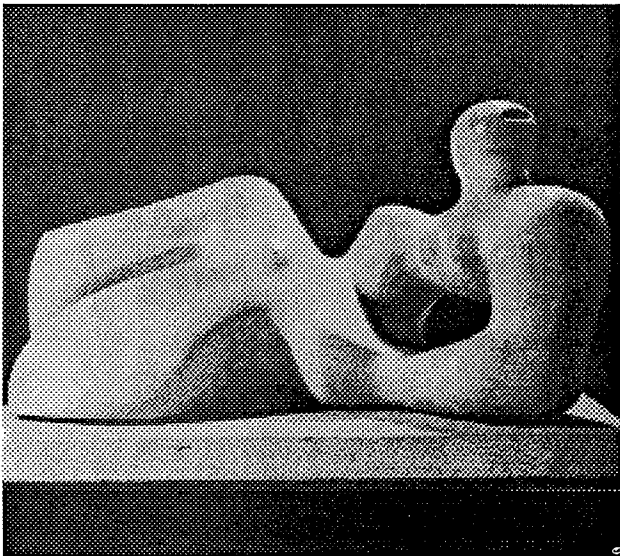
In the first two chapters of Genesis, we learn that God made a world of relationships: animal and animal related in peace; human and human related in mutuality and complementarity; human and divine related in communion. But after chapter two, the story of humankind takes a turn for the worse. By the end of chapter three, the love story has gone awry. The harmony that marked relationships is replaced by shame, blame, pain, and the domination of one by the other. The rest of Scripture essentially unfolds the story of how God reclaims the lost loves.

One book of the Bible—usually neglected, at times even spurned—superbly reveals God's attempts to reclaim the beloved human: *The Song of Songs*. Here the lovers make up. When the story of the Fall is compared to the lyrical images of the Song, the transition is clearly from condemnation and death to the celebration of life in its fullness. At the Fall we observe the destructive powers of the senses: the

couple *saw* the fruit; *heard* the tempter's voice; *touched* the fruit; *smelled* its fruity fragrance; and *tasted* the fruit. In the Song, however, we find pleasurable and uplifting delight in the senses. In chapter two, for instance, image is piled on image of sensory activity: sweet taste and banquets, raisins and apples, gazing, peering, looking, cool shade and tender embraces, singing and cooing, blossoming vines and fragrance. Between the fall and the Song, the movement flows from the separation of sin to the renewal of closest intimacy: from the shame of nakedness to delight in nakedness; from leaving father and mother to bringing the lover into the mother's house; from the woman's desire being toward her husband to their mutual desire for each other; from expulsion from a garden to return to a garden. The description of the love affair between the man and the woman of the poem figuratively carries the theme of the restoration of all lost love relationships.

In chapter five, verses 10-16, the woman (in this translation referred to as the Beloved) describes how she feels about him (referred to as the Lover):⁵

My lover is radiant and ruddy,
 outstanding among ten thousand.
 His head is purest gold;
 his hair is wavy
 and black as a raven.
 His eyes are like doves
 by the water streams,
 washed in milk,
 mounted like jewels.
 His cheeks are like beds of spice
 yielding perfume.
 His lips are like lilies
 dripping with myrrh.
 His arms are rods of gold
 set with chrysolite.
 His body is like polished ivory
 decorated with sapphires.
 His legs are pillars of marble
 set on bases of pure gold.
 His appearance is like Lebanon,
 choice as its cedars.
 His mouth is sweetness itself;



Adapted from Henry Moore's "Reclining Figure"

he is altogether lovely.
This is my lover, this my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem (vv. 10-16).

This man not only appears strong and handsome, he has a strong and good character, too. She finds in him sweetness and loveliness and friendship.

Her appreciation of and attraction to his fine qualities are increasingly apparent. In chapter 8, she speaks again:

Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal over your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.
Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot wash it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of his house for love,
it would be utterly scorned (vs. 6, 7).

The richness and provocativeness of the imagery prompts the metaphoric transfer of these descriptive networks from the human lover to the divine. We know God's love is stronger than death and his possessiveness unyielding. We have experienced this love as more precious than all our worldly possessions. By means of the love of the man to the woman we have given a form to the love of God to humanity. In her overflowing response to his love, we may give articulation to our response to God's love.

We have come to regard the Song of Songs, appropriately, as a picture of God's love for the church, where the man and his actions metaphorically depict God and his actions, and the woman and her responses metaphorically depict the welling-up and overflowing responses and actions of the church. The strength, passion, and possessiveness of the man's love for the woman suggests possible qualities in the love of God. The woman's reception of the love as an irreplaceable and indispensable gift expresses the church's re-

ception of the boundless love of God. By itself, however, this interpretation of the Song of Songs takes into account no more than half of the total possibilities it affords. Without the other half, both our knowledge of ourselves and our understanding of God are limited.

In the case of our self-knowledge, the temptation is to regard man, the metaphor for God, as somehow a more worthy being than the woman, the metaphor for the church.⁶ As far as it goes, this interpretation reflects *some* of the content of the Song. But by overlooking a large part of its message, this interpretation alone casts the man forever in the role of one superior and worthy and the woman forever in the role of one needy and undeserving, with concomitant destructive effects on their respective identities and personal self-esteem.

When God is perceived only in terms of the man's experience as lover, valuable insights into the love of God and its impact on our lives are lost. When we look at the neglected half of the metaphorical potential of the Song, it is apparent that the woman lover can give us insights into the character of God, too. In fact, in the total context of the Song, the woman is the more dominant figure. She opens and closes the song and is the more active player throughout—facts that theological exegesis should not overlook.

An early clue to the metaphoric potential of the woman is offered in chapter 2, where she declares:

I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys (v. 1).

These images have later been applied to Jesus. In chapter 6, the man's words to the woman continue the description:

... my dove, my perfect one, is unique,
the only daughter of her mother,
the favorite of the one who bore her.
The maidens saw her and called her blessed;

the queens and concubines praised her.
Who is this that appears like the dawn,
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,
majestic as the stars in procession? (vs. 9, 10).⁷

Again, we find here expressions reminiscent of descriptions of God Incarnate: perfect, unique, the only-begotten child, favored, blessed, and praised. The place the woman occupies in her lover's mind and heart suggests the place of Christ in the believer's thoughts and affections.

The full power of the woman-lover metaphor, however, is realized at the most poignant moment of the Song. In chapter 5, she recounts this episode:

I opened for my lover,
but my lover had left; he was gone.
My heart had gone out to him when he spoke.
I looked for him but did not find him.
I called him but he did not answer.
The watchmen found me
as they made their rounds in the city.
They beat me, they bruised me;
they took away my cloak,
those watchmen of the walls!
O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—
if you find my lover,
what will you tell him?
Tell him I am faint with love (vs. 6-8).

The infidelity exhibited here by the man is consistent with similar images representing the waywardness of God's chosen people.⁸ Other "watchmen of the walls of Zion," acting in their official capacities, would eventually see to it that the One they called "the Beloved" would be beaten and bruised and have lots cast over the cloak taken away from him. In the same way, the woman's deep sense of loss, her driven seeking and the pain she suffered in that search serve well as figures for the activity of a God who seeks and saves the lost without counting the cost. Her concluding words in this episode:—"Tell him I am faint with love"—are in the same spirit of reconciliation as those of Jesus who said, "Father,

forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

An interesting expression found three times in the Song and always uttered by the woman provides a key to the kind of love she models. She repeats:

Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires (2:7;
3:5; 8:4).

In her unique way, the woman's way of loving represents aspects of God's way of loving: wooing, searching, seeking, inviting. It does not demand or force a reluctant response, but is patient and long-suffering.

When a balanced interpretation of the Song is taken into account, women and men discover something about themselves: all are faulty and imperfect yet valued, favored, praiseworthy, and needed. Moreover, they discover God as a lover like themselves: one who loves strongly, passionately, and possessively as the man has done, and who also loves patiently, perseveringly, and sacrificially as the woman has done.⁹

God as Homemaker

The domain of housekeeping has largely fallen into the hands of women as far back as we can discern. Before the production of food became big business, the women in virtually every cultural group grew, gathered, prepared, and served the meals for the family¹⁰ and they have always washed, mopped, polished, scrubbed, swept, and dusted most of the homes in the world. Such women's work has aimed to serve others with attention and to make sure that all are well fed and well cared for. Herein lies grounds for theological reflection.¹¹

In Psalm 123, the singers declare that they lift up their eyes "to you whose throne is in heaven" (v. 1). But how are we to understand

and approach one who so royally occupies the seat of honor in a place beyond our scrutiny? The succeeding verse gives us some figurative parallels to reassure us in this regard:

As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their *master*,
as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her *mistress*,
so our eyes look to the *Lord our God*,
till he shows us his mercy.

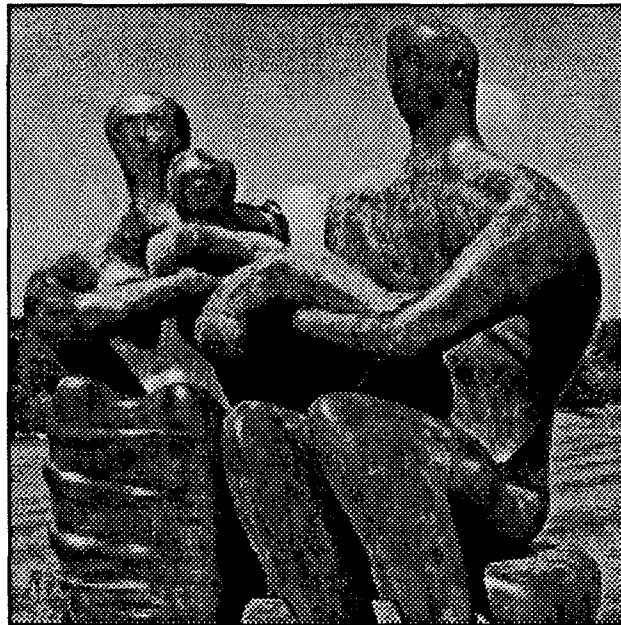
We are accustomed to thinking of God in terms of “master,” but the Psalmist here encourages us to see God also in terms of “mistress,” the female householder who governs her home in orderliness, thoroughness, and mercy. In her preparations and efforts for the members of the household she is a figure for God who governs the world with the same kind of loving care and attention to detail.

In extending the insights of this verse, Mollenkott suggests that it “gives us permission to see in Proverbs 31 a full-scale description of Yahweh as the perfect female home-maker, the perfect wife to a humanity which is cast by this image into a masculine role.”¹² The “wife of noble character” depicted in this Proverb is an extraordinary person:

Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value.
She brings him good, not harm,
all the days of her life.
She selects wool and flax
and works with eager hands.
She is like the merchant ships,
bringing her food from afar.
She gets up while it is still dark;
she provides food for her family
and portions for her servant girls.
She considers a field and buys it;
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.
She sets about her work vigorously;
her arms are strong for her tasks.
She sees that her trading is profitable,
and her lamp does not go out at night.
In her hand she holds the distaff
and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

She opens her arms to the poor
and extends her hands to the needy.
When it snows, she has no fear for her household;
for all of them are clothed in scarlet.
She makes coverings for her bed;
she is clothed in fine linen and purple.
Her husband is respected at the city gate,
where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.
She makes linen garments and sells them,
and supplies the merchants with sashes.
She is clothed with strength and dignity;
she can laugh at the days to come.
She speaks with wisdom,
and faithful instruction is on her tongue.
She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
“Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all . . .” (vs. 11-29).

This extraordinary woman can be no mere mortal. Only one is so untiring, dependable, and perfect in the fulfillment of all her duties and responsibilities. Like the good shepherd in relation to his flock as described in Psalm 23, so the noble wife in relation to her family in this Proverb gives us access to an understanding of God in relation to us. Hasidic Jews to this day, in the belief that God has both



Adapted from Henry Moore's "Family Group"

masculine and feminine manifestations, traditionally recite on the Sabbath day both Psalm 92, which recounts God's deeds in masculine terms, and Proverbs 31 with its feminine imagery.

In the chapter of lost things, Luke 15, a sheep, a coin, and a son are lost. In classical understanding, these lost things represent lost humanity. The chapter's message, however, is filled with hope: each of the lost things is found—by the faithful shepherd, the energized housewife, and the patient father, respectively. Christianity has celebrated and immortalized in song, art, and sermon the shepherd's and father's agony, effort, and reward as parables of God. But traditional expressions have been strangely silent—or even more strangely, cynical—about the parallel figure of the housewife.¹³ However, as we can comprehend God in terms of the shepherd with his rod and staff on the rugged mountainside searching for one lost sheep and perceive God in the father with ring and robe scanning the horizon, his eyes longing for his one lost son, so we can also discover God in the woman who, with broom in hand, desperately sweeps her home from top to bottom for one lost coin.¹⁴

In the chapters of the workers who represent the work of God in establishing the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 13, the writer adopts as metaphors a number of common employments of first-century Palestine: a sower who sows seeds and reaps a bountiful harvest; a bakerwoman who mixes yeast into flour and produces a loaf of nourishing bread; a man who discovers a great treasure in a field; a

merchant who searches for fine pearls; and a fisherman who hauls in a great catch. Again the parallelism of these parables compels the reader (or hearer) to find in the activity of the bakerwoman a metaphor for the activity of God. As her leaven permeates the whole mixture and gives it the texture and lightness of a good loaf, so God's words and deeds permeate all parts of society and all stages of life for salvation and righteousness.¹⁵ Furthermore, in her cooking tasks, the woman recalls God's provision of manna in the wilderness and Jesus, the bread of life (John 6:35, 48).

The realities of motherhood—the authentic experience of giving birth and raising children—can effectively picture God for us: not only by means of the joy and dignity of its calling but also by its pains and sacrifices.

God as Mother

Just as our understanding of God is mediated by the metaphor of "Father," so it can also be mediated by the metaphor of "Mother." In the many instances where motherhood appears, a wide range of associations are called upon to help us know God.

When Yahweh spoke to Job out of a storm of creative energy it was to pose a series of rhetorical questions to remind him of divine mystery. In describing the abundance of majestic and powerful natural phenomena, the Lord asks:

Does the rain have a father?
 Who fathers the drops of dew?
 From whose womb comes the ice?
 Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens . . . ? (Job 38:28, 29).

One approach to understanding and appreciating the creative act of God in giving form, energy, and life to the world is to see it in terms of the procreation and birth that brings a new

being into the world.

Furthermore, the relationship of human beings to God can also be appreciated and understood in terms of the relationship of a child to its parents. For instance, in his farewell song to the Hebrews, Moses recounts how God "found" Israel in a "barren and howling waste," "shielded him and cared for him" like an eagle hovering over her young, and set him up in a land rich with all good things. But Israel, "filled with food" and grown sleek and fat, abandoned and rejected God, giving allegiance instead to foreign deities. Then addressing the prophet directly, he adds:

You deserted the Rock, who fathered you;
you forgot the God who gave you birth
(Deuteronomy 32:18).

God, like a father and a mother, had given them every advantage only to be taken for granted and finally rejected. As a parent would say: No one could have done more for them; no response could have been more ungrateful!

The image of God as Mother pervades both the Old and New Testaments. Job 38:8 speaks of when the sea "burst forth from the womb." In Isaiah 42:14, God speaks of keeping silent for a long time until now, "like a woman in childbirth," she cries out, gasps, and pants, for she is about to deliver a new world. On an individual level, in John 3:5, 6, Jesus declares, "Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." Later, Jesus faces the prospect of his imminent death and, endeavoring to explain to his followers the shape of events to come, he offer them this same metaphor: "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world" (John 16:21). The coming into being of a new world, a new being in Christ, or a new epoch is understood

as a "birthing" act in which God has conceived, waited through the period of gestation, gone into intense labor, and ultimately delivered with great joy.

Not only does God figuratively give birth to us, but also figuratively nurses that "aspect of ourselves that remains always in infantlike dependency,"¹⁶ constantly, reliably, consistently:

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has
borne?
Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!" (Isaiah 49:15).¹⁷

When Jacob calls his 12 sons to his side to give them his final blessing, he tells them one by one of a God of power, turbulence, and might. But the tone of the old patriarch's blessing changes when he comes to speak of Joseph and Joseph's God:

"Joseph is a fruitful vine,
a fruitful vine near a spring,
whose branches climb over a wall.
With bitterness archers attacked him;
they shot at him with hostility.
But his bow remained steady,
his strong arms stayed limber,
because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob,
because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,
because of your father's God, who helps you,
because of the Almighty, who blesses you
with blessings of the heavens above,
blessings of the deep that lies below,
blessings of the breast and womb" (Genesis
49:22-25).

God, referred to here as God Almighty, is *El Shaddai*, drawing on the root word, *shad*. *Shad* carries two meanings: one, "mountain," a particularly destructive volcanic mountain; the other, "breast," a woman's nurturing breast. While it is possible to read in this blessing that Joseph would prevail because he had the hand of the Mighty God of the Mountain to strengthen him, the other interpretation can-

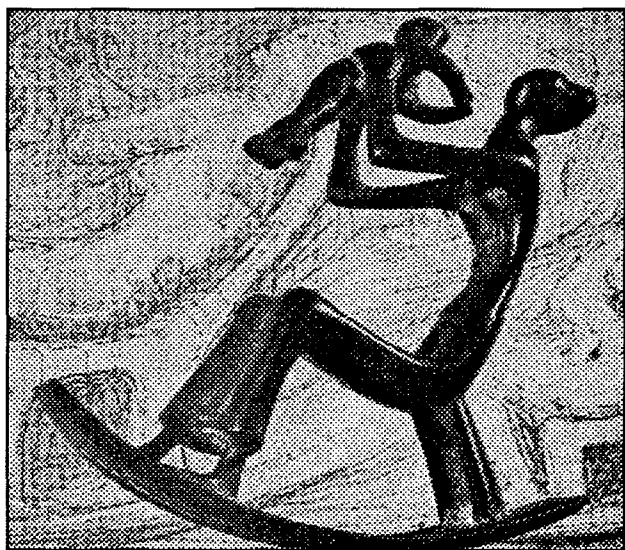
not be ignored while being true to the context. The God of the Mighty Breasts is the one who “blesses you with . . . blessings of the breast and womb.” In fact, the succeeding verse directs attention away from the mountain imagery:

“Your father’s blessings are greater
than the blessings of the ancient mountains,
than the bounties of the age-old hills” (v. 26).

With the dual meaning of the imagery suggested in the name *El Shaddai*, we can know God as the one who combines the power of an unleashed volcano with the power of nurturing love for our protection and maintenance.¹⁸

God’s mother-activity toward us is not exhausted by the images of birthing and nursing, but continues with child-minding and child-raising. In the closing chapters of Isaiah, the prophet gives us this touching picture of God:

“Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her,
all you who love her;
rejoice greatly with her,
all you who mourn over her.
For you will nurse and be satisfied
at her comforting breasts;
you will drink deeply
and delight in her overflowing abundance.”



Adapted from Henry Moore's "The Rocker"

For this is what the Lord says:

“I will extend peace to her like a river,
and the wealth of nations like a flooding
stream;
you will nurse and be carried on her arm
and dandled on her knees.
As a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you;
and you will be comforted over Jerusalem”
(Isaiah 66:10-13).

The Scriptures do not sentimentalize motherhood,¹⁹ but remain consistent with the declaration made to woman in Genesis 3:16: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children.” The realities of a demythologized motherhood—the authentic experience of giving birth and raising children—can effectively picture God for us: not only by means of the joy and dignity of its calling but also by its pains and sacrifices, by its burdens and heartaches and losses, and yet by its fundamental long-suffering and constancy.

Summary

When we see God through the metaphors of our helping partner, our committed lover, our dedicated homemaker and our caring, comforting mother, neglected aspects of the divine nature become again accessible to us. God is not only just, powerful, strong, destructive, and judging, but also tender, merciful, caring, providing, supportive, self-giving, suffering, tireless, and nurturing. In the balance of attributes and virtues, God appears to us as one not only fearsome and mighty, but also as approachable and approaching.

When the “feminine” aspects of God are present in our theological and devotional understandings, the “feminine” virtues take on new value. In the nature of God we discover the ideals of womanhood as well as of manhood. Through knowing God in terms of the

characteristic traits, interpersonal relations and life's devotions of women as well as men, we all may recognize that God understands and appreciates who we are, as individual women and men, in being all that we are meant to be. A theology that recognizes the fundamental truth that "God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him; *male and female he created them*" (Genesis 1:27) will cherish, honor, and promote equally the qualities inherent in both woman and man. Then the life experiences of both women and men can provide us with reflections on the divine nature itself.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976), pp. 68-80; *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 71-77; Goodman and Catherine Elgin, *Receptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988), pp. 16, 17; Israel Scheffler, *Beyond the Letter: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Ambiguity, Vagueness and Metaphor in Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 118-130; Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), chapter 111.

2. Biblical texts are from the New International Version, unless otherwise indicated.

3. It has been a source of some amused reflection that man (2:7) and beasts and birds (2:19) were made of the coarse materials taken from the ground, but woman was made of living, vital flesh and blood. In a satirical piece by Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Adam Was Only a Rough Draft," appearing in a *Catholic Reporter* a few years ago, she has some fun proposing that since women were created from human flesh, they were more suited to the finer, more spiritual tasks of society, including the ordained priesthood, and that since men were created from dirt, their cruder and heavier physical frame marked them for the physical tasks of society, such as digging ditches, mending roofs, and the like. Her intent, no doubt, is to turn the tables on arguments that would exclude women from certain functions in our corporate life simply on the grounds of origin and gender. However, the serious point to be made here is that man's "suitable helper" was one like himself—not a distinct order of being, but one who stood as his equal by the very side from which she was taken.

4. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 75.

5. The headings "Beloved" and "Lover" are additions to the text made by the translators of the New International Version to identify the respective speakers. Their choice of terms is questionable in the sense that "beloved" suggests one who is a passive recipient of

love and "lover" suggests an active giver of love. It is clear from a reading of the whole book that being passive recipient and active giver are roles shared by both the man and the woman.

6. While it is idolatrous to regard a symbol in the same way as that which it symbolizes, nevertheless, the network of associations a symbol possesses forms the metaphoric applications that have characterized its past usages. As a metaphor for God, the symbol of the male lover to some extent carries the connotations associated with that usage. Typically, the man, and God, are described as "famous," "chief," "coming . . . as a conqueror to be crowned," "victorious," "radiant, ruddy and the fairest of ten thousand." Similarly, the woman, and the church, are described as "humbly conscious of her defects," attempting "to flee from the grand king whose glory makes her more aware of her imperfections," "a plain field flower," "immature," one who "in time will develop into a maturity worthy of marriage," and shy. These descriptors are taken from an article by Gordon Christo, "Here Comes the Bridegroom!" *Adventist Review*, 165 (July 28, 1988), pp. 9, 10.

7. In the history of religions, the symbolism of the moon has often been associated with the cyclic and regenerative powers of woman, while the sun has been linked with masculine concepts of kingship and supremacy. See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Rosemary Sheed, trans. (New York: New American Library, 1958), chap. III and IV. But here in the Song of Songs, the Lover finds the qualities of both sun and moon in the Beloved. With this as part of its associative network, the metaphor suggests that God can be understood in terms of both male and female.

8. See, for example, Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16 and 23; Hosea; Revelation 17.

9. For further elaboration of the imagery of the Song of Songs, see Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) and Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine*, pp. 69-73.

10. If the offering of Jesus' flesh and blood for our spiritual nurture can be understood in the terms of the

servicing of food for our physical nurture, it is ironic to regard women's hands as unworthy or inappropriate for handling the sacramental bread and wine in the Communion service.

11. Ellen G. White notes in *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1905), p. 302, "It takes thought and care to make good bread; but there is more religion in a loaf of good bread than many think." Mary E. Hunt, "Food, Glorious Food" *Waterwheel*, 2 (Fall 1989), pp. 1, 2, suggests that such tasks *do* what theology *talks* about—among other things, they nurture, nourish, and occasion celebration.

12. Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine*, p. 62.

13. In the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1956), vol. 5, p. 816, the argument is given that in the parable of the lost coin, "the element of pity is lacking. The woman had only her own carelessness to blame for the loss of the coin, and her desire to reclaim it was based exclusively on her personal interest in it. . . . the coin could not be blamed for losing itself."

14. Some commentators, noting that a woman portrays one of the searchers, have suggested that Jesus may merely have been trying to catch the attention and interest of women in the audience. (See, for example, the *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 816.) In relation to this suggestion, in *The Divine Feminine*, p. 64, Mollenkott comments, "That's true enough, of course—but it overlooks the fact that Jesus was also affirming and empowering human females by allowing them the same privilege accorded males: to see their own nature

represented in the godhead."

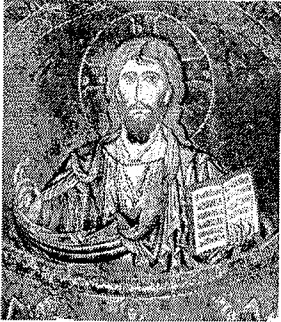
15. However, interpretations of the bakerwoman episode have been ambivalent, in part because of her connection with leaven. Leaven, or yeast, has been symbolic of evil and at Passover every trace was to be removed from the homes of the Hebrews. Furthermore, Jesus had warned his listeners of the "yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew 16:6, 12; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). However, a symbol may be used to refer to a number of different things on different occasions. For instance, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 409, notes that both Satan (1 Peter 5:8) and Christ (Revelation 5:5) are symbolized by a lion. Thus it is not inconsistent that, in the recipe of the bakerwoman, the leaven is a good thing, without which the loaf (and metaphorically the church) would be spoiled.

16. Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine*, p. 21.

17. Cf. 1 Peter 2:2, 3; John 7:37, 38; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9; Psalm 34:9; 131:1, 2; and Hosea 11:4.

18. For further discussion of *El Shaddai*, see Caleb Rosado, *The Role of Women and the Nature of God: A Socio-Biblical Study* (Loma Linda, Calif.: Loma Linda University Press, 1989), chapter 8.

19. The relatively modern phenomenon of sentimentalizing motherhood has not served women well. Whatever psychological benefits it may have for husbands and children, for women it has tended to limit their socially acceptable roles to child-bearer and child-minder and to isolate them from the other affairs of life—the hierarchy of the church, the body politic and economic, the academy, the arts, and much more.



Adapted from "Christ Pantocrator,"
the Cathedral of Cefalù

God's Justice, Yes; Penal Substitution, No

God's justice is primarily social. The penal, substitutionary view is individualistic, egocentric, and contrary to Scripture.

by Charles Scriven

"... the social gospel is the voice of prophecy ..."

—Walter Rauschenbusch¹

"Every truth . . . must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary."

—Ellen White²

EACH TEACHING OF THE CHURCH INTERPRETS God. When teachings go wrong, God is diminished, and when God is diminished, so are the children of God.

No means of diminishing God is more flagrant, and none more disastrous, than readings of the cross of Christ that turn believers inward instead of outward. Nevertheless, the inner life, largely abstracted from questions of community and justice, is today a besetting preoccupation for popular, especially conservative and fundamentalist, Christianity. Ac-

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ording to resurrection faith, the cross—or better, the life that culminates at the cross—brings God's justice into perfect focus.³ What popular devotion overlooks is that just this fact proves the gospel is social; just this fact shows that the Maker of heaven and earth wants above all things to build community and justice. In spite of this, many professed partisans of the cross, captive not just to conservative religion but also to modern individualism, settle into pious introspection, obsessed with guilt and zealous for self-esteem but indifferent, or at least disengaged, when it comes to justice.

God and Social Justice

Read through Luther's eyes, the biblical account of atonement has seemed to support the introspective, or privatistic, understanding of the cross.⁴ Luther struggled with his conscience, and brought this struggle to his reading of the New Testament, and especially of Paul. For him the overriding issue

was the resolution of personal guilt, and he thought that was the overriding issue for Paul. But it wasn't. Paul's passion was community. Nothing underscores this more than his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians, where the whole point is to found a new covenant of fellowship on the fact and meaning of the cross. Yet these very letters are treated—or better, mistreated—as linchpins for accounts of atonement in which community and justice play very little part.

The fact is that Christ's atonement puts community and justice at the center. The gospel is social and the cross is the proof. Biblically speaking, any account of atonement that invites exclusive or primary attention to personal concerns is false. Any true account of atonement must—the necessity is absolute—*must* foster passion for community and social justice.

I say community and *social* justice because, as we shall see, writers on the atonement sometimes invoke God's justice without apparent comprehension of what it is according to the Bible. Anyone, however, who would truly illuminate the cross of Christ must honor the conception of justice central in the story leading up to the cross. That conception is unmistakably social.

Jesus' tradition was the Hebrew tradition. The Exodus was the definitive event in his people's history, and it recalled a God determined to build community and to meet human needs, especially the needs of the vulnerable. God was a champion of the weak. God's justice opened the doorway to joy for the oppressed, the hungry, the lonely, the afflicted. It amended inequities. It restored and enhanced the life that men and women share. It sought blessedness and peace. Justice was a standard for community, but it was no abstraction: it was covenant faithfulness, it was care and compassion, it was action to reclaim lives and renew relationships.⁵

Luke declares in his fourth chapter that Jesus put this very justice, the justice of the Hebrew tradition, at the center of his inaugural sermon. Jesus took the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and identified his basic mission with chapters 58 and 61. In both chapters, social justice and loyalty to God are the themes. And in both chapters, the first is a condition of the second: a love of justice is a test of loyalty to God.

Donald Bloesch, an evangelical writer, argues that whereas this was true of the Old Testament author, it was not true of Jesus. Jesus did speak in Nazareth of "good news to the poor," "release to the captives," "sight to the blind" and deliverance to the "oppressed." But with him these words assure freedom from "sin and death rather than from political and economic bondage."⁶ As proof, Bloesch cites Luke 7:22, where Jesus responds to a question about his mission and identity from two of John's disciples: "Go," he says,

"and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news preached to them" (RSV).

Bloesch thinks these words undergird his claim that Jesus focused on salvation for individual souls. But this is bizarre. The remark in Luke 7 also draws from the book of Isaiah, in this case from chapter 61 (again) and from chapter 35. In both the theme is sociopolitical, not merely personal, deliverance. Bloesch's claim that Jesus, unlike the Hebrew prophets, makes personal concerns fundamental, and social ones merely secondary, collapses under the weight of Scripture itself. Jesus was not the kind of political Messiah his contemporaries expected, it is true, but he certainly stood with the prophets on the question of social justice: to him it was central.

Overwhelmingly, recent studies of Jesus

support this.⁷ Jesus was a Spirit-filled person, a man of mighty deeds and startling insight, who banqueted with outcasts, who challenged the established social hierarchies, who championed a just and fully inclusive form of human community. Of all the leaders in his tradition, he was “most like the classical prophets,”⁸ most like the great Hebrew advocates of social justice. Indeed, Jesus’ death came about precisely because of this. As the Gospels declare, he indicted the dominant culture and was deemed a threat to its future. Therefore, Jesus, knowing at firsthand the hiddenness of God and the dark night of the soul,⁹ was killed.

None of this, however, subverts God’s offer of personal forgiveness and his call to personal commitment. In religion, including Jesus’ religion, the personal is not a frill but a fundamental. As you cannot have peace without justice, you cannot have justice without the integrity of persons. Still, readings of Jesus’ life and death that make the social invisible or secondary are wrong. They are historically false. What is worse, they ratify egocentricity. Individualistic readings of Jesus’ life and death nourish an obsession with the introspective, with preoccupation over personal guilt and personal prospects. And this leaves questions of community and justice, central in Jesus’ tradition and in his own teaching, virtually ignored.

Social Justice and Substitutionary Atonement

In the light of Jesus’ life and death, then, justice is social and justice is central. But as I have said, this is obscured in popular Christian piety. One reason, and surely one of the most important reasons, is that it is obscured in the penal, substitutionary view of the atonement, the interpretation of Jesus’ life and death most common among conservatives and fundamentalist Christians. Curiously, though, in

the penal, substitutionary view, God’s justice figures prominently. How so?

A long theological history, going as far back as Tertullian and Cyprian,¹⁰ underlies the penal, substitutionary view. It is really one expression (the best-known expression) of what historians call the Latin or objective view of the atonement. After Luther, Protestant Orthodoxy, propelled by Melancthon and his theological adversary Osiander, crystallized the basic position that since then has had immense impact on the popular religious imagination. Today the prominent advocates include the evangelical scholar J. I. Packer and the celebrated evangelical pastor John R. W. Stott. Many Adventist pastors and teachers uphold doctrines of atonement similar to theirs.¹¹

According to a penal, substitutionary view of God’s justice, God requires full obedience to divine law. Any failure to obey, any lapse into sin, must be penalized, and the penalty is death. God is implacably hostile to sin, and the death penalty expresses this fact. It expresses God’s consistency and integrity—both the reality of divine wrath and the holiness of divine love.



Adapted from “Christ Pantocrator” from the Cathedral of Cefalù

Because no human being perfectly obeys God's law, no one of us measures up to the required standard. Everyone, therefore, deserves to die. But God is merciful. God loves us, and the love persists even when we disobey. So, in order to legitimate amnesty and save us from death, God initiates a plan of self-sacrifice. The premise is that the divine self-sacrifice makes more than adequate reparation for the guilt accrued by human disobedience.

The self-sacrifice involves the mystery of incarnation. God becomes flesh in Jesus, the Son of Mary. Jesus lives, uniquely so, a life of perfect obedience. Aware that through undeserved punishment his one case of perfection can win forgiveness in every other case, Jesus resolves to die and to bear the penalty deserved by others. By faithful and fearless obedience to the law, he enrages the (disobedient) authorities. Thus he invokes, he *purposefully* evokes, his own crucifixion, and thus he becomes our substitution.

God incarnate, Jesus the Son of Mary, dies *instead of us and so establishes the divine right of forgiveness*. This death, and this death alone, makes ample compensation for human wrong. The sinner may embrace this God in faith, may ask pardon and pledge commitment, and thereby benefit from the divine self-sacrifice. The death penalty, though fully deserved, loses its inexorability. God in Christ bears the punishment sin requires, bearing it for us and instead of us. In this way God propitiates God and now is able, in the

full integrity of holy love and holy wrath, to bestow acceptance and salvation on the undeserving.

A favorite way of expressing all this is to say that God in Christ bore the death penalty as our substitute in order to satisfy the demands of justice. According to Stott, justice requires punishment. Justice must be executed in a judgment upon sin, or sin is condoned. So God, by bearing the penalty others deserve, "defended and demonstrated" the divine justice.¹² Packer writes that "the retributive

principle," requiring punishment for wrongdoing, has God's "sanction" and expresses God's "justice."¹³

It now becomes clear why an interpretation of the cross can speak of justice yet obscure the fact that biblical justice is social. *The penal, substitutionary view assumes a different conception of justice from the one dominant in Scripture.* Retributive justice makes past wrongs right through punishment, but biblical justice

has, overwhelmingly, a different focus. To the Hebrew mind, justice is determined, compassionate faithfulness in the building of community and the meeting of human needs, especially the needs of the vulnerable.

Romans 3:21-26 is often said to prove the penal, substitutionary account, since Paul here writes that God gave up Christ Jesus "as a sacrifice of atonement" (NIV) in order "to show God's righteousness," or as some versions say, to "demonstrate his justice."¹⁴ But the background of the passage, as of the entire letter, is God's covenant with Israel. Paul is

The penal, substitutionary view assumes a different conception of justice from the one dominant in Scripture. Retributive justice makes past wrongs right through punishment, but biblical justice has a different focus. To the Hebrew mind, justice is determined, compassionate faithfulness in building community and meeting human needs.

addressing the house churches in Rome where divisiveness between the Gentile majority and the Jewish minority is threatening community. His overall point in the letter is to lift up the cross as proof of God's commitment to connect all peoples into a single new humanity.

The distinctions that divide God's children make no sense in the light the grace embodied in Christ. Jesus' sacrifice of atonement demonstrates, not a lawyerly (and legalistic) retributive justice, but the compassionate faithfulness of God to the original community-building promises.¹⁵ The point, as Paul writes in Romans 15:8, was to "confirm the promises given to the patriarchs" (RSV). This letter to the Romans and the letter to the Galatians attest, from the beginning to end, to the promise to Abraham: that his seed would mediate God's blessing to *all* the families of the earth.¹⁶

Stott writes in his book on the cross that the principle of substitution is the "foundation" of all the New Testament images of Christ's atonement. Whether "redemption" or "reconciliation" or "justification," each image of atonement "lacks cogency," he says, except in the context of penal, substitutionary doctrine.¹⁷ The truth is the opposite. This doctrine is so individualistic that it projects modern, introspective consciousness even onto God, whose plan of self-sacrifice is essentially a self-propitiation, resolving issues of inner, divine integrity.

God thus becomes an individualist. Stott does suggest that the cross as "revelation of God's justice" should evoke our concern with "social justice." But the discussion is brief, and the leap from the retributive conception of justice to the social conception is unexplained. Social justice receives a nod, but remains extrinsic to the basic meaning of the cross. Once Stott, commenting on Latin American theologian Jon Sobrino, remarks that Sobrino's concern to end oppression and relieve injustice are fine if he "is not denying the fundamental, atoning purpose of the cross."¹⁸ But

just these matters *are* the fundamental purpose of the cross. With respect to biblical justice, the penal, substitutionary doctrine does not illuminate, it obscures.

The cross puts *social* justice at the center. Christ represents the divine care and compassion for humanity, God's covenant-making, community-building faithfulness. The cross is God's perilous solidarity with those who by sinful disobedience injure themselves and one another as well as their Maker. The cross is God refusing to indulge disobedience, refusing to be indifferent to the harm it does. The cross is God bearing our sins, bearing them with such generosity and determination as to defeat resentments, heal the wounded, and renew community.¹⁹ The cross is God fighting the powers of evil, struggling for the social justice that gives rise to joy.

All this is *for* us. The justice of the cross is not an abstraction in the mind of God; it is the attitude and activity of amending inequities, embracing the afflicted, welcoming the undesirable—in short, of making shared life both joyful and strong. But we dare not forget that Christ on the cross represents us as well as God. Christ represents the true destiny and mission of humanity as well as the true destiny and mission of God.

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer writes: "The cross is laid on every Christian."²⁰ In New Testament light, this admits of no rebuttal. The Gospels, the various New Testament letters, the Apocalypse of John—all say repeatedly that Christ involves the believer in the sharing of his whole mission, the danger and the suffering as well as the eventual victory.²¹ As Gustavo Gutierrez remarks, "To believe is to proclaim the kingdom as Christ does—from the midst of the struggle for justice that led him to his death."²²

In one of her essays on language, Iris Yob remarks that metaphors are "semantically potent." They are not, in other words, mere

decoration: they have power, over and above prosaic speech, to shape the way we think and live.²³ That is why the alert community will always subject its metaphors, especially its favorite metaphors, to critical analysis. And that is why the penal, substitutionary doctrine again invites attention.

Substitution is a metaphor when applied to the atonement. The metaphor suggests, to invoke the familiar world of sports, that one person becomes involved while another rides the bench or stands along the sidelines. The suggestion is wrong. Christ on the cross acts for us and on our behalf, not instead of us. Christ represents true God and true humanity and is, as the first letter to Timothy declares, our mediator.²⁴ But Christ was not our substitute. We are, with Christ, a community of fellow sufferers.²⁵ The cross is laid on every Christian.

In the light, then, of Christ's atonement justice is social and central—and self-involving: for each believer and for the church as a whole, justice is a task to perform as well as a gift to receive. Knowing human sinfulness and divine forgiveness through the cross, true believers realize the equality of all before God



Adapted from "Throne of Grace," a manuscript illumination from Western Germany or Belgium

and lay aside the arrogance of self, class, race, and gender in order to embrace "the larger fellowship of life."²⁶ Through the church's task of social justice the promise to Abraham finds fulfillment today: God saves through partnership with people called for witness.²⁷ Instead of backing away from the struggle for justice, the community of Christ becomes by its participation the nucleus and vanguard of a new humanity of peace and joy.

Justice and a Non-Violent God

The cross illuminates justice in still another way: by exposing and challenging the violence in human life. In his remarkable new book, Robert G. Hammerton-Kelly explores Paul's hermeneutic of the cross with a view especially to the way human rivalry and envy give rise to "sacred violence."²⁸ Typically, he writes, individual human beings deal with their competitive desires and their consequent rage at each other by uniting in a common hostility against someone else or some other group.

Human beings cannot survive a chaos of sheer conflict among individuals. Cooperation is required. But the energy that fuels cooperation is sacred violence, the fervor of the group against a common victim. This energy is what explains the in-group/out-group mentality so pervasive in human life.

Paul's critique of the Judaism of his day precisely aimed at sacred violence, at the human tendency to channel rivalry and envy into victimizing, or scapegoating, forms of group loyalty. At first when he came to know the story of Christ's atonement he resisted it, and resisted it violently. Gentiles were outsiders in his thinking; they—and those who relaxed the boundaries—were dangerous, were legitimate scapegoats. His conversion occurred, not in a paroxysm of introspective guilt, but as he was on a mission to persecute Christians in

Damascus. Paul was a religious man, zealous enough to seek out and harm the enemies of his people's sacred law, and confident enough to think he himself was blameless in honoring that law.²⁹

But on the road to Damascus, Paul met the risen Christ and was converted. He began to regard the cross as an "epiphany" of the violence in the Judaism of his day,³⁰ and henceforth disavowed what he saw as Judaism's use of the Torah "to exclude the gentiles and to glorify itself." Through "the lens of the cross," he saw that his people's law had been "deformed to the service of violence." He saw that he himself had been infected with this violence.³¹

Jesus ministry and message was a reaching out to the victims of the human penchant for in-group/out-group thinking. He drew from his heritage the themes of sacrificial service and universal loyalty. He espoused nonviolence. He called for the love of the enemy. For all this, he was executed.³² But on the Damascus road, Paul met Jesus resurrected, and embraced him as the Messiah, the Messiah of Jews and gentiles alike.³³

From that day forward Paul became an advocate of a justice configured by the cross, a justice shaped by the universal love of

Christ and shorn of the distinctions and violence engendered by in-group/out-group thinking.³⁴ In light of Christ's atonement, justice is both radically inclusive and radically nonviolent.

Jesus was not the political Messiah his contemporaries expected, it is true. He rejected the group loyalties men and women so doggedly cling to and authorized not only a universal love but also a vision, rooted in Isaiah, of nonviolent, suffering service. This is an unexpected form of politics, but it is still politics, still a strategy to shape society. Mennonite theologian John Driver calls it "a new kind of power, the power of servanthood."³⁵ The cross, in short, illuminates the meaning—and the means—of justice.

According, then, to the light that streams from the cross of Calvary, the gospel is social and the cross is the proof. From this perspective, God's justice is social, his justice is central, his justice is self-involving, his justice is radically inclusive and radically nonviolent. All this follows from Christ's atonement, and all this condemns egocentric—and as we now also see, group-centered—readings of the cross. God's business, and God's joy, is community.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978 [first published in 1971]), p. 279.

2. Ellen White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1955), p. 221.

3. Two New Testament passages that link the Resurrection with the belief that Jesus is the revelation of God are Romans 1:4 and Colossians 1:18, 19. I borrow the "focus" metaphor from H. Richard Niebuhr, who in *Christ in Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 29, writes that Christ "exists . . . as the focusing point" of the movement of God toward humanity and of humanity toward God. Both divine and human being are illuminated by other means—by the prophets of old, e.g., or the church of today—but the focus is

imperfect in Christ.

4. Here the classic essay is Krister Stendahl's "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in the author's *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 78-96.

5. The relevant Hebrew words include *sedez/sedaqah* and *mispat*, with *besed*, meaning "steadfast love," an important part of background. For a recent application, see Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991). From the Bible consult, for example, Deuteronomy 10, Psalm 146, Isaiah 1 and 2 and 58 and 61. For a study of community-building as the basic impulse of the biblical tradition, see Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

6. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical*

Theology, Vol. II: *Life, Ministry and Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978-1979), pp. 156, 157.

7. For two summaries of 20th-century scholarship, see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), and Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987); for studies of individual Gospels see Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), on Luke; and Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), on Mark; for an historical study of Jesus and social revolution, see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

8. So writes Borg, in *Jesus: A New Vision*, p. 150.

9. On this see Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), p. 169.

10. The classic, and much discussed, short history of the doctrine is Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor* (New York: Macmillan, 1969 [first published in 1931]).

11. Among them, Smuts van Rooyen, Desmond Ford, Norman Gulley, and Richard Fredericks. The latter's recent account appeared in "The Moral Influence Theory—Its Attraction and Inadequacy," *Ministry* (March 1992), pp. 6-10.

12. John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 211.

13. J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?" *Tyndale Bulletin*, XXV (1974), p. 30.

14. The KJV, RSV, and NRSV translations say "righteous" or "righteousness"; the NEB and REB translations say "justice."

15. For an essay connecting Paul's doctrine with the Hebrew idea of justice, or covenant faithfulness, see Sam K. Williams, "The 'Righteousness of God' in Romans," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XCIX (1980), 241-290. For a recent collection of essays on Romans, in which matters I am here discussing figure prominently, see Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate: Expanded Revised Edition* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991).

16. See Galatians 3: 6-9, 13, 14, and Genesis 12:1-3. For a similar world-embracing vision, see Isaiah 42:1-4.

17. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 168.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 292, 334.

19. The sentence reflects the analysis of forgiveness found in James McClendon's *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), pp. 224-229.

20. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 99.

21. Besides *The Cost of Discipleship*, which cites numerous biblical passages in developing its theme of following Christ, consult the compendium in chapter 7 of John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*.

22. Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 20.

23. The phrase is from page 2 of a manuscript on "Teaching in the Language of Religion," to be published in the journal *Religious Education*.

24. 1 Timothy 2:5.

25. See Philippians 3:10.

26. Rauschenbusch's phrase, from *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, p. 273.

27. Consider Genesis 12:2, 3 and Luke 1:72-75.

28. Hamerton-Kelly's book, *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), draws on the theory of the Durkheimian critic and sociologist Rene Girard, who argues that "sacred violence" is the energy that drives social systems.

29. See Philippians 3:4-6.

30. Hamerton-Kelly, *Sacred Violence*, p. 65.

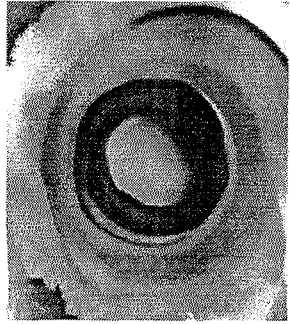
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

32. The works cited in footnote 7 all support these claims.

33. Hamerton-Kelly is taking issue in his book with those writers, among them J. Gager and L. Gaston, who, after Franz Rosenweig, argue that "Jesus is not the Messiah of Israel but only the Messiah of the gentiles" (p. 186). Paul actually broke with the Judaism he knew.

34. Hamerton-Kelly does (pp. 138, 139) raise questions, at the point of his doctrine of election, about Paul's consistency in rejecting in-group/out-group thinking.

35. John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church* (Scottsdale, Penna.: Herald Press, 1986), p. 91.



Adapted from Georgia O'Keeffe's
"Lake George in the Woods"

The Omnipotence Fallacy and Beyond

God's power is limited. Therefore, it is questionable to indict God for the evils of life.

by David R. Larson

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways."

—1 Corinthians 13:11, R.S.V.

NOT LONG AGO I MET A JOGGING FRIEND AT A bank who told me about a teenage relative who, along with doctors and nurses, is waging a war against a life-threatening malignancy. "Sometimes it makes you wonder," my friend observed. "It certainly does!" I responded.

Why does God allow such things? Although I didn't mention it to my friend at the bank, part of an answer that increasingly makes sense to me is that God's power is limited. Contrary to our first impressions as children, divine power cannot do anything

and everything. Properly understood, omnipotence is not, as one of my dictionaries says, "unlimited power and ability." To misunderstand this point is wrongly to blame God for every evil that occurs by committing some version of the so-called "omnipotence fallacy." To grasp it is to take an important step on the long journey toward mature faith.

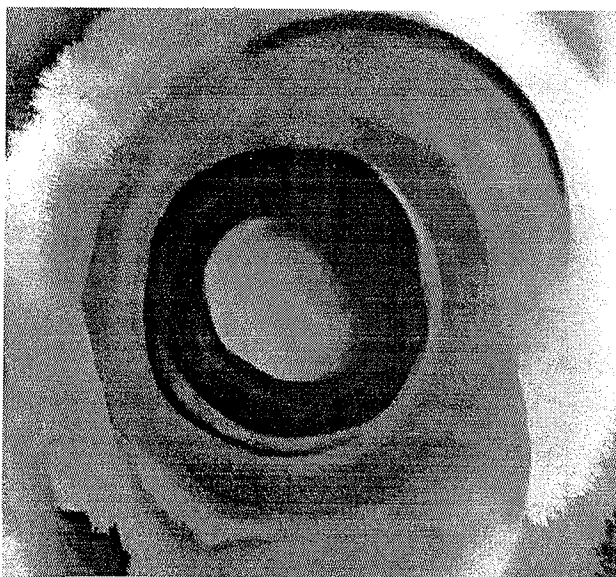
If I understand things correctly, God's power is limited by logical, ontological, and ethical restraints. The logical constraints are necessary. It is very difficult to conceive of a deity to whom they would not apply. The ethical constraints are contingent. They pertain to God only if—or only because—God is morally good. The ontological constraints are either necessary or contingent, depending upon how one understands the relationships between God and the universe. Whether necessary or contingent, however, they effectively curtail divine power. These various limits converge in ways that make it questionable to indict God for the evils of life.

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Logical Limits

Almost everyone agrees that God's power is limited by logical constraints. God cannot do that which is inherently self-contradictory. God cannot make a square circle, a triangle with four angles, a cube with five square sides, or a diamond with four straight but unequal lines. This limit constitutes no defect in God. Neither does it suggest that God must submit to some other actuality. Much less does it imply that God is less important or valuable than something else. To ask God to do that which is inherently self-contradictory is to fail to make an intelligible request. It is to make noise without making sense.

Keeping this limit in mind can prevent us from asking God to do that which is meaningless. Sometimes we wonder, for instance, why God does not create persons who would be "exactly like we are" except that they would be incapable of causing suffering by doing evil. But beings who are "exactly *like* us" are "exactly *unlike* us" at a crucial point of comparison if they cannot choose to do evil. Or to use another illustration, we sometimes pray that God will "make Jack love Jill" or vice



Adapted from Georgia O'Keeffe's "Lake George in the Woods"

versa. But this request also contradicts itself if, as most of us properly believe, true love must be freely given. God cannot *force* Jack *voluntarily* to offer his affection to Jill or to anyone else.

We sometimes pray that God will spare us and others from the consequences of decisions we have deliberately made. But God cannot do this without eviscerating the meaning of the choices we prize. To ask God to do such things is to fail, however innocently, to make meaningful requests of God. Such petitions are understandable when we are children. They are less so when we are adults.

Many persons hold that divine power is limited by logical constraints but by nothing else. This position is exceedingly persuasive if one is a pantheist, but less so otherwise. All true pantheists contend that God and the universe are identical. Many pantheists also believe that God is wholly capable of completely determining every detail of God's own life. From this point of view, it does make sense to suppose that God's power is limited by nothing but logical constraints because, quite literally, there is nothing other than God that could possibly hamper divine omnipotence. But for those of us who are not pantheists, for those of us who believe that the one Creator continuously coexists with innumerable creatures, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that divine omnipotence is limited by logical constraints, but that it is limited by the power of the countless others as well.

Ontological Limits

That God's power is limited by the power of all who are not God is explicit and obvious in some schools of thought. Plato thought, for instance, that God struggles to elicit order and beauty out of a somewhat

recalcitrant chaos. In our own time, the exponents of process theology often assert the primordial power of creatures to be something other than the Creator an eternal "given" that not even the Creator can alter. They frequently contend that the Creator does the best that can be done as a positive influence on the countless creatures. However, because these individuals are inherently capable of resisting the Supreme Being with their own embodiments of primordial power, God is by no means indictable for every evil that occurs throughout the universe. Hence, according to schemes of things such as Plato's philosophy and process theology, God's power is unquestionably limited by the primordial power that is embodied in all those who are not God.

Although it is less obvious, and often debated or even denied, the power of the Supreme Being is limited by the power of other beings, even in the more prevalent forms of ethical monotheism. Generally speaking, persons with this perspective, and I include myself among them, view the power of countless billions to be something other than God not as something that is a "given *for* God" but as something that is a "gift *from* God." From this point of view, all those who are not God live and move and have their being not in themselves but in the Creator, as the Apostle Paul reminded the philosophers of Athens by quoting one of their own poets (Acts 17:28). It might seem, at first glance, that the dependence of all creatures upon divine power for their very lives makes it impossible for them successfully to resist it. But this is not the case. God's power can be and often is resisted by those whose lives depend upon it.

Perhaps God's situation in this view of things can be compared to that of a human parent confronted by a dependent child who acts in independent ways. God could withdraw the gift of life from all those who resist. Or he could force all resisters to comply. But

either option would eliminate the creature's separate identity and life, which is God's basic intent. If God exercises the first option, the creature dies. If God selects the second, the creature becomes a mere extension and expression of the divine will with no separate existence. In both instances, this destroys the Creator's gift to the creature of a life of its own.

Power can accomplish only so much. It can compel. And it can crush. But it cannot preserve the continuing uniqueness of the other if it does either. Whether by necessity or by choice, divine power is constrained and God coexists with billions of other beings instead of destroying all resisters either by coercing them or by eliminating them. The only alternative would be for God to be "home alone." But God is not solitary. The divine realm includes many guests. God's power is limited by their presence and by their power, whether a "given for God" or a "gift from God."

Many Christians concede that divine power is limited by the power of those who, like normal and healthy human adults, can exercise moral freedom. This insight is valid as far as it goes, but it must be extended in a way that acknowledges the capacity of all individuals, not merely those who possess moral autonomy, to resist God's power to some extent, however slight.

Much of the evil we see throughout the universe is clearly caused by the misuse of moral freedom. Many other evils are caused by ethical violations that took place so long ago and so far away that we can no longer trace the connections. But there are other evils that seem related to abuses of moral freedom in only the very most remote ways, if at all. Whenever we encounter such destructive forces, we should bear in mind that all beings, and not merely those relatively few who enjoy moral freedom, have at least some ability, however slight, to pursue their own perceived goods to the detriment of the whole of which they are a part. Such resistance to God's will

is rarely sinful because it is not usually conscious, let alone deliberate. Nevertheless, it is destructive, sometimes devastatingly so. To this we can attribute much of the evil of the world that is not caused by human wrongdoing.

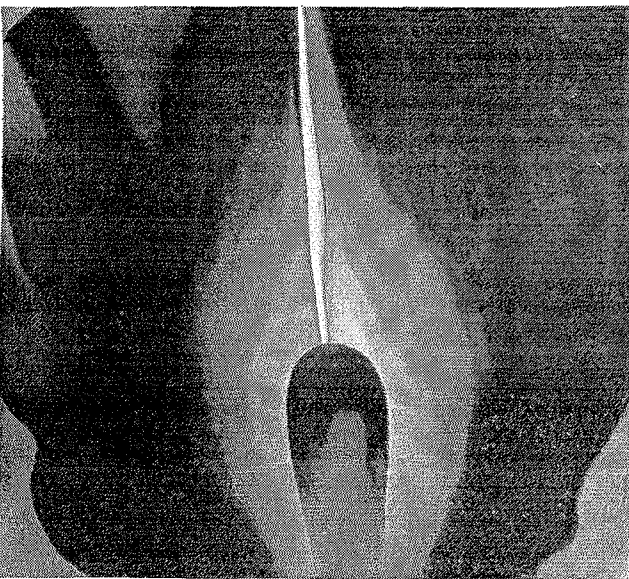
Ethical Limits

God's power is limited by logical and by ontological constraints. But it is curtailed by ethical boundaries as well. There are some things God cannot do because he is morally good. This is one of the ways in which a biblical view of God differs from many other portraits of the divine. So often these other religious perspectives, some of which are ostensibly Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, portray God as "beyond" good and evil or, worse yet, as "including" both. Such a deity would not be limited by ethical constraints. But the God of the Abrahamic faiths is morally good without qualification or equivocation. The power of this God is limited by moral considerations.

At the very least, because God is morally good, divine power must be exercised in a *morally consistent* manner. Similar cases must

be treated similarly. Equals in equal circumstances must be treated equally. To this fundamental ethical requirement there can be no exception whatsoever. If cases or individuals are treated dissimilarly, it must be because, and only because, they or their circumstances are different in some ethically relevant way. This means that as we mature in faith, we should be increasingly reluctant to ask God to do for us what it would be impossible or undesirable for God to do for any other individual or group in an ethically identical situation. We should not ask God to exercise divine power in an inconsistent, arbitrary, or capricious manner. And we should not be surprised if God declines to act in these ways if we so request. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," Jesus said, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44, 45).

To say that God's power is limited by ethical constraints is also to claim that, because God is morally good, divine power must be exercised in a *morally effective* manner. This involves at least two things. On the one hand, the means God uses must produce the ends he seeks. God cannot establish a loving community in hateful ways. He cannot foster nonviolence by prompting violence. He cannot nurture justice by indulging in injustice. He cannot encourage freedom by acting oppressively. He cannot nurture maturity by insisting upon immaturity. On the other hand, the ends God seeks must be morally commendable. A large river of religious thought contends today as it has for thousands of years that God could have enjoyed all eternity in self-satisfied solitariness but chose instead at a particular time to create free moral agents who can accept or reject divine grace. Another stream of religious thought contends that over the millennia God encouraged the evolution of free moral agents who could truly love one



Adapted from Georgia O'Keeffe's "Jack-in-the-Pulpit, IV"

another and their Creator. These alternative readings of the human situation may differ in many ways but not about God's ultimate purposes. According to both schools of thought, God seeks to co-exist with those who can give and receive genuine, uncoerced, love. God can do many things. But because he is morally good, divine power cannot use any means that would frustrate, immediately or eventually, the flourishing of uncoerced love. And because God is morally good, divine power cannot do anything that would compromise, directly or indirectly, the overwhelming propriety and priority of this end.

Does this make prayer pointless? Not at all! Prayer is not the morally questionable practice of trying to cajole God into doing for us what it would be inappropriate for divine power to do for any other person or group whose circumstances are relevantly similar to our own. Among other things, prayer is the honorable attempt, however feeble and broken, to discern God's will more clearly and to do it more fully. Ellen White and her editors put it more clearly than I can: "Prayer is not to work any change in God; it is to bring us into harmony with God" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 143).

From Coercion to Persuasion

When we consider the ways divine power is constrained, we may feel disappointed or sad, almost as if we wish it were possible for God to escape these limits so as to be able to do whatever we desire. Such feelings, though misplaced, are understandable, given the circumstances of our lives. Despite our many other differences, and regardless of where we

have spent our days, virtually all of us have been educated to prize coercive power. The capacity to compel, the ability to crush, the might to harm and kill: this is the kind of power we know best and prize most. And this is the kind of power we expect God to manifest.

And yet, as illustrated by the recent tragedies at Waco, Texas, the capacity to coerce is exceedingly weak in comparison with the ability to persuade. The officials who surrounded the Branch Davidians possessed much coercive power but little persuasive power. They planned to increase their use of coercive power incrementally until it persuaded those inside the compound to surrender. But their plan didn't work. This made them look and feel powerless.

God's approach functions the other way. Instead of increasing coercive power until it becomes persuasive, it increases persuasive power until it becomes coercive in a different sense. God's power is limited. But because it can convince without crushing, no force in the entire universe is more powerful than the divine ability to persuade. This is the power to notice. This is the power to worship. And this is the power to emulate. By comparison, all other power, no matter how great, is embarrassing weakness.

This essay is one of five presentations David Larson made at the Randall Visitors Center Sabbath school in Loma Linda, California, during the spring and summer of 1993 when the lessons focused on the book of Job. The titles of the other presentations are: (1) "Why Head-Tripping Can Be a Good Thing"; (2) "Amoral, Immoral, Transmoral: What Is God?" (3) "Doubting the Evil of Evil"; and (4) "Can Evil Ever End?" Those who desire complimentary copies of the other presentations are invited to write to the author at the Faculty of Religion, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California 92350.



Adapted from Michelangelo's
"God Separating Sky and Water"

God and His Most Glorious Theater

How rational people can believe in God—revisiting a version of the argument from design.

by John T. Baldwin

ADVENTISTS HAVE BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF Protestants concerned with continued belief in God in the light of scientific evidence. Not all Adventists agree on what kind of God they can affirm, and how God relates to the world.

The present discussion traces evidence for the interaction of God and the world—hence his existence—known as the argument for God's existence from perfection tradition, stemming from its probable inception in William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802) to its influence upon contemporary thinkers such as philosopher of religion Alvin Plantinga, as well as scholars standing outside the tradition,

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such as geneticist Richard Goldsmith and paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould.

Throughout *Natural Theology* Paley frequently refers to and rejects as inadequate a theory of origins based on what he calls the concept of appetencies. These appetencies are located in soft, ductile pieces of matter. Introducing this theory, Paley writes, "Another system, which has lately been brought forward, and with much ingenuity, is that of *appetencies*."¹ Although in *Natural Theology* Paley does not explicitly link the name of Erasmus Darwin to this concept, Paley often refers to Darwin by name and also to several of Darwin's works in *Natural Theology*, thereby establishing his close acquaintance with Darwin and his works.

The source of the appetency theory is found in a chapter entitled "Generation" in Erasmus Darwin's work *Zoonomia; or the Laws of Organic Life*. Since this hypothesis had appeared just six years before Paley published *Natural Theology* in 1802, he describes it as a theory that "has lately been brought forward."² Darwin describes the theory in some

detail: "All animals therefore, I contend, have a similar cause of their organization, originating from a single living filament, endued indeed with different kinds of irritabilities and sensibilities, or of animal appetencies."³

The macroevolutionary implications of this theory are significant. Erasmus Darwin contends that the warm-blooded animals, for example, have "alike been produced from a similar living filament." Concerning birds, Darwin states that "this original living filament has put forth wings instead of arms or legs." Moreover, in language that anticipates concepts later advanced by Lamarck, he states that physical "exertions to gratify . . . lust, hunger, and security" have "changed the forms of many animals."⁴

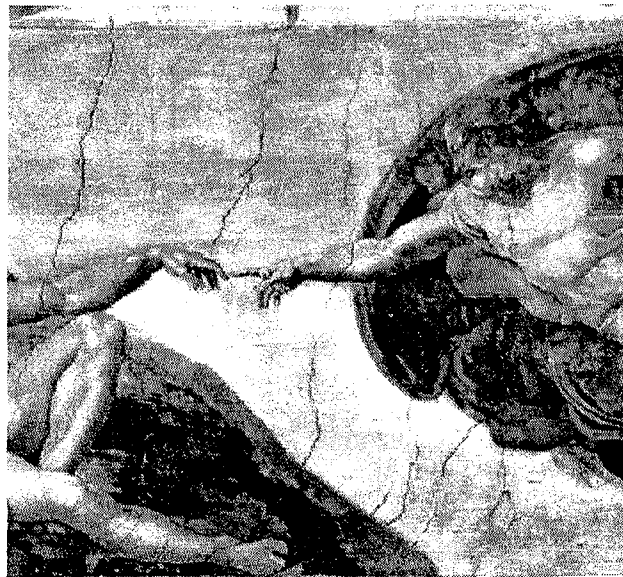
This developmental method means, as Paley observes, that the animal parts "have themselves grown out of that action,"⁵ rather than having been originally designed for a particular use. For instance, Darwin asserts that the trunk of the elephant "is an elongation of the nose for the purpose of pulling down the branches of trees for his food."⁶ Darwin presents the following grand conclusion made possible by this theory:

In the great length of time, since the earth began to exist, perhaps millions of ages before the commencement of the history of mankind, would it be too bold to imagine, that all warm-blooded animals have arisen from one living filament . . . with the power of acquiring new parts, attended with new propensities, directed by irritations, sensations, volitions, and associations; and thus possessing the faculty of continuing to improve by its own inherent activity, and of delivering down those improvements by generation to its posterity, world without end!⁷

How does Paley answer this serious biological challenge to the design argument? Characterizing the difficulty, he warns, "The theory therefore dispenses with that which we insist upon, the necessity, in each particular case, of an intelligent, designing mind, for the

contriving and determining of the forms which organized bodies bear."⁸ Paley briefly responds by introducing the argument from perfection.

I shall briefly discuss its essence and name. The argument from perfection is a subspecies of the design argument and focuses upon a restricted window of reality, specifically the rise *de novo* of a "first" new body part, instinct, or ability. This focus implies that the argument from perfection deals exclusively with the development *de novo* of the first incipient new animal structures or instincts. For example, assuming the Darwinian principle of *natura non facit saltum* ("nature does not make leaps"), the argument from perfection asks how, biologically speaking, a brand new, first-time-ever body part can originate over many generations by means of many small, incomplete, initial stages called incipient forms, if none of these structures are useful entities in themselves. In other words, the argument queries: How can these incipient forms be preserved by the action of natural selection when these bridging stages, viewed individually, have no selective advantage? Thus in effect the argument from perfection holds that nothing works until everything works.



Adapted from Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam"

The first individual to give a formal name to this method of argumentation may be Gertrude Himmelfarb. While writing about the elements of this argument in a 1968 work entitled *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*, she offers this nomenclatural line, "The same supple and yet aggressive tactics are displayed in Darwin's efforts to capture that traditional stronghold of teleology: the argument from perfection."⁹

In the following passage, Paley discusses the formation *de novo* of the epiglottis; here the argument from perfection is articulated, perhaps for the first time in British natural theological thought:

There is no room for pretending, that the action of the parts may have gradually formed the epiglottis: I do not mean in the same individual, but in a succession of generations. Not only the action of the parts has no such tendency, but the animal could not live, nor consequently the parts act, either without it, or with it in a half-formed state. The species was not to wait for the gradual formation or expansion of a part, which was, from the first necessary to the life of the individual.¹⁰

A clearer indication of the argument from perfection can hardly be imagined. The two crucial concepts—"in a half-formed state" and "the species was not to wait for the gradual formation or expansion of a part, which was, from the first necessary to the life of the individual"—represent the essence of the idea of the argument from perfection. In effect, Paley is asking: How can an epiglottis first originate *de novo* and subsequently develop slowly by means of the supposed functioning

of a useless bulge? For Paley, the epiglottis could not evolve in this manner; hence, some form of causality other than chance origin is called for. Paley's answer was "an intelligent and designing Creator."¹¹ Soon other thinkers followed Paley's lead concerning the impact of the argument from perfection.

In one of the most amazing shifts in the history of ideas, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) employed what may be considered an indirect use of the argument from perfection against the very theory of natural selection that he had founded with Charles Darwin. While studying the origin of the speech-forming mental capacities of selected races in the Far

East, Wallace discovered little if any difference in mental capacity between so-called sophisticated European minds and the abilities present in his study groups. In light of this finding he asks:

How was an organ [the human brain] developed so far beyond the needs of its possessor? Natural selection could only have endowed the savage with a brain a little superior to that of an

ape, whereas he actually possesses one but very little inferior to that of the average members of our learned societies.¹⁵

Here Wallace makes the important point that an instrument has been developed far in advance of the needs of its possessor, which presents difficulties for the notion that nature does not make leaps. In other words, Wallace concludes that based on Darwin's principles, significantly advanced perfection in mental capacity should not be associated with a specific animal form prior to the need for such perfection and for immediate survival. Based

In one of the most amazing shifts in the history of ideas, Alfred Russel Wallace employed what may be considered an indirect use of the argument from perfection against the very theory of natural selection that he had founded with Charles Darwin.

on previous correspondence with Wallace, and anticipating his direction in the *Quarterly* article quoted above, Darwin wrote the following words to Wallace shortly before its appearance, "I shall be intensely curious to read the *Quarterly*. I hope you have not murdered too completely your own and my child."¹³ Darwin wavered and seems to have returned to a formerly rejected and truly untenable Lamarckian position.

Two years later Huxley responded to Wallace with the following surprising retort, "The lowest savages are as devoid of any such conceptions as the brutes themselves."¹⁴ This desperate remark implied that Wallace had misread his subjects and that they indeed had very little mental capacity. Wallace's findings prompted him to seek a form of causality other than one driven solely by the extremely gradual, fortuitous formation of human mental capacities. Concerning the nature of such a needed cause, Wallace writes, "We must therefore, admit the possibility, that in the development of the human race, a Higher Intelligence had guided the same laws for nobler ends."¹⁵

In 1871, the same year as Huxley's response to Wallace, St. George Mivart applied the argument from perfection in a work bearing the significant title *On the Genesis of Species*. The second chapter, entitled "Incipient Structures," discusses numerous biological anatomical parts of which the origin *de novo* Mivart believes defies adequate explanation by means of Darwin's gradualistic theory. For example, Mivart points to the alleged incipient development of baleen in whales and wonders how one can "obtain the beginning of such useful development."¹⁶ In other words, he questions how the "network of countless" fibers constituting the food-catching plates of baleen could successfully function in a less than complete or perfect form.¹⁷ Mivart's point, of course, is that if incipient structures of baleen are essentially of no use to the aquatic animal, how can these structures be retained

by a process of natural selection that in the building of a new body part retains only forms beneficial to the creature?

Early in the twentieth century, Henri Bergson briefly invoked the argument from perfection as he suggested the idea of an "original impetus of life" to replace the notion of materialistic evolution. He asked, "How could they [insensible variations in both vertebrate and mollusk eyes] have been preserved by selection and accumulated in both cases, the same in the same order, when each of them, taken separately, was of no use?"¹⁸

Twenty-nine years later, Richard Goldschmidt, although standing outside the argument from perfection tradition, nevertheless expressed sentiments similar to those of Mivart and Bergson. This eminent Berkeley geneticist based his famous "hopeful monster" concept (which replaces the Darwinian rate of evolutionary development) in part on aspects of the argument from perfection. While remaining a wholly naturalistic evolutionist, Goldschmidt nevertheless boldly confronted the traditional Darwinian methodological rate theory with the following developmental puzzles:

I may challenge the adherents of the strictly Darwinian view, which we are discussing here, to try to explain the evolution of the following features by accumulation and selection of small mutants: hair in mammals, feathers in birds, . . . teeth, shells of mollusks, ectoskeletons, compound eyes, blood circulation, . . . poison apparatus of snakes, . . . etc. Corresponding examples from plants could be given.¹⁹

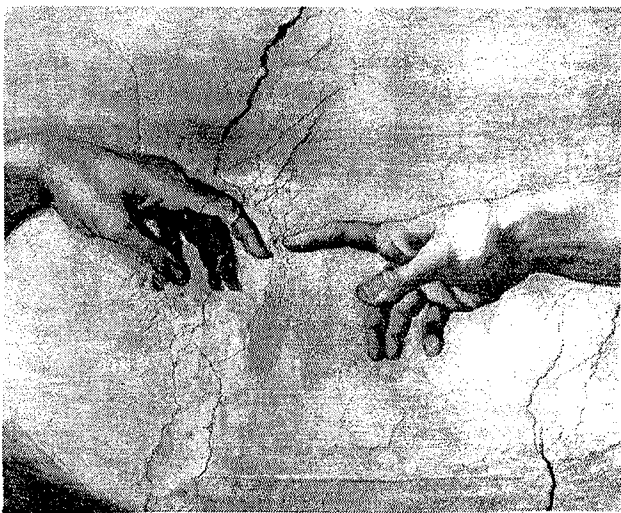
Goldschmidt illustrated the lethal effect of the argument from perfection on some aspects of traditional Darwinian theory, for example, in its account of the gradual origin *de novo* of the mouth parts of the mosquito and the bee: "Among these evolutionary steps there are many of a type which preclude an evolution by slow accumulation of micromutations. The

mouth parts of a mosquito or of a bee . . . are an example in question: gradations between generalized and specialized types would have died of starvation."²⁰ These lines show the impact of the argument from perfection on Goldschmidt's thought, which may have been one factor influencing him to develop the "hopeful monster" theory, which advocates genetic changes that are large enough in a single generation to be retained by natural selection.

A. E. Taylor contributes to the argument from perfection tradition in his 1947 work *Does God Exist?* He claims that the force of the argument from perfection has the following far-reaching implications:

If . . . we think of each change in the strict Darwinian fashion, as arising separately by a minute variation, it follows that during most of the period over which the process is going on there has been *no* advantage derived from the variations, and no reason, therefore, why they should have been preserved by "natural selection." The reasoning seems to me to be fatal to *any* theory of the origination of species in the course of "unguided" evolution.²¹

Taylor's admission that the argument from perfection seems "to be fatal to any theory of unguided evolution" is the most significant



Adapted from a detail of Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam"

single evaluation of the implications of this argument that I have discovered to date. This conclusion has direct relevance for the discussion of the relation of God and the world at the conclusion of this article.

In "Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism," Niles Elderidge and Stephen Jay Gould—both of whom, like Goldschmidt, stand outside the argument from perfection tradition—advance a new theory of the rate of evolutionary change largely based on the picture of a fossil record that documents biological stasis rather than phyletic gradualism. In some of his subsequent writings, however, Gould discusses the argument from perfection in a fashion that suggests that he may base the need for rapid and "episodic events of allopatric speciation," not only on the absences of transitional forms in the fossil record, but also in part on the biological implications of some aspects of the argument from perfection.²² For instance, concerning the significance of an aspect of the argument, Gould asks: "Can we invent a reasonable sequence of intermediate forms—that is, viable, functioning organisms—between ancestors and descendants in major structural transitions? Of what possible use are the imperfect incipient stages of useful structures? What good is a half a jaw or half a wing?"²³ The phrase "half a jaw or half a wing" shows Gould working with the basic concept of the argument from perfection. Although preadaptation, the conventional response to the incipient organ problem—perhaps the half-wing trapped prey—may apply to some cases, Gould raises the following question: "Does it [preadaptation] permit us to invent a tale of continuity in most or all cases? I submit . . . that the answer is no."²⁴

Although Gould does not discuss the issue, preadaptation also faces the biological difficulty of the infinite regress of preadaptation in light of the argument from perfection. The so-called half-wing that trapped prey is not,

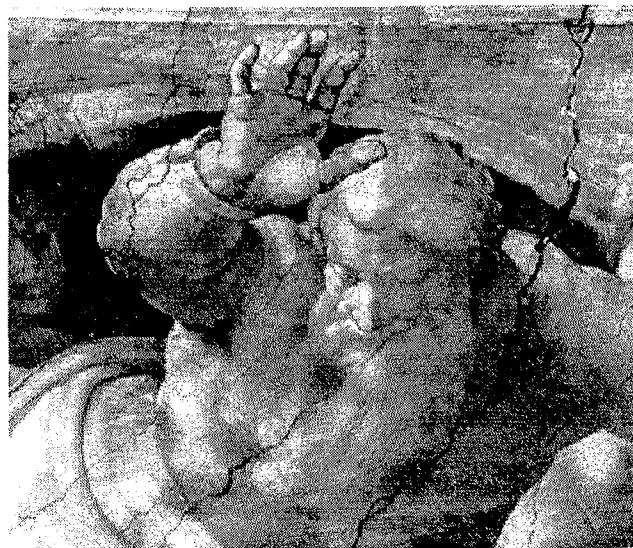
properly speaking, a “half-wing.” Rather, it is an end in itself, because there is no place for overarching future-oriented goals in evolution toward which forms develop. Therefore, the half-wing may be called an insect trap and so on, indefinitely. Biologically, the chain of forms seems to require some kind of perfection of structural forms from the beginning of its existence in order to function.

Two philosophers of religion, Anthony Kenny and Alvin Plantinga, and one scientist-theologian, John Polkinghorne, discuss what I suggest is the crucial theological significance of this research concerning the argument from perfection tradition. The argument from perfection raises afresh the question of the relation of God and the world.

This issue is concerned with problems such as the following: What are the foundational presuppositions necessary for a proper consideration of the issue of God and the world? In what way does the argument from perfection open the question of the actions of divine and secondary causality in the world? As noted earlier, Taylor concludes that the argument from perfection is “fatal to *any* theory of the origination of species in the course of ‘un-guided’ evolution.”²⁵ Thus, does the argument from perfection suggest a need for an active causality in the world other than that described empirically? Can the divine causality properly be said to interpenetrate the phenomenal realm of space-time or secondary causation in some sense? In other words, how shall we properly characterize the relation of God and the world? These questions indicate the central theological issues raised by the argument from perfection, thus showing the theological significance of this study. The brief analysis below addresses such theological issues raised by the argument from perfection.

In his 1986 reflections, “The Argument from Design,” Anthony Kenny discusses the is-

sue of the “God-of-the-gaps” in relation to the design argument. Kenny makes a new distinction between contingent and necessary gaps in explanation. The former, he holds, would “only have a precarious hold on worship.”²⁶ Having made this important distinction, he cogently argues for the existence of a necessary gap in the phenomenon of the origin of what amounts to sexuality, that is, the origin of true-breeding species. Kenny states that the “Darwinian explanation cannot explain the origin of true-breeding species.”²⁷ In effect, Kenny is arguing that the origin *de novo* of true-breeding species represents a necessary gap which calls for a principle of originating causality other than that provided by the Darwinian theory. In this way he acknowledges in principle the biological gaps outlined by Gould and others. In his vision, however, aspects of the argument from perfection in conjunction with these gaps may suggest a more active role for God in relation to the world than is generally granted in modern theological thinking as demonstrated, for example, by Friedrich Schleiermacher in *The Christian Faith*. In Schleiermacher’s view the divine causality does not interfere with the realm of secondary causality, whereas in



Adapted from Michelangelo's "God Separating Sky and Water"

Kenny's vision there may be room for some form of a dynamic interpenetration of God and the world.

This last point is underscored by Alvin Plantinga in a recent article entitled, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible." In this piece Plantinga discusses the likelihood of evolution according to pure Darwinism in light of the argument from perfection, intensified in this instance by the fact that not just the eye is involved in this transition, but the "whole visual system, including the relevant parts of the brain."²⁸ The question is, how, biologically, can one properly "envisage a series of mutations which is such that each member of the series has adaptive value, is also a step on the way to the eye, and is such that the last member is an animal with such an eye."²⁹ In light of this developmental question, Plantinga concludes that the "vast majority of these paths contain long sections with adjacent points such that there would be no adaptive advantage in going from one point to the next, so that on Darwinian assumptions, none of them could be the path in fact taken."³⁰ According to Plantinga, the theological implication of this evidence is that from a Christian point of view one needs a scientific account of life that is not restricted by "methodological naturalism."³¹ I suggest that the account of life includes the relation of God and the world.

Finally, in a recent article scientist-theologian John Polkinghorne also calls for a reconsideration of the relation of God and the world. In "God's Action in the World,"

Polkinghorne rejects, on the one hand, the popular notion of a God of extrinsic, imposed gaps, because these "bad" gaps represent arbitrary ignorance. On the other hand, Polkinghorne argues that within the hiddenness of flexible processes, God acts as guide in relation to intrinsic gaps: "I'm not talking about arbitrary gaps but rather intrinsic gaps. If the world's process is genuinely open, it has to be 'gappy' in this intrinsic sense. We are people of the gaps, as we make our way through choice, and I don't think *in that sense* it is all pejorative to speak about God as being of the gaps."³² The implication

of Polkinghorne's quotation is to invite fresh reflection concerning the possibility of a dynamic interpretation of God and the world.

In summary, this study illustrates some biological and theological aspects of the continuing impact of the argument from perfection tradition. Due in part to aspects of this argument, the thinkers discussed turn to accounts of origins differing from

the strict Darwinian position. On the one hand, motivated by the biological evidence discussed, but restricting themselves to a one-dimensional model of world reality, Goldschmidt and Gould (themselves standing outside the argument from perfection tradition) of necessity turn for an alternative model of origins to a refined concept of the "hopeful monster" theory wholly explainable by empirical principles within a materialistic framework.

On the other hand, Paley, Wallace, Mivart, Bergson, Taylor, Kenny, Plantinga, and

If the world's process is genuinely open, it has to be 'gappy' in this intrinsic sense. We are people of the gaps, as we make our way through choice, and I don't think in that sense it is at all pejorative to speak about God as being of the gaps.

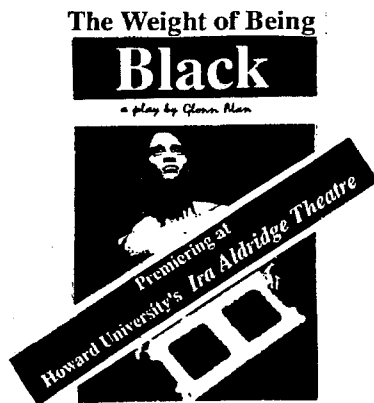
—John Polkinghorne

Polkinghorne, prompted by similar biological evidence but remaining open to a wider model of reality (one that can include a trans-empirical dimension) and to a dynamic relationship between God and the world, conclude that the evidence points more convincingly to some kind of originating causality that in the

final analysis lies beyond the reach of "methodological naturalism." Thus, for Adventists and other theists concerned about creation, the theological implications of the argument from perfection call for a fresh, continuing study of the issue of the relationship between God and the world.

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22. Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, "Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism," in Niles Eldredge, ed., *Time Frames* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) p. 207.
23. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb* (New York: Norton, 1980), p. 189.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Taylor, *Does God Exist?*, p. 61.
26. Anthony Kenny, *Reason and Religion: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), p. 84.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Alvin Plantinga, "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (1991), p. 25.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. John Polkinghorne, "God's Action in the World," *Cross Currents* 41 (1991), p. 305.



The Weight of Being Black

by Camille R. Lofters

Adventist college alumni, students, and faculty write, perform, and produce a play at a famous off-off-Broadway theater.

When *The Weight of Being Black* premiered on December 1, 1992, at the Ira Aldridge Theatre at Howard University in Washington, D.C., it received a full minute-long standing ovation. Written and co-directed by a former student at Columbia Union College, Glen Alan, it was first performed by six young men enrolled at the college and produced by Rhondda Robinson, an assistant professor of communications and English at CUC.

Three months later *Weight* had an even greater triumph—two performances at the internationally renowned off-off-Broadway La MaMa Experimental Theater Club, 74A East 4th Street, New York City.

"Eighty percent of what is called the American theater came out of La MaMa," says Harvey Fierston, the actor and playwright who wrote the book on which the hit production *La Cage aux Folles* is based. One of the few black theater owners today, Ellen Stewart, founder, artistic director, "la mama" herself, was inducted into the Theater Hall

of Fame in January 1993.

The Weight of Being Black explores the problems, the fears, and the frustrations of being a black male in American society today. It is a series of dramatic poems, by no accident reminiscent of Ntozake Shange's production: *For Colored Girls* . . . What *For Colored Girls* did for the black female, *The Weight of Being Black* does for the black male.

The Weight takes the audience through seven aspects of the social ills that affect the black youth of today's American society, beginning with Act I, "Love," which delves into the African-American male/female relationship. While man is the power, the strength, woman is the goddess, the progenitor, the miracle of birth and of life—"Respect you?" begs one actor. "I don't know *how* . . . teach me."

In Act II, "Father and Son," the vicious and tragic cycle of teenage parenthood is painfully and poignantly illustrated. "I was fifteen when my girlfriend told me she was pregnant," says the father from one end of the stage. ". . . I

Camille Lofters is a senior English, pre-law, and journalism major at Columbia Union College.

heard she had a boy."

"My momma said that they called Jesus a bastard," says the son, from the other end. "I guess my father was like God—unseen."

"... But I was always there when he needed me," the father protests.

"He was never there when I needed him," retorts the son.

Act III, "Disillusioned Warriors," deals with the very prevalent problem of violence and police brutality based on race—"... hiding behind a badge, under the street lights, in a neighborhood that did not invite them, looking for an excuse..." "Listen to their screams," cries a preacher in the third scene, "Eulogy"—the screams of the mothers whose sons have been gunned down for the sole crime of being dark and scared.

"Where have all the heroes gone?" is the message, the urgent question of Act IV. In "A Letter to Malcolm," a young man reluctantly, painfully acknowledges the fact that in truth, "... nothing has changed..." Loath to believe, he poses the question—have our heroes died for nothing?

In a most stirring, most frightening act, the profound effect of drugs on the black community is addressed. "I'm gonna be just like Big Freddy," says one misguided little boy, whose hero worship has fallen on the head of a drug dealer whose motto is "those who live by the sword . . . survive by the sword." "He don't have to go to school or *nothing*... He just stands on the corner, and people walk up to him and *give* him money." In a truly sad example of faulty logic, the boy explains that he wants to become rich to get his mother out of the projects and off of drugs, so that he can go to school and "... get me some good peanut butter . . . the kind that don't come in a can, and don't tear up your bread."

The Weight also deals with an

issue that most non-minority individuals rarely think of or understand—the issue of stereotypes, unconscious prejudices. Why is it that they cross the street and clutch their purses tighter when they see him approach? wonders one young man. Is it his dress, or because "My enunciation undermines my pronunciation?" Maybe it's "my jeans..." he says, as slowly, his hand travels from the belt of his pants to the back of his hand. "My genes..."

The finale, "Rising Up," offers a glimpse of hope as the full cast entreats the "brothers" everywhere to "rise up," to rise above fear, above anger, racism, oppression, and hatred.

The booking of *The Weight* into a New York theater is a saga in itself. Robinson, the producer, decided to try for La MaMa. La MaMa was one of the first "non-mainline" theaters to support full-time resident companies, such as the American Indian Theater Ensemble and The Pan Asian Repertory, that have served as "American ambassadors of experimental culture in all corners of the world."

The atmosphere is dusky and mysterious. Black chairs and black-covered tables line the brick walls, creating an ambiance reminiscent of a 1920 jazz club. The small stage is close to the audience—close enough to touch, close enough for the action to engulf you. It is a place where stars are created.

"I mean, you've got veteran actors who are dying to play at La MaMa's," says actress Princess Wilson, who performed a one-woman play at CUC's convocation service on February 9, 1993. "To have that in the credits . . . 'has been performed at La MaMa's . . .'"

The standard procedure for booking a play is to mail in the script and wait for a reply. Robinson

and Alan the playwright called the office and were told that Stewart, the director, admired spontaneity. So, in November 1992, they traveled to New York's lower East Side, bringing in the script themselves.

"If we mailed it in," says Robinson, "it would get thrown on a pile with everything else. But if we brought it in ourselves, and especially if we got to talk to somebody, it had a better chance."

The associate director, Merryl Vladimer, gave them five minutes to present their case. "Glenn told her about the play, gave her a summary. . . . She told us to leave the script with her. She would read it and call us back in a week. We called *her* back the week before Thanksgiving, and she said . . . well, she said Yes," said Robinson.

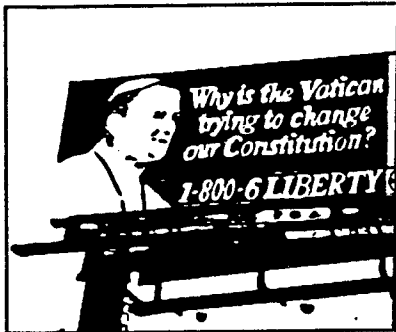
Then the waiting began.

"We called to set a date. For six weeks we called . . . not every single week, but at first, once a week. [Vladimer] would be out or our calls wouldn't be returned. We sent her a Christmas card with a written sneak preview, a program from the Howard [University] production, and the review that was in the *Columbia Journal* enclosed."

But finally, on Monday night, February 8, 1993, five young men from CUC, members of the Dramatis Theatrical Ensemble, found themselves in New York at La MaMa's, performing Glenn Alan's *The Weight of Being Black*. The actors were Randolph Stafford, Randy Preston, Huan Mitchell, Joel Pergerson, and Dwayne Coutreyer.

The Weight went back to La MaMa's on February 22, 1993, when the theater sent out a special mailing to the public and critics.

Where does *The Weight* go from here? "[Hopefully,] we'll get to Broadway—maybe a nationwide tour, where we'll hit all the metropolitan areas," says Pergerson, one of the actors. "I'm always optimistic!"



Desmond Ford on the Danger of SDAs Joining the Anti-Christ

Congratulations to Dr. Frank Knittel for writing "The Great Billboard Controversy," and to *Spectrum* for publishing it (Vol. 23, No. 1). There is much more to this "can of worms" than is readily apparent.

The famous Merikay McLeod Silver case during the 1970s forced Pacific Press into a legal suit with the federal government. R. H. Pierson, the General Conference president at that time, gave a sworn affidavit (November 30, 1974), that used terms and ideas some considered to be papal.

Related to this is a footnote to the "Reply Brief for Defendants in Support of Their Motion for Summary Judgment" (March 3, 1975).

Although it is true that there was a period in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church when the denomination took a distinctly anti-Roman Catholic viewpoint, and the term "hierarchy" was used in a pejorative sense to refer to the papal form of church governance, that attitude on the church's part was nothing more than a manifestation of widespread antipope among conservative Protestant denominations in the early part of this century and

the latter part of the last, and which has been consigned to the historical trash heap so far as the Seventh-day Adventist Church is concerned (Merikay McLeod lawsuit: Docket entry #84 EEOC vs. PPPA, C-74 20250CBR. Feb. 6, 1976).

This statement came from, and was approved by, the General Conference.

The July 29, 1990, *Arkansas Catholic* diocesan newspaper told of an anti-Catholic tract being circulated by SDAs called, "United States in Prophecy." This tract called Catholicism a pagan religion and referred to the pope as a beast. The paper reported the SDA response to complaints:

Herbert Ford, news director for the denomination, told the *Indianapolis Star* that Adventists who want to cling to the church's historic anti-Catholic beliefs represent only about 1,000 of the church's 750,000 North American members. . . .

Fred Allaback, an independent evangelist from Mount Vernon, OH, said that the "Prophecy in the United States," [sic] is a condensation

Readers comment on "The Great Billboard Controversy," Waco, Loma Linda, the environment, and Islam.

of "The Greater Controversy," [sic] written by 19th-century Seventh-day Adventist founder and prophet, Ellen G. White.

White's book, Allaback said, warned against the evils of the papacy and feared that Catholicism would become the official religion of the U.S. (*Arkansas Catholic*, July 29, 1990, p. 8).

Fourteen years ago, I wrote a two-volume commentary on Revelation, entitled *Crisis*! I pointed out that "Antichrist" is the New Testament term for all those who oppose Christ and his people by force or subtlety. In expounding Revelation 13, I suggested that the symbolism of this chapter reflects the liaison between Pontius Pilate and Jewish religionists of the first century. This symbolism also points to an eschatological church-state union similar in principle to that which occurred in the Middle Ages.

Classical commentators have long recognized in the two chief "beast" symbols of Revelation 13 allusions to threatening government and apostate Christianity. These two beasts work together to persecute God's people. Therefore, *we have no right to apply the label "Antichrist" to Catholicism unless it is linked with the state for the purpose of persecuting dissenters.*

I believe this was Ellen White's own mature view when she warned us that in the future, "we may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the Papacy" (*Evangelism*, p. 577).

Years earlier, she wrote:

There should be no going out of the way to attack other denominations. . . . There is danger that our ministers will say too much against the Catholics and provoke

against themselves the strongest prejudices of that church (ibid., p. 574).

She would have heartily condemned the billboards under discussion—the work of David Mould and his sympathizers.

In Scripture, Antichrist is a genus, not any single power. The five uses of the term in the first and second epistles of John make this quite clear (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3, 7). To apply it today to any *single* power is to miss the import of Scripture. Furthermore, "The doctrine that God has committed to the church the right to control the conscience, and to define and punish heresy, is one of the most deeply rooted of papal errors" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 293). If our own church stoops to the defining and

the punishing of heresy, it also enters the ranks of Antichrist.

Desmond Ford
Auburn, California

P.S. By way of a general statement about *The Great Controversy*: it was a splendid tract for the times and enshrined principles of enduring worth. However, its exegesis at several points is now recognized by Adventist scholars as erroneous. The interpretations of Daniel chapters 7, 8, and 9 in *The Great Controversy* are fallacious, especially in the matter of prophetic dating. Similarly, some of its New Testament interpretations (including Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 9:15; and Revelation 13), are mistaken. Ellen G. White did not originate these errors, but only adopted them.

Blaming SDAs for the Billboards

W as it serendipity, or just pure happenstance, that *Spectrum* included, at the end of its "apocalypse" issue, Knittle's wonderfully ironic piece on "The Great Billboard Controversy"?

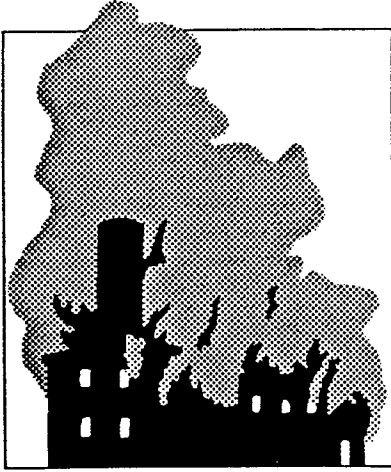
In Knittle's portrayal we glimpse our poor church caught on the horns of self-made dilemma. For a century, or more, we have emphasized apocalypse, expectant persecution and self-elected remnancy, etc., as "present truth," our very own doctrinal road to heaven, while deemphasizing the gospel. Now we are upset. Some followers have gotten the "real message" and want to run with it. The vignette of the General Conference explaining away the David Mould "controversy," while promoting *Day of the Dragon*, is both painful and a little ludicrous. We might laugh if we could only be bystanders. But, unfortunately, we can't. We are not bystanders. We are members of the supporting cast.

As I write these words the papal weekend in Denver is drawing to a close. I am relieved that, so far as I know, there have been no media shots of the controversial Mould billboards—and thankfully no rifle shots from a demented zealot or nut with close or remote Adventist connections. "Oh, but that just couldn't happen to us. Could it?" Oh, yeah? Tell it to Waco. In our zeal to confront, we forget that inflammatory words and methods may ignite unintended and very undesirable fires among "us" as well as among "them."

The possible connections and causes, for the Wacos and the Orlando-Denvers, etc., may not be so far apart as we would like to think. Maybe it was a good idea to get them all together in the same issue. Maybe, just maybe, we should be thinking about them all together.

Frank R. Lemon
Beaumont, California

Scriven's "Destructive Passion" Makes Him a Fundamentalist, Too



I had a number of problems with Charles Scriven's tirade against fundamentalism (Vol. 23, No. 1). These problems had nothing to do with Scriven's facts or theses, and everything to do with his attitude.

I have my own doubts about fundamentalism as an expression of Christianity. Mostly, they're prompted by attempts to implement it politically by the likes of Pat Robertson. There is an anti-modernist conservatism inherent in fundamentalism that can be considered apart from questions of orthodox Christianity. Scriven doesn't make this distinction as he lashes out at fundamentalism root and branch.

Scriven states that he had been cautioned against "an explicit reproach" of fundamentalism because it might be misinterpreted and thus end up being a rhetorical mistake. It would be more accurate to say that, by mounting an anti-fundamentalist hobbyhorse, Scriven has made a *tactical* mistake. *How* something was being said has gotten in the way of *what* was being said. This issue is at the heart of *The Great Controversy* billboards affair (c.f., "The Great

Billboard Controversy," Vol. 23, No. 1).

I can appreciate the point Scriven was trying to make—that "you walk a path of bravery and risk, all along acknowledging the imperfection of your knowledge and even of your prophecy . . ." How many times have I read a passage of Scripture 50 times, only to have it finally sink in on the 51st reading?

Yet even if fundamentalists see things differently, insisting on a one-size-fits-all outlook in interpreting Scripture, that's no reason to think that launching into a rav-

ing screed is the best answer. I mean, "fundamentalism is a dread disease, a demonic perversion, a groundwork for madness"? Does it really help if, in the course of arguing against fundamentalist passions, one comes off sounding like an ayatollah?

This, in fact, is the most striking irony of Scriven's piece. He states, on the one hand, that "fundamentalism . . . leads . . . to destructive passion." Yet what was the impression he left after his piece was over? That this was a man consumed with a destructive passion. It just goes to prove the old saying that you should choose your enemies well, for you'll become like them in the end.

Daniel Drazen
Berrien Springs, Michigan

Fundamentalism ≠ Koresh

As I read Charles Scriven's comments in "Fundamentalism Is a Disease, A Demonic Perversion" I began to wonder if my understanding of "fundamentalism" was at fault. So I got out my *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* to check my recollection. The first definition offered is, "The belief in the Bible as factual historical record and incontrovertible prophecy, including such doctrines as Genesis, the Virgin Birth, the Second Advent, Armageddon." My understanding of these "doc-

trines" has been revised over the years; however, I am still a fundamentalist as far as the dictionary is concerned.

May I paraphrase a statement found in the article following Scriven's by Beatrice Neall ("Apocalyptic—Who Needs It?"). "But apocalyptic [fundamentalism] should not be rejected because enthusiasts have abused it. Abuse does not cancel use."

Neil Rowland
Lincoln, Nebraska

No to "Orgies of Revisionism"

For a century and a half, thousands of Adventists have immersed themselves in the apocalyptic portions of Scripture. Because one lunatic persuades a handful of others to bring on the apocalypse

with AK-47s, what logical basis can possibly be contrived for the orgy of prophetic revisionism suggested by *Spectrum's* authors?

Perhaps Charles Scriven has forgotten that Jim Jones was not at

all a fundamentalist, but a social-gospel liberal. Jones actively supported civil rights and similar crusades for social justice. Is it fair to question the rightness of these causes because of the paranoia, sexual manipulation, and violence that culminated in Jonestown?

Scriven and Warren approach breathtaking levels of absurdity when they claim that belief in absolute truth was responsible for the Waco debacle. Interest in Bible prophecy may indeed have been

Koresh's chief drawing card, much as social causes were for the followers of Jim Jones. But the evidence is clear that the Branch Davidians, like the People's Temple, were governed by charisma, hormones, and maniacal whims of one man, not by an objective standard of right and wrong to which all—including the group's leaders—were subject.

Kevin D. Paulson
Redlands, California

sition I hold precisely on scriptural grounds. One writer does object to my reading of Isaiah 48, but the objection is inexplicable in view of that chapter's insistent call to repentance and renewal.

Mr. Drazen agrees with the substance, but not the tone, of my remarks. His message is: "Lighten up." I am surprised at this when the occasion for what I wrote was . . . Waco!

My argument with the fundamentalist attitude is that insecurity suffused with arrogance and self-satisfaction feeds violence, whether psychological or physical. How could someone "appreciate" this precisely in Waco's shadow, and yet be incensed by passionate expression of the point? This is like asking a sportscaster to report home runs in a measured voice—except that in this case the offense wounds not only taste but also principle.

Let me say that if conceit is constructive, I will lighten up. If barbarous death, or even lesser forms of human hurt, are matters of indifference, I will lighten up. But not otherwise.

Charles Scriven
Takoma Park, Maryland

Koresh Endorsed Change, Too

I am not surprised that so many SDA leaders are asking why so many members of the SDA Church followed David Koresh. The answer is simple. They accepted the teaching of leaders who, like Charles Scriven (Vol. 23, No. 1), teach that "God wants us always to remain open to changes and renewal." The followers of David Koresh carried out these teachings very well. They prepared themselves for change and when David Koresh came along and offered them change, they changed.

Charles Scriven uses Isaiah 48:6

to show that "God wants us always to remain open to change and renewal." I read this text, I even used a Roman Catholic version of the Bible, but I could not see anywhere a call for change. Where does he get this idea that verse 6 talks about being open to change? As we read the Old Testament, we can see very clearly that God asks his people to keep his commandments and not change their ways for the ways of the heathens.

John Sanocki
Frenchtown, New Jersey

. . . and the Scriven Riposte

The term *fundamentalism* sprang up with the emergence, early in the 20th century, of evangelical Protestant reaction against "modernism." Although the modern outlook deeply deserves to be reacted against, fundamentalism came, in part through the sins of its defenders, to be associated with, and indeed to betoken, arrogance and self-satisfaction. That is why the newspapers now regularly use the term outside the Christian context, as in the phrase "Islamic fundamentalism."

The fundamentalist attitude—of arrogance and self-satisfaction—is what I call a dread disease, a demonic perversion and a groundwork for madness. We each feel insecure under challenge, but no iron law requires us to cope with insecurity by self-deceptive means: grace is sufficient to burn away panicky conceit and to infuse conviction with humility.

I have not been dissuaded from any of this by correspondents who write as believers yet invoke no scriptural arguments against a po-

Letters to the editor are always welcome, and will be considered for publication unless otherwise specified. Direct editorial correspondence to Spectrum, P.O. Box 5330, Takoma Park, MD 20913 (U.S.A.). The editors reserve the right to condense letters prior to publication.

Jettison Koresh, Not Eschatology

Is there something in history which might give us a long-distance perspective on the Davidians of Waco? One group who traveled this painful road before us is the Anabaptists who live on in the Mennonites and Amish. The Anabaptists were that part of the 16th-century Reformation that closest resembles Adventism; they are our true Reformation roots. When the Waco events hit the news, the European media were not careful to distinguish the Davidians from European Anabaptists.

The Anabaptists were radical reformers, and their radical emphasis was on the Bible as their source of authority. Thus they rejected the Mass, practiced adult baptism, and emphasized discipleship. Pacifism and separation of church and state were also among their chief characteristics, and their early history was marked by eschatology and apocalyptic speculation. They also had their prophets. Melchoir Hoffman was a prophet who evangelized extensively in Strasbourg, Holland, and low Germany. Hoffman thought that the New Jerusalem would be established in Strasbourg. Though he remained a pacifist until his death, some of his followers who took up the prophetic mantle shed their pacifism. They desired to establish the kingdom in Holland and low Germany. One group took over the city of Munster and among their innovations was polygamy, interestingly enough. Another group took over the Old Cloister in Holland, and yet others raised riots in Amsterdam. The state churches responded quickly. Munster and the Old Cloister were taken by force, the apocalyptic residents slain, and the persecution of all Anabaptists throughout Europe intensified—if that was possible.

Not all Anabaptists of the low countries joined with the militants. Dietrich Philips and Menno Simons reorganized those Anabaptists who rejected the prophets and held to Anabaptist tenets more like their fellows in Switzerland, Austria, and south Germany. At every opportunity, they distanced themselves from the militant Anabaptists and soon even their fiercest opponents recognized the differences between the pacifist and militant Anabaptists. Menno and his followers were so successful that when Holland gained its independence from Spain, the Calvinist government was largely tolerant of its Anabaptist population.

The Mennonites, along with the other Anabaptists, paid a price for their new image. They jettisoned the eschatology and apocalypticism that once characterized Anabaptism. They distanced themselves so thoroughly from this New Testament doctrine that when Menno wrote a treatise on the resurrection, it was about

resurrection as an allegory of conversion. There was nothing there that Paul would recognize as his "blessed hope."

In modern Anabaptist treatments of the Christian faith, eschatology tends to be relegated to an appendix or a single statement that is briefly and superficially explained. I have two 20th-century Mennonite books on doctrine that do not give eschatology its own chapter. Munster occurred four-and-a-half centuries ago and Anabaptists are still living it down.

Events like the Davidian debacle could have a similar effect on Adventism. Some would prefer we dropped or toned down our eschatology and placed it far in the background. If, however, we retain our radical commitment to the Bible, we need to understand we retain the risk of repeats of Waco and Munster. As much as I honor our legacy from the Mennonites, I cannot accept their solution to the image problem. This is part of the risk of radical commitment to our faith.

James E. Miller
Madison, Wisconsin

FBI Demonized the Davidians

First, your very headline is provocatively prejudicial. No Davidian ever called it "Ranch Apocalypse." That was a creation of the media, and is part of the demonization of Koresh and the Davidians. You can't begin to understand what happened when you start from that frame of reference. They called it Mt. Carmel—and if you had just used that, or the all-encompassing "Waco," you would've gotten closer to a setting for the truth.

Next, your first writer says, "apparently self-set conflagration."

The first word may be a disqualifier, but when the rest is accepted as fact by 80 percent of the public, this goes too far. No one knows for sure how the fire started. But since the FBI told four stories in the first few hours, and the Davidians told only one—and it is consistent with what we all saw—I will tend to believe them. So you want to tell me about the "experts" who said so? Did anyone tell you that the team leader wrote the text and taught courses in fire analysis for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF)? That

another one had a wife who was a secretary in the Houston ATF office? And the third had done work for the ATF before? Hardly an unprejudiced group of "experts," in my mind.

The caption for the picture on page 36 leaves something unsaid. That is essentially the way it was reported—but not what the little girl really said when I saw her interviewed on TV, as she drew the picture. She was asked what she was drawing and she said, "holes from the bullets," as she jammed the pencil onto the roof time after time. That puts a totally different light on it. You may remember that when the lawyer (Dick DeGuerin) was still being allowed into the compound, he reported holes in the overhead from bullets fired from the helicopters. That is what the kid was talking about.

Finally, we were all raised on the same prophecy stuff that Koresh carried to the end. Let me ask you: What does the SDA story tell you to do when you "flee to the mountains"? One hundred years ago, you might find isolation—a place to hide. Just what are you going to do in an age where they have satellites that can see tennis balls, airborne heat detectors that can tell where you laid down hours earlier, where we have instant communication—and when the government uses tanks, helicopter gunships, armored men, and machine guns on its own citizens as first resort? Koresh was smart enough to realize this. So he decided that the next logical step was to be armed to defend his camp.

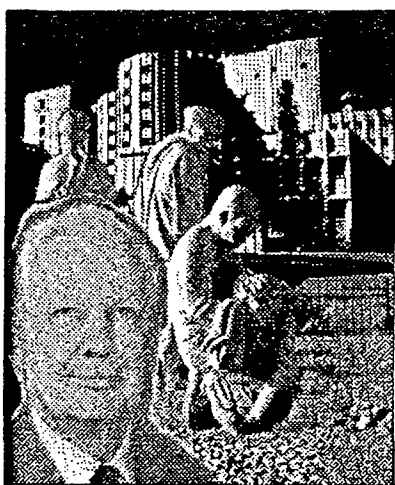
Bob Patchin
Villa Park, California

fection.

Even in hindsight, there are no simple answers. The issues are complex and some have a long and turbulent history. The traditional rivalry between departments of internal medicine and surgery at medical schools is also present at Loma Linda University, and the internal medicine faculty consider that the surgeons have been dominant for most of the past 30 years. Dr. Hinshaw and Dr. Shankel have very different administrative styles. As Bonnie Dwyer reported, Dr. Hinshaw has a remarkable foresight and acts decisively to make even unpopular changes. Dr. Shankel is by temperament a consensus builder who sought to protect the Department of Internal Medicine from the impact of changes.

Considering the complexity of the issues it is not surprising that, at times, the actions taken were imperfect. But the university administration's actions were not sinister. I hope that the following observations will provide a useful perspective to the discussion:

Grievance Committee Member Says LLU Action Not Sinister



The Loma Linda issue of *Spectrum* (Vol. 22, No. 3) was insightful and refreshingly positive. I suspect that documentation of a dispute between faculty in the Department of Internal Medicine and

the administration will generate the most discussion. The events surrounding the departure of Drs. Shankel, Grames, and Williams from the School of Medicine are among the most painful in the 17 years that I have been a faculty member in the School of Medicine. These are colleagues who have served with distinction. Dr. Shankel, in particular, epitomized for students and physicians the Christian physician that they sought to emulate. I was a member of a grievance committee and of the School of Medicine Executive Committee when the charges and counter charges were examined and recommendations were made that influenced the course of events. I have often asked myself what could have averted the conflict and disaf-

1. The university dismissal policy has been faulted because the grievance hearing was post-dismissal. The policy had recently been revised after extensive and public discussions with the faculty. The faculty were accustomed to a post-dismissal grievance hearing and no one, including the aggrieved faculty members, had publicly proposed changing to a pre-dismissal hearing. After the dismissals, when Dr. Shankel and the AAUP raised the issue, the merits of a pre-dismissal hearing were then obvious and the faculty forum promptly initiated the process to revise the dismissal policy. Dr. Behrens has taken administrative action to ensure that

no one will be dismissed without a formal pre-dismissal hearing while the policy is being revised.

2. Although there was no formal pre-dismissal hearing, the dismissal of Dr. Shankel came after extensive discussion and attempts to solve the problems. I was a member of a grievance committee that heard evidence presented by Dr. Neal Bricker, with the assistance of Dr. Shankel, relating to the dispute between Dr. Bricker and his former research colleague, Dr. Wechter. This dispute was central to the distrust between Dr. Shankel and School of Medicine administration. Despite some concerns about possible bias, and some tense moments during the hearings, the objectivity of the committee deliberations was exemplary. University administration may have been surprised by our recommendations. I still regret that there were not more members from the Department of Internal Medicine on the committee to witness that process. The discussions by the executive committee were vigorous, and the dismissals were supported only after a strong consensus developed that reconciliation was no longer possible.

3. The school of medicine and the university adhered to university policy. With the university on academic probation and facing an imminent site visit from the accrediting organization, the president, the School of Medicine executive committee, and the board of trustees knew that the accreditation team would investigate the dismissals to determine whether the current policy had been followed. As reported in *Spectrum*, the WASC commit-

tees concurred that the policy had been followed.

4. A conflict of this complexity would not be resolved by reconstructing a "pre-dismissal" hearing for the aggrieved faculty members, as they have requested. The polarization is, unfortunately, too great. Even where there is agreement about the issues and events, people have drawn very different conclusions from the same facts. Some of these conclusions assign motives to the actions of others and various parties hold to their conclusions passionately. An extensive hearing before the Clinical Sciences Faculty Advisory Coun-

cil failed to satisfy the aggrieved faculty members and members of that body are skeptical that any other hearing will be accepted unless the aggrieved faculty members are exonerated.

The healthcare industry and university medical centers, in particular, are currently undergoing unprecedented changes in which we can only estimate the wisest course of action. It is a stressful time for management and faculty alike. Our best strategy is to cool the rhetoric on both sides and to allow time for healing.

Barry Taylor
Loma Linda, California

Environmental Stewardship Celebrated in Hymns



Concerns for the ecological balance (*Spectrum*, Vol. 22, No. 5) have not been totally forgotten by traditional hymn writers. The productivity of nature is well expressed in a hymn by Matthias Claudius: "We plow the fields and scatter / The good seed on the land / But it is fed and watered / By God's almighty hand" (561).¹

Hymnals are almost replete with references to the beauty of God's creation: "This is my father's world; / I rest me in the thought / Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas / His hand the wonders wrought" (92). Another example is the favorite by

Joseph Addison, "The Spacious Firmament" (96), sung to music arranged from F. J. Haydn's *Creation*.

The wonders of the universe are expressed in Albert Bayly's hymn "Lord of the boundless curves of space / And time's deep mystery, / To Your creative might we trace / All nature's energy" (97).

Most hymn writers, however, have ignored the problems relating to environmental stewardship. But contemporary hymnists are now often responding to the challenge of human accountability in caring for our natural environment. A 1989 hymn by Herman G. Stuempfle "O God, Who Formed This Fruitful Earth,"² in the second stanza reminds us: "The earth with all its fullness, Lord, is yours and yours alone; / Yet we its riches seize and hoard as though they were our own. / Let poisoned air, the ravaged land expose our wanton, wasteful hand."

Hymn writer Barbara Owen's

1970 hymn "God of Green Earth"³ is an excellent summation of environmental concerns. A slight alteration in the first stanza would make it wholly consistent with creationism.

God of the green earth, /
Singing with growing,
Lord of the ocean, / From
which life sprang,
Teach us their wisdom, / Born
at creation
When the planets danced and
/ Morning stars sang.

Teach us respect for / Forests
and marshlands,
Not to defile them / With
ignorant greed;
But love tall redwoods, /
Crowning the ages;
Love the brown loam and /
Small fertile seed.

Makes us to love all / Our
fellow creatures:
They not too humble, Nor we
too great.
Wildcat and beaver, / Bee
and brown sparrow,
Have earned equal rights to /
This earthly estate.

Stay us from killing / With
arrogant science
Men, beasts and plants we /
Do not understand.
With love comes wisdom, /
Compassion and patience;
Justice for all things, / Peace
in the land

The final lines of Fred Pratt Green's hymn, "God in His Love for Us." (641) confirms the Christian concern for the world that God has loaned us:

Earth is the Lord's; it is ours to
enjoy it, /
Ours, as His stewards, to farm
and defend.
From its pollution, misuse,
and destruction,
Good Lord, deliver us, world
without end!"

Paul E. Hamel
Berrien Springs, Michigan

1. All hymn numbers refer to the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.
2. *The Hymn* (April 1991), p. 38.
3. *Ibid.* (October 1970), p. 1.

subordinate and sacrifice him to the collective. They are anti-Christian, since Christianity states that man is a volitional being created in the image of God and possesses free will. Environmentalism is an assault on freedom and the individual. Hard environmentalism worships nature as a god and propounds a poisonous philosophy inimical to man.

Unfortunately, this same thought is echoed by Glenn Coe in his article "The Compelling Case for Nature." He writes, "I suggest assessing the needs of humanity and weighing them against the legitimate and independent right of nature to exist unmolested by humanity." This is mere nonsense—nature does not have "rights," legitimate or otherwise. And the presumption that man molests the environment is nihilistic.

I do not believe man is some despicable virus or blight infecting "Gaia" or "Mother Earth" as the hard-core environmentalists would have us believe. Rather, I am convinced man is created in the image of God and his God-endowed nature is that of a builder, creator, and innovator in his own right. Man is a transformer of nature and as such has produced innumerable products, tools, machines, and technologies with untold and unsung benefits for individual men and women. I am very happy for, and I enjoy the benefits of electricity, automobiles, airplanes, furniture, houses, textiles, plastics, ceramics, supermarkets, refrigeration, tools and appliances, pharmaceuticals, paper, books, computers, stereos and CDs, air-conditioning, gas heating, hot and cold running water, etc. These products and technologies have improved the quality of life and health for literally billions of people. I applaud technological innovation and the advance of human civilization.

I believe just as it is misguided for Christians to espouse socialism

Is Environmentalism Christian?

I was surprised by the ideology espoused by most of the authors writing on the environment in the January issue of *Spectrum*. The fundamental premise presented by this special section seemed to be that "nature" has more value than man.

It is a false and dangerous notion that nature has intrinsic value that supersedes that of man himself; and that man is a blight upon the environment. Activists in the environmental movement though have made such blatant claims: "Human happiness and certainly human fecundity, are not as important as a wild and healthy planet.

... We have become a plague upon ourselves and upon the Earth. . . . Until such time as Homo sapiens should decide to rejoin nature, some of us can only hope for the right virus to come along" (David Graber, quoted by George Reisman in his essay *The Toxicity of Environmentalism*).

The heart of the environmental deception lies in the belief that "all life and even non-life, is part of a larger collective organism; variously called 'Mother Nature,' 'Planet Earth,' and 'Gaia'" (M. Gemmill and J. Lehr, *Ecology's Ancestry*). These notions repudiate man and

since it is anti-freedom and anti-individual; so it is wrong for Christians to promote ideological environmentalism since it is anti-man and anti-civilization. Wilderness does *not* have intrinsic value over and above man. I choose civilization and responsible technology over wilderness.

Environmentalism is also a movement or philosophy that has definite political overtones. Roy Benton writes approvingly of Al Gore's fervid, committed environmentalism in his article "Earth in the Balance," referring to Gore's book of the same name. Gore is a good example of an environmentalist who has a strong political agenda. Environmentalism in his

hands will certainly be used as an excuse for more government intervention, manipulation, and control, with consequent loss of individual freedom of choice and rational decision making. We should consistently deplore and oppose this sort of government-backed environmental ideology. There *are* free market solutions to environmental problems as abundantly demonstrated in the book *Rational Readings on Environmental Concerns*, edited by Jay H. Lehr, Ph.D. I highly recommend this volume to the authors and readers of *Spectrum*.

Robert Haynes, M.D.
Ukiah, California

prised at the amount of energy, time, and money Adventists have spent attempting to justify their belief that God made the world. How the world was made is indeed an intriguing riddle, but the answer, regardless of the way it turns out, need not concern us spiritually. Attempts to provide scientific support for God's activity (a futile task) demonstrate lack of trust in his creatorship.

Could it be, though, that Adventists are beginning to care for their earthly house (a rewarding task) without first detailing how it was made? *Spectrum's* recent cluster of articles on environmental stewardship (Vol. 22, No. 5) made me hope so. I appreciated each piece.

James Hayward
Berrien Springs, Michigan

Beyond Creationism, Caring

Eleven Christmases ago, my dad gave our young daughter a beautifully crafted dollhouse. He made it all himself—windows, shutters, stairways, porches, shingles, window boxes, even furniture—at least that's what he told us.

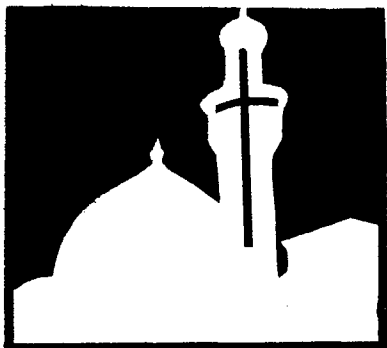
I suppose we could have demanded to see if he owned the tools necessary to build such a structure. We could have examined the materials to see if they

were available from local suppliers. We could have even hired a forensic expert to see if Dad's fingerprints covered his purported handiwork. But we had no reason to doubt his word, given our relationship with him. Our chief concern was to care for this heirloom in ways consistent with its value and our belief that it was given in love.

Many people would be sur-

EDITOR'S NOTE: Several readers have called attention to the controversy surrounding the speech of Chief Sealth reprinted in Spectrum, Vol. 22, No. 5. Multiple versions of the speech are known to exist and, while it is generally conceded that Chief Sealth gave a memorable speech urging respect for the environment, it is unclear how much the various versions have been embellished.

"Adventist Muslims" Misleads Muslims and Misguides Mission



As an Adventist and an Islamicist, I read with interest the recent issue of *Spectrum* (Vol. 22, No. 4) devoted to Muslims and mission. It is a pleasure to note a new generation of Adventists struggling to display a more positive attitude toward the achievements of Muslim culture.

I was, however, first amazed and then aghast at Jerald White-

house's report of efforts to create a community of dissembling "Adventist Muslims" in a justly unnamed country. Certainly, as he suggests, it is wise to distinguish between religious and cultural conversion, but the elements within Islam which he seeks to retain as Adventist, at least temporarily, are more elements of pan-Islamic law than local Muslim culture—e.g., canonical prayers, Ramadan, the two Ids. It is an oddly skewed pan-Islamic reified Islam and not a regional Islam that is being encouraged and replaced by degrees. That

is, the theory seems to require Islamization of the culture being subjected to Adventist re-interpretation and proselytization. This "Islam" is one that apparently non-Muslim Adventists know best since, Whitehouse observes, "Muslims do not develop a questioning mind." This is antiquated and ethnocentric, if comforting, orientalist nonsense that does no justice to Muslim education or rationality. Christians do not have a monopoly on intellectual curiosity.

The final picture that emerges is of a series of Adventist agents provocateur surreptitiously utilizing the high tradition of Islam (specifically the Qur'an as reinterpreted by Adventists) to subvert believing Muslims step by step. It is an arrogant and dangerous stance for Adventists to assume. Perhaps we

should look more to dialogue and understanding and less to confrontation and subversion.

Whitehouse concludes that "the forces of evil arrayed against this ministry are real." Indeed, the scheme acts to confirm Muslim views of the invidious and insidious nature of much Christian proselytization and, in so doing, compromises our more structured and valued medical and social ministries in the region. The "change agents" are unfortunately left exposed, but they are exposed by this misguided ministry and not by any innate "forces of evil" within Islam. In the past, I have always identified myself as Adventist to inquiring Muslims. I now hesitate to do so.

Derryl N. MacLean
Burnaby, British Columbia

... and Whitehouse Responds

Mr. MacLean's letter raises several questions that concern how we view ourselves as Adventists and our mission, as well as how we view Islam. As I have lived among Muslims for several years, spanning a period of 25 years, participated in and thoughtfully observed various Adventist and other Christian traditional, institutional approaches to Islam, I have come to the deep conviction that in such high solidarity honor cultures as we find in Islamic peoples, we must somehow divorce ourselves from an institutional Christian or church identity. It is much more helpful to see ourselves as an Adventist prophetic movement among all peoples. To approach Islam from this identity requires an incarnational ministry among the people, living the principles of the gospel and the end time message in that context in ways that will meet the spiritual

heart cry of the common Muslim. That will bring to sincere Muslim the assurance that there is a God-appointed Mediator for their sins, that they can face the coming day of judgment (in which they already believe) with confidence of sins forgiven through faith in Isa (Jesus) as their redeemer.

A recent evaluation of this particular ministry by an Adventist team which included, among others, an individual with many years of experience in Muslim countries and a doctorate in Islamic studies, and a church administrator also with many years of experience in Islamic countries, indicates that the ministry is in fact achieving just such objectives. The groups of believers are, in fact, experiencing spiritual formation, a deepening faith in Isa (Jesus), and are developing a clear identity as God's prophetic movement in the Muslim community, preparing themselves and others for the im-

minent return of Isa.

MacLean's characterization of my statement, "Muslims do not develop a questioning mind," as "antiquated and ethnocentric, if comforting, orientalist nonsense," is a misreading of the intent of my statement. I do not at all deny or downgrade the high education and intellectual curiosity of many in the Islamic community. However, at the grass-roots level where this ministry is operating, one must realize that the majority of Muslims will give far higher weight to *takleed* (traditional interpretation handed down from religious leaders) than to *ishtihad tafseer* (personal effort to try to understand the meaning of the passage). I dare say that Islam has no monopoly on this, either.

He further notes that the statement "the forces of evil arrayed against this ministry are real" implies these evil forces to be in Islam itself. This was certainly not the intention of the statement. In fact, the ministry is based on the assumption, among others, that Islam is *not* an "evil empire." However, evil forces are at work in all places to subvert spiritual growth and wreak havoc in the earth. That includes within Islam and closer to home, even within Adventism. MacLean must know that the majority of Muslims, in practice, are part of what can be termed popular or folk Islam, where belief in evil forces of various kinds and participation in various rituals to obtain blessing and power for protection forms a large part of their informal worship. We or they (the believers in Jesus in this ministry) are only safe as we take personal refuge in our faithful allegiance in God.

Dr. Jack Provonsa in his recently published book, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1993), challenges our thinking regarding this work:

I've sometimes wondered whether the finishing of the work in Islam, where cultural and social ties are so powerful and all-encompassing that entry of the Christian message has been virtually impossible (there is only one Adventist to every 50,000 people in the Middle East), may have to depend upon the indigenous movement within Islam. Might the members of such a movement preserve most of their cultural

ties with Islam while capturing the essence of the gospel? Conceivably, such might even consider themselves to be "true Muslims" much as Christians, following Paul's attitude in the New Testament speak of "true Israel." Would we praise God for it? Would we even dare to foster it? Would we grant them institutional autonomy, or would we insist that these "true Muslims" sign on our Adventist institutional dotted

line, including sending their tithes and offerings to the right place?

May we have the courage to move forward in incarnational ministry that a body of true believers might glorify God in this end time among all peoples, each giving praise in its own culturally unique manner.

Jerald Whitehouse
Silver Spring, Maryland

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