

SPECTRUM

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The Age
of the
Earth

Loving
Friends
&
Loving
God

Seven
Deadly
Truths

On the
Necessity
of Fiction
in the Life
of Faith

The
Adventist
Murders in
Rwanda

SPECTRUM

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The cover image is a Photoshop composite of two drawings. In the two originals, oil and chalk pastels were blended together with a thinning agent to help smooth the transitions and to create a more vibrant color where desired. Friends and family were enlisted as models to aid in the overall feelings of warmth and friendship.

About the Artist:

Elizabeth Davis graduated from Humboldt State University in 1999 with a B.A. in studio art. She works part-time as a freelance artist and full-time on her portfolio. She says that sharing art with others is an unexpected joy that is

Contents



Friendship: Affirming a Trustworthy God

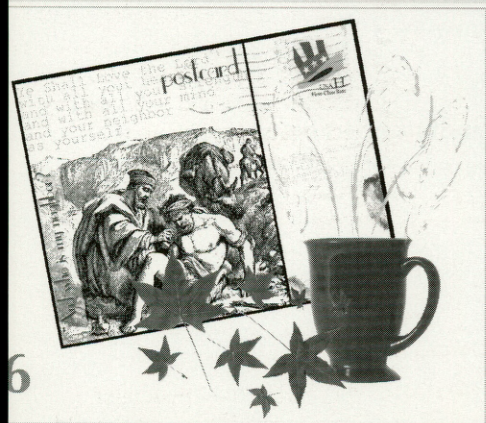
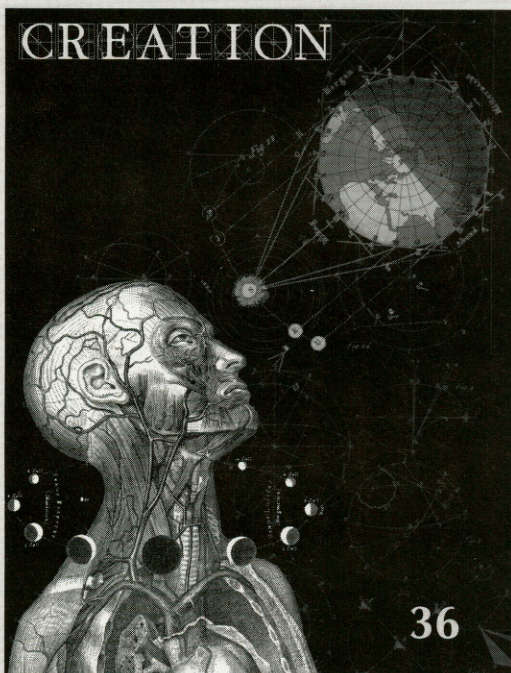
- 6** **There Goes the Neighborhood!**
 By Kent A. Hansen
 Confrontation about friendship yields questions as well as answers.
- 11** **Loving Friends and Loving God**
 By Gary Chartier
 An ethicist considers the theological implications of friendship.
- 23** **The Afterlife of Friends**
 By Juli Miller
 At death's door, one learns the lessons of friendship and the key to life.
- 31** **Fear of Friendship**
 By Gail Catlin
 God's covenant with man breathes life into the spaces between people.

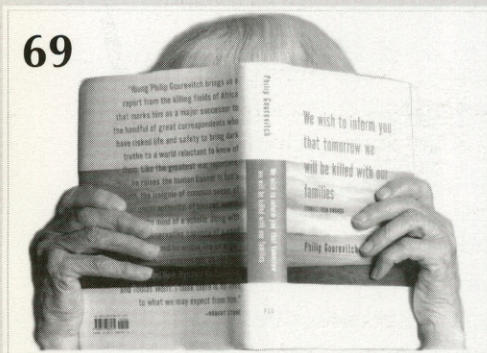
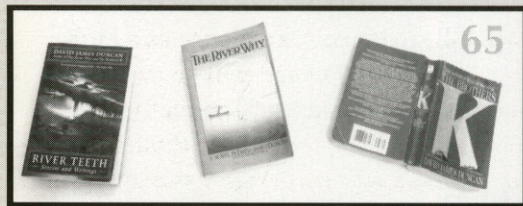
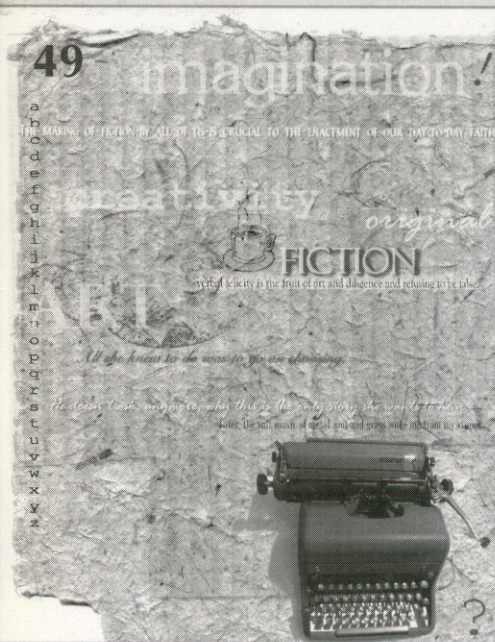
Creation: Is it Chance and Dance?

- 36** **The Metaphor of Design**
 By Edwin A. Karlow
 How shall we talk about the creation?
- 44** **Age Dating of Rocks**
 By Richard J. Bottomley
 What rocks have to say about the age of the earth.

Fiction: What is Truth?

- 49** **The Age of the Earth**
 By Mary Pat Koos
 Choosing challenges a college coed.





- 55 **The Seven Deadly Truths**
 By Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson
 A boy's observations from a treetop clash with the knowledge in his heart.
- 61 **Waiting for Angels**
 By Chip Cassano
 A contemporary family story about blessings in bathtubs, courage in waiting.
- 65 **On the Necessity of Fiction in the Life of Faith**
 By David James Duncan
 What does it really mean to "love thy neighbor?"

Reviews

- 69 ***We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda***
 by Philip Gourevitch
 Reviewed by Donald R. McAdams
- 72 **Chapter Two from *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda***
 By Philip Gourevitch
- 75 **Appeals Court Says Pastor Must Be Turned Over to Rwandan Tribunal**
 By Patty Reinert

Editorials

- 3 **From the Editor: Show vs. Tell**
 By Bonnie Dwyer
- 79 **From AAF: My Grandfather's Voice**
 By Brent G.T. Geraty

Responses

- 76 **Letters to Editor**

Show vs. Tell

It was a high day on the La Sierra campus of Loma Linda University. Not only would the famous novelist John Gardner give an address, he was also scheduled to meet with students. People crammed into the seminar room in La Sierra Hall. Students seated at the room-length oak table shuffled papers nervously, while faculty and other interested people found places along the wall. At the front, the long-haired guest in the black leather jacket tipped back in his chair and invited a male student to read. In a short passage the would-be writer described a woman, a good woman with a fine moral character, he said. After a couple paragraphs, Gardner stopped him. "But how do we know she is good? What has she done to make us understand the strength of her character. You have to show us that she is good, not just tell us."

In this issue of *Spectrum*, we attempt to show several things. With our first subject, friendship, we try to show the importance of the topic to Christians and demonstrate that more can be said about it than a cursory reading of Hallmark cards might suggest. Though friendship is not a controversial subject, our writers testify that it can be particularly challenging in the living—the showing.

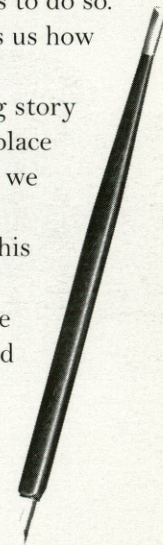
Creation science has been a favorite subject in *Spectrum* since the magazine's inception. One memorable episode in the life of the Association of Adventist Forums was a 1985 field trip to explore geological sites in the western United States. Theologians and scientists traveled together, and participants still talk about the experience as a high point in their spiritual life. The papers presented on that trip have been prepared for publication and will be available as a book from AAF by the end of this year. We feature a presentation by Richard Bottomley, taken from that work, explaining how rocks are dated. Edwin Karlow updates the creation discussion. In his presentation to the Biblical Research Institute Science Council Session (BRISCO) this year, he showed how the metaphor of design has evolved in the scientific and theological discussion of origins. We are pleased to include his presentation.

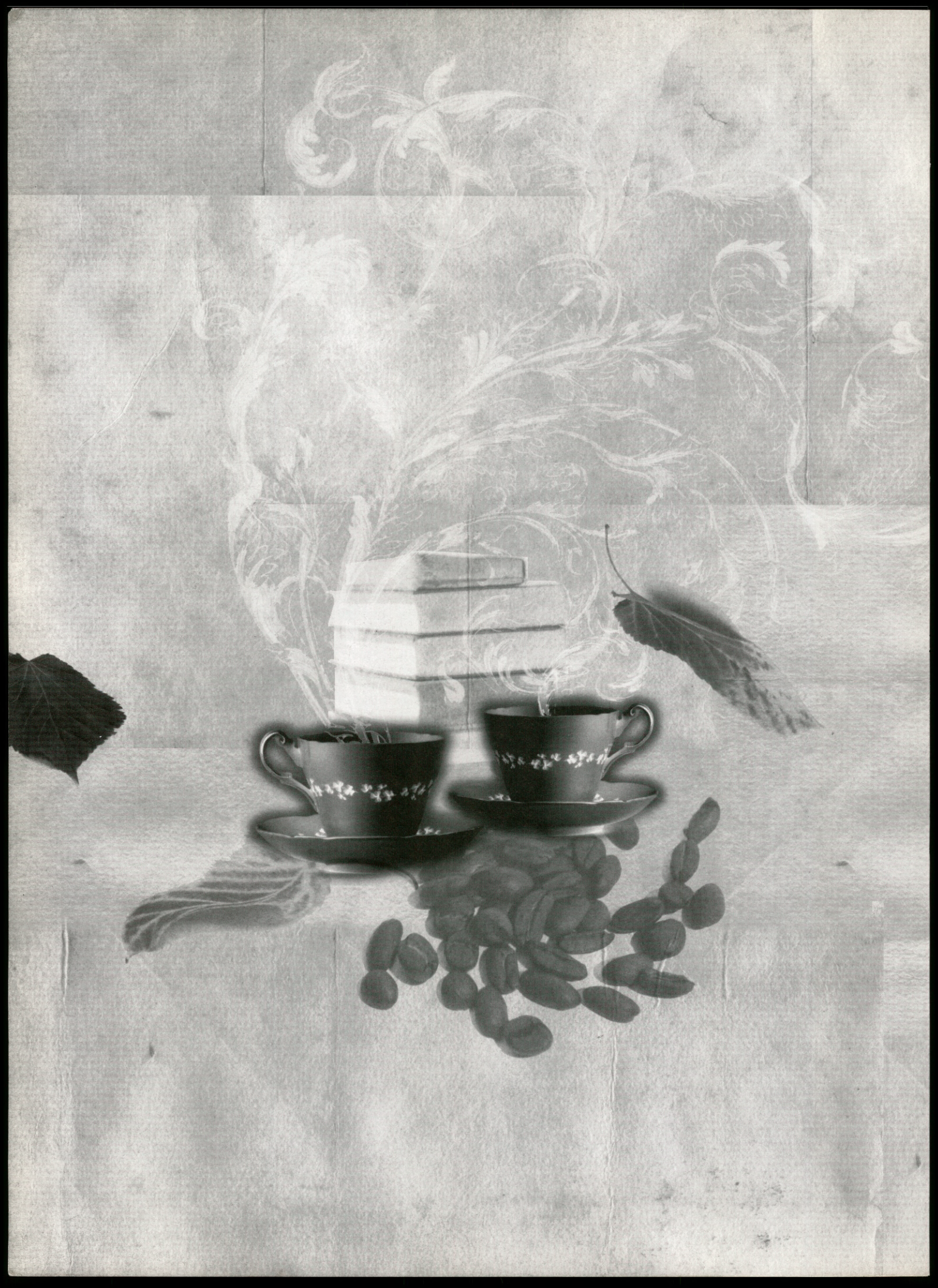
Fiction is our final special feature. We end as we began—by discussing neighbors. Whether loving our neighbors is an act of faith, friendship, postmodernism, or magical realism, our Lord has instructed us to do so. David Duncan, author of a great Adventist novel, *The Brothers K* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), shows us how fiction can help.

Then, in a review of a book that won *nonfiction* awards, Don McAdams brings us a heartrending story of something we wish *were* fiction: a murderous tale from Rwanda, where unspeakable mayhem took place on an Adventist compound. This story provides the ultimate lesson in show-and-tell: no matter what we say we believe, our actions show our real character.

In this festive year for Adventism, however, I cannot close on Rwanda. In Oshkosh, Wisconsin, this August, twenty-two thousand young people from fifty countries celebrated a half century of Pathfinding. *The Adventist Review* marked its 150th anniversary over the summer. Thirty years have passed since the first issue of *Spectrum* appeared. And more than eight hundred thousand people joined the church this past year. (Oh, that all of them subscribed to *Spectrum*!) There is much that is good in Adventism, and none more important, more telling than the friendship we offer to our neighbors.

Bonnie Dwyer, *Editor*





Friendship

Affirming a Trustworthy God

Serious thinkers have explored the meaning and nature of friendship for millennia. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all addressed the topic; Aristotle devoted an entire book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to friendship, which he regarded as an essential component of the good life. Cicero followed with his own treatment of friendship; and the experience of friendship was a running theme in the writings of the intensely passionate Augustine. Friendship also occupied a central place in the medieval spirituality of Aelred of Rievaulx.

A topic once central to moral, even political and philosophical reflection has been eclipsed by romantic love and mass politics. Modern thinkers have given friendship far less attention than their predecessors—until recently. Especially in the last two decades, the importance of friendship has reemerged in serious religious, philosophical, sociological, and psychological scholarship. As our closest relationships come under threat from modern individualism and geographic mobility, as cultural and ideological divisions seem to make political community impossible, serious study of friendship has blossomed. Beginning with Gilbert Meilaender's *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* and Lawrence A. Blum's *Friendship, Altruism and Morality*, scholars have linked friendship with discussions of the moral claims of special relationships, the place of emotions in our lives, the character of relationships between women after patriarchy, the social nature of selfhood, and opportunities for community in an individualistic era. One thing that seems to mark the end of the millennium is a rediscovery of just how fragile and just how important friendships really are.

[A] lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"¹

There Goes the Neighborhood!

How God Redefines the Boundaries of My Friendships

By Kent A. Hansen

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to this know-it-all lawyer who wanted to split hairs about targets of love. A smug, complacent Seventh-day Adventist lawyer, I find myself questioning Jesus' command to love while seeking to preserve the neighborhood of my daily existence. Jesus does not tolerate my posturing; he constantly stretches the boundaries of my understanding of friendship and mercy.

The following three stories tell what I'm learning from Jesus about friendship.

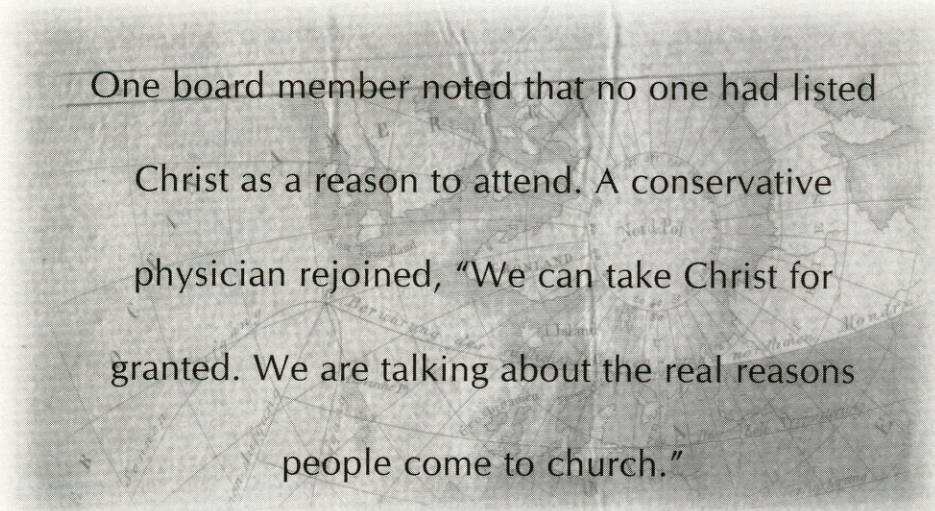
Loving God

Our embattled church board met to consider the qualities desired in a new pastor. The results of a membership survey were revealed on why people chose to attend our congregation. (In southern California, the close proximity of churches gives Adventists a variety of choices about where to attend.)

The number one reason people came to our church was friendship. This was not surprising in our affluent, well-connected suburban congregation. The second-scoring reason was the high quality of our children's Sabbath Schools.

One board member noted that no one had listed Christ as a reason to attend. A conservative physician rejoined, "We can take Christ for granted. We are talking about the real reasons people come to church."

The caustic remark silenced the room. This



One board member noted that no one had listed Christ as a reason to attend. A conservative physician rejoined, "We can take Christ for granted. We are talking about the real reasons people come to church."

man had already helped hound our previous pastor out of the congregation with the incessant accusation that he "preached too much love, and not enough Spirit of Prophecy."

"Doc," I said. "Why would we ever take the Savior of the World for granted?"

"You know what I mean," was the terse response.

"I'm afraid I do know, and it's a problem."

"Doc, have you considered that Jesus gave Pilate and Herod an excuse to become friends?² Yet one of them ended up taking his life and the other

self-destructed in worm-eaten egoism. Friendship can't save us. Jesus isn't just some excuse for getting together. If all that is involved in membership in this church is showing up a couple hours each week with my buddies, paying my dues, singing some songs, and listening to a talk, I can join the Rotary Club and save the grief of this place. Besides, where's the friendship in a church as divided as this?"

The interim pastor noisily intervened at this point, chiding me for unorthodox use of Scripture. Three more senior pastors in four years and a weekly drop in attendance to seventy-five out of a total membership of eight hundred finally sobered everyone to the truth that potlucks, flannel boards, and weekly arguments in Sabbath School are no substitute for a relationship with Christ.

Loving My Neighbor

I lunched with my friend, a fundamentalist pastor. He told me about a book that he was reading. He liked it, except for one thing: "I can't understand how someone can write that way about devotion to God and grace, but say that God loves homosexuals."

"Well," I said, "maybe he knows some gays."

"What do you mean?"

"I used to think that homosexuals should be shunned. But I didn't know anyone who claimed to be gay. Then one day an old friend came to see me. We had gone to an Adventist college together and kept in

touch afterward. I was one of the first to know of her engagement and had attended her wedding as an honored guest.

"We made some small talk and then she said: 'I hear that there have been some big changes in your life.'

"Yes, I had an encounter with Jesus that changed everything for me.'

"I went on to describe an experience of intense spiritual renewal and the impact that it was having on my life and the lives of some mutual friends.

"I'm glad somebody I know is getting their life together,' she said. Then she told me abruptly, 'I've taken a lover.'

"My eyes must have widened. 'Really?' I said.

"There was a pause, then the other shoe dropped: 'My lover is a woman.'

"Oh,' I said.

"We kind of tiptoed through the conversation after that."

My pastor friend laid down his sandwich and wiped his mouth with his napkin. "I can only imagine how you must have felt," he said.

"Well," I continued, "we talked about her estrangement from her husband and whether their marriage had a chance.

"Finally, I told her what was on my heart. 'If God can say one thing to you in this moment, it is that he loves you and wants you to think.'

"I don't want to think right now,' she said.

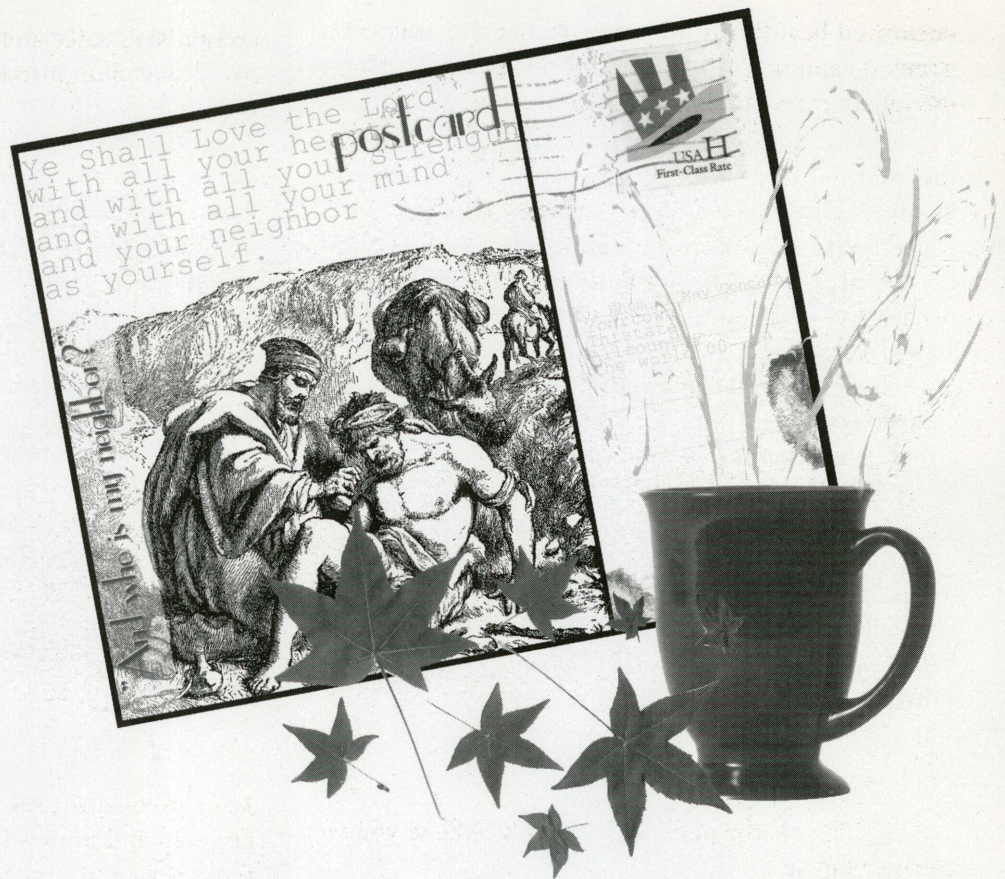
"I know, but God wants us to think about what we are doing and why."

"So what happened?" the pastor asked.

"We wrote to each other after that. We exchanged frank views regarding the rights and wrongs of her situation. She realizes that I don't approve of the breakup of her marriage and her new relationship, yet she knows I care deeply about her as a person and friend. I also maintain a good friendship with her former spouse.

"I invited her back to church when I preached, and she came. She was obviously uncomfortable, but thought enough of me to listen as I spoke about a complete commitment to Christ.

"Later, she and her domestic partner needed legal assistance concerning their property. She asked me to represent them. 'Now this is where the rubber hits the road,' I thought, 'What am I going to do?' All other friendships from her Adventist days were gone. Outside her family, I was her only remaining contact to that life. Would I enable sin if I helped her and her domestic partner? If I cut her off, what



would be the gain to God or to her?

"These were really tough questions because I believe that sexual purity is an essential principle. I accept traditional Adventist teachings on adultery, fornication, the sanctity of marriage, and the need for celibacy outside of marriage. In my representation of church institutions, I have been called many times to provide legal enforcement of these principles in the discipline and termination of employees. She knows what I believe and why. What she doesn't know is how much I prayed about what to do.

"I was impressed to go forward. I offered to take her and her partner to lunch to discuss their legal problem. Instead, she invited me to lunch at their home, and I agreed."

"You mean you condoned her sin," said the pastor, unable to contain his distaste.

"I don't see it that way. She was my friend long before she admitted her new relationship to me. I love her. What chance does love have without contact and communication? Isn't that what Jesus' incarnation is about? If there is contact there can be evangelism. Also, legal ethics are involved. It's wrong for me to refuse representation just because I disapprove of a client's sexual orientation.

"The lunch was pleasant and the home

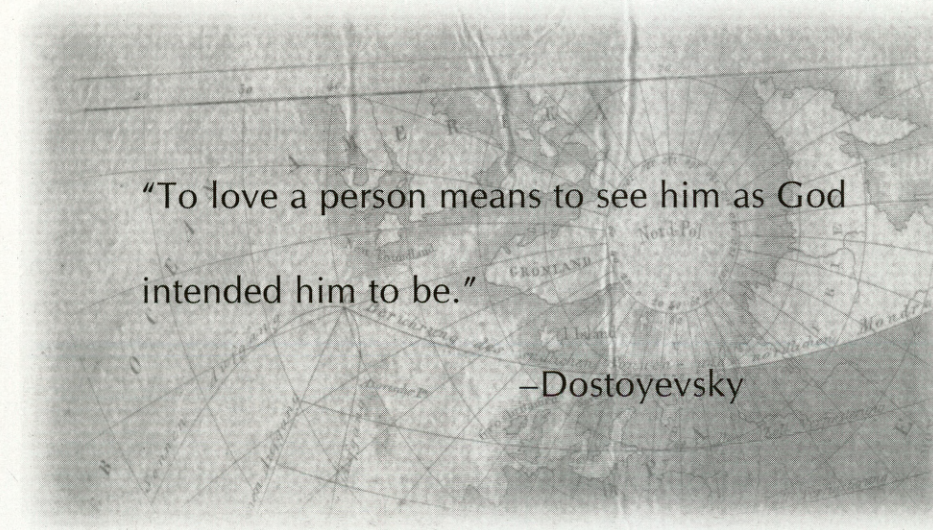
decorated beautifully. My friend's partner was very gracious and both were friendly and relaxed. They obviously cared about each other."

compulsive eater and verbal abuser are those who loved me enough to look at and touch me, not

flinching at my nature. The ones who turned away in disgust left me in despair and self-hatred. Knowing that, I can't turn away from my friend.

Dostoyevsky observed, "To love a person means to see him as God intended him to be." Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."⁵ There are four Gospels, four sets of God-given eyes that saw the people whom Jesus came to save from four different perspectives. With the eyes

Jesus gives me, I see a friend God loves, who needs my help and knows I serve Jesus. Who am I to shut these eyes and turn away, wishing instead for God to bring me a person who thinks and acts just like me?



"To love a person means to see him as God intended him to be."

—Dostoyevsky

The pastor persisted: "I can't believe you went to their house."

"Well, I kind of surprised me. But I'm glad I went and I would go again."

"I could never and would never do that," the pastor said. Persons in known sin should be excluded from fellowship until they repent and return to God."

"The God we know," I replied, "is a God of mercy. I simply cannot get around what James wrote: 'Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.'³ If Christ is my life, if Christ means anything to me, then who am I to deny contact to a person who seeks me out in friendship?"

In politeness, we agreed to disagree. The lunch ended; we were both troubled. My mind continues to change about how the gospel should be applied in relationships.

Sometimes I long for the return of days before I felt the grip of Jesus on my soul. I was much more comfortable and certain then about the application of rules to life and friendship.

What do I think at this point? I think that my friend's lifestyle is not God's ideal, but neither are my compulsive behavior and angry speech—both equally noted as barriers to inheritance of the Kingdom.⁴ The persons who have brought me to conviction as a

Loving Myself

The story is often told of a man who made an appointment with the famous psychologist Carl Jung to get help for chronic depression. Jung told him to reduce his fourteen-hour work day to eight, go directly home, and spend the evenings in his study, quiet and all alone. The depressed man went home to his study each night, shut the door, read a little Herman Hesse or Thomas Mann, played a few Chopin etudes or some Mozart. After weeks of this he returned to Jung complaining that he could see no improvement. On learning how the man had spent his time, Jung said, "But you didn't understand. I didn't want you to be with Hesse or Mann or Chopin or Mozart. I wanted you to be completely alone." The man looked terrified and exclaimed, "I can't think of any worse company." Jung replied, "Yet this is the self you inflict on other people fourteen

hours a day" (and, Jung might have added, the self you inflict on yourself.)⁶

This story explains why I sat on an eighty-seven-hundred-foot peak in Arizona's White Mountains at 6:30 a.m., on July 30, 1994, reading Psalm 119. I could no longer live with the self that I was inflicting on others and on me. I had learned in childhood to question whether I was really loved and, to avoid the pain of discovery, I learned to keep those closest to me at bay, routinely using an emotional flamethrower to clear space around me and readjust my boundaries. Anger, however, is a weapon without discernment between enemies and friends. It seared persons in my life deeply committed to me no matter what happens—people like my spouse, child, and law partners.

My rages broke relationships that I valued. Persons who loved me and whom I loved came to fear me and distrust my responses. This, I discovered, was the very cycle through which I had learned my destructive behavior.

Christ seized my life and stubbornly refused to coexist with my murderous heart of anger. The fact that I was reacting to childhood wounds explained matters, but was no excuse. Writing about the preeminence of love in Christ's followers, Paul explained: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult I put an end to childish ways."⁷ When people depend on you to take care of them, you must forgo the luxury of childish indulgence at their expense and pain.

In the summer of 1994, I was referred to a couple of clients who told me, "They say that win or lose, you always take a pound of flesh." That comment devastated me. My sin was my business card and it was past time to change. But how could I alter my very nature?

Unfit for companionship, I retreated into the Arizona wilderness for two weeks. I hiked into the woods every morning before dawn and spent the day praying for God to change me. The Holy Spirit strongly impressed me to pray while reading Psalm 119. That surprised me because I knew the passage only as the longest chapter in the Bible and an exposition of the glories of God's law.

On the sixth morning, I found my way cross-country to a rocky promontory that rose out of an aspen grove in the valley below. There I sat and prayed, reading these words: "May your unfailing love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to

your promise; then I will answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word."⁸ These words were a revelation. God loves me and will not stop! This truth moved from my head into my heart. Assured that the Creator and Lord of the Universe finds me loveable, I could confront the one who taunts me: myself. In that moment, a door opened and I walked through to free space where I could begin loving my neighbor and myself—as I am loved. In the words of an old children's chorus about John 3:16, "Whosoever surely meaneth me."

The simple fact of a life possessed by a faithful Christ is that it does not need to force issues and people to compensate for a perceived lack of love. Jesus tells me, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."⁹ Accepting this promise changed everything for me. I am my own friend.

A year after that Arizona morning, I was driving with my spouse, Patricia. I told her in amazed relief, "I'm not mad anymore. I don't know when or exactly how it happened, but the rage has gone out of me like a forest fire must die in the rain—slowly and gently, with steaming hisses and flare-ups—but it goes out."

Jesus' point to the lawyer was that the neighbor is the one who shows indiscriminate kindness. I am learning that the person who needs my kindness is a friend with whose choices I disagree, my own self-contemptuous soul, and even Jesus himself when taken for granted and shunted aside in his own house.

Notes and References

1. Luke 10:25-29 (NRSV).
2. Luke 23:6-12.
3. James 1:12-13 (NIV).
4. 1 Cor. 6:10.
5. John 9:39 (NIV). Dostoyevsky is quoted in Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father: Sermons and Parables of Jesus*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 81.
6. Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 19-20.
7. 1 Cor. 13:11 (NRSV).
8. Ps. 119:41-42 (NIV).
9. John 14:18 (NRSV).

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Loving Friends and Loving God

By Gary Chartier



By loving friends, we love God, whether we know it or not. The experience of friendship can point people to conscious awareness of the divine presence, and thus to explicit love for God. So friendship has the potential to be a rich spiritual resource. Because God is the world's transcendent Creator, we can experience and respond to the divine presence under any circumstances. So we do not have to choose between loving God and loving creation. Indeed, we love God precisely as we love the created world. In particular, we love God as we love other people. Thus, friendship can be a form of love for God.¹

The Defining Nature of Friendship

Love between persons is fundamental to who we are. Every genuinely moral choice is an implicit expression of love for God, for to accept a moral limitation on my being is to accept my status as a creature.² With every moral

choice I confront comes the requirement that I make or reaffirm a fundamental decision about my own identity. Am I God? Am I valueless? Or am I a part of God's good creation.³ Each of us faces these questions in every situation. Every time I make a choice about some concrete, particular thing in the world I also decide who I am. Even when not directly confronting another person, even when I am alone, I have to ask if my choices take the reality and value of others—and myself—into adequate account. Our encounters with other people pose basic moral and spiritual questions with particular force and clarity: will we exist with others in relationships of love, or will we sacrifice them—or ourselves—in relationships of abuse, domination, or neglect? Will we be open to the world, or will we refuse to acknowledge any reality beyond ourselves?⁴

Personal relationships call up, challenge, and engage every aspect of our humanness.⁵ Thus, interpersonal love fundamentally reflects who we are.⁶ When we love, therefore, we decisively express our basic orientation to the world—and thus to God.⁷ Friendship is a particularly intense and committed kind of love. It embodies and expresses the decision to accept oneself as a part of God's good creation in several ways.⁸

Friendship and Respect for Difference

It does so, first, because it is grounded in respect for otherness.⁹ My friend is different from me. No matter how much I love her, no matter how much our interests may converge, no matter how much we may identify with each other, I must recognize that she is still free, that she can surprise me, that our desires may not always coincide. To take her seriously as a friend is to grant her the space to be who she is.

Of course, if the identities of two friends merged, they wouldn't be friends. Love is so powerful, so profoundly moving, precisely because it is given freely by another. A friend who does not stand over against me cannot really love me. The inner logic of friendship

requires the maintenance of otherness, the respect for difference, between the friends. Allowing a friend to be herself can prove to be a delicate moral task.

Friendship, Fidelity, and Vulnerability

To love a friend is to be faithful to her even as she grows and changes in the exercise of her freedom. This might be an easy task if a friend's interests and one's own, a friend's personality and one's own, a friend's identity and one's own, were simply the same. But the reality of a friend's difference from oneself challenges

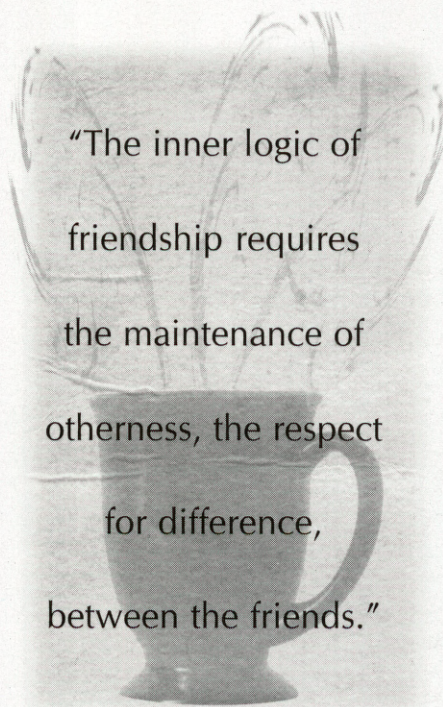
one to be loyal despite change and conflict. That a true friend is in an important sense a part of oneself only complicates matters further. By defining who one is with reference to who a friend is, by making her part of oneself even as she differs from oneself, one accepts a potentially threatening vulnerability.

To take a friendship seriously is to accept the responsibility to be loyal to someone to whom one is vulnerable. A friend's claim on one's loyalty constrains one's options. Accepting this claim means that one must consistently define one's own projects with reference to hers, even when—precisely when—

they are not identical with one's own. In opting for fidelity, one accepts oneself as limited, as finite—as a creature.

Accepting Friendship, Gifts, and Grace

Another important moral and spiritual dimension of friendship is the essentially graced quality of a life in which friendship is a part. Accepting friends and friend-



"The inner logic of
friendship requires
the maintenance of
otherness, the respect
for difference,
between the friends."

ships as gifts; accepting a friend's ongoing, particular self-gifts; and accepting oneself as a friend's gift are all ways in which, as a friend, one owns oneself as a part of God's good creation.

As a Christian, I will believe that God has been at work in and through the events leading to the formation of my friendships. In this sense, each friendship is a gift of grace. But it is possible to accept and respond to the experience of grace in friendship whatever one believes about divine providence. That a friendship cannot be planned or controlled confronts us directly with its character as a gift of grace. Friendships come into being when we least expect them. The factors that predispose us to enter into them are often unconscious: we often want particular people as friends for social, cultural, and psychological reasons that we cannot articulate. Seemingly random circumstances bring people together and give them opportunities to discover each other as potential friends. Thus, our friendships tend to be beyond our conscious control.

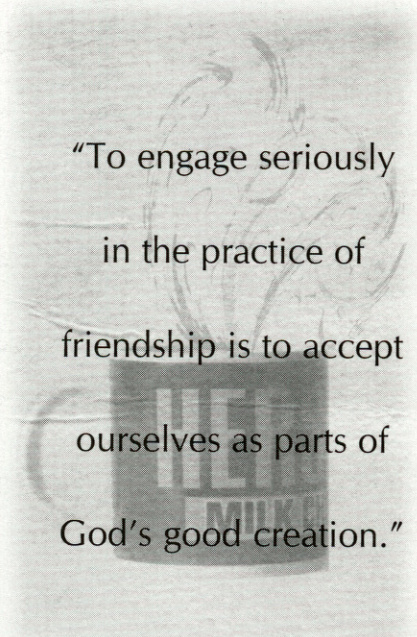
Becoming and remaining a friend reflects the recognition that our lives are better—more fulfilled, marked by greater flourishing—when we share ourselves with others than when we close ourselves off in individualistic isolation. As a friend, I accept that I need someone else if I want to experience a certain quality of life. After a friendship has come into being, and I have bonded my life with that of a friend, I also need her if I am to be the person I am, to retain the identity I have achieved in relationship with her. In this sense, I am dependent on her.

As one weaves one's life together with a friend, one becomes dependent on her in other ways as well. A friendship itself is a gift. But gifts of various kinds may also accompany or result from it. Gifts of time, money, expertise, and emotional support may all express a friend's love. Receiving these gifts joyfully may sometimes be easy—but not always. Fearful of domination and abuse, we may flee dependence. But accepting gifts is part of what it means to be a friend. To let a friend

know that she has something valuable to give by accepting her gift is a gift in its own right. Our friends need to know that what they offer is significant, that it matters. When we grant the reality of our dependence by accepting our friends' gifts, we affirm again our status as God's creatures.

To make another person a close friend is to make her part of oneself. Who one is, then, depends on who she is. One is always vulnerable, of course, to forces outside one's control, but in friendship one explicitly owns and accepts one's vulnerability. One chooses it. One agrees that one's identity will be affected by the actions of another. Realizing that her love has shaped and

continues to shape who one is, one accepts that one's identity is a friend's gift. It is contingent on her choices and on what befalls her. "A friend is a part of my own being. If he is no longer there, then I have somehow died with him."¹⁰ The friend's gift thus includes, in a sense, the gift of myself. To receive this gift of grace thankfully, instead of shunning it as a source of enervating dependence, is also to choose life as a part of the good creation.



"To engage seriously
in the practice of
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Friendship as a Response to the Good

Friendship represents a response to the good discerned in the friend. I don't mean that we seek—or should seek—only the virtuous or the beautiful as our friends. But everything that is at all is good. The simple fact of existing is good. Being is good. The only perfectly bad thing would be something that didn't exist at all. Of course, the good that every finite thing embodies is limited—that's just what finitude means, and the goods realized in human lives are distorted by, among other things, humanity's moral imperfection and brokenness. The fact remains, though, that, whenever we experience true friendship, we respond to qualities of our friends as in some sense good. Friendship is morally significant, then, because in it we respond to the claim of a goodness external to ourselves.

To engage seriously in the practice of friendship is to accept ourselves as parts of God's good creation. It is to grant, practically if not always explicitly, that we are finite, contingent, vulnerable. It is to deny the possibility that we could ever exist on our own, and thus to affirm that we are creatures. In owning ourselves as creatures, we experience again and again an essential element of the conversion that is necessary if we are to relate appropriately to God. For in friendship we accept that we are not divine. We recognize our dependence, even as we celebrate the goodness of the grace on which we are dependent.¹¹ Thus, we orient ourselves aright in relation to God.¹²

Distractions and Disagreements

Some people seem to think there's a basic, unavoidable conflict between loving other people and devotion to God. For them, God "is the only thing worthy of love." Every other reality is less important, less valuable. Prayer and devotional practices are the only genuinely worthwhile activities. We are wasting time and emotional energy when we focus our attention on other people—time and energy we could instead give to God. Our friends are at best distractions from God, who is our only true Beloved.

Such people are wrong. They rest on a misunderstanding of God's relation to the world—a misunderstanding according to which friendship is a spiritual distraction and God and creatures compete for our love. I believe the Christian doctrine of creation helps to show why this conception is doubtful.

As well as highlighting God's presence in the world, the Christian doctrine of creation also points to the difference between God and creation. Being created means being the kind of reality that couldn't exist on its own. Being created means being finite, limited, constrained. By contrast, God is infinite. God isn't a thing, an object, or a bit of finite reality. As the universe's infinite Creator, God is qualitatively different from each of the things that make up the universe, and from the universe in its totality.

We can encounter God anywhere and in any context. God doesn't live in church. Having pious feelings isn't the only way to be sensitive to God's presence (indeed, it may not even be an especially good way). Turning away from particular things in the world won't enable us to know or love God better, for we can turn away from one finite thing only to another finite thing and God is not a finite thing at all. The Creator is not a competitor with any aspect of creation for our attention and love. A God who could be a human friend's rival for our affections—even a successful rival—isn't really God at all.

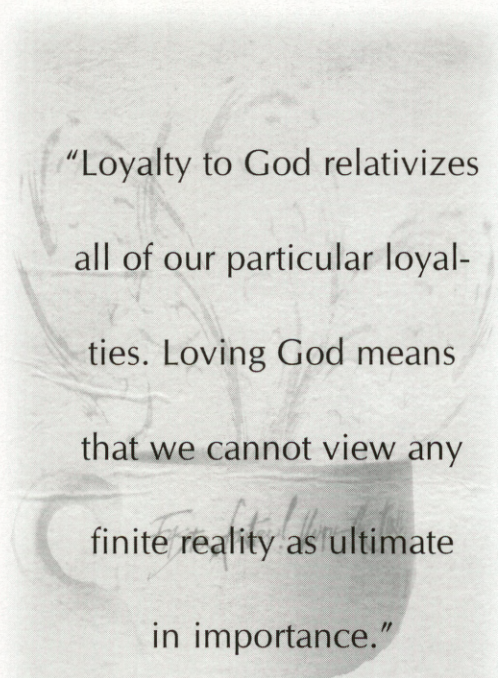
Friendship and Idolatry

The actual significance of Christian concern with idolatry can help us avoid the guilt and anxiety that sometimes follow from the view that God and creation compete for our love. We can't treat any finite thing, any creature, as if it were infinite—as if it were God—without falsifying the nature of reality. If we are to treat each bit of finite reality appropriately, then we can't allow any single constituent of the creation to trump the claims of all the others. Only if we give ultimate loyalty

solely to God, to the infinite reality that transcends every particular object in the world, will we be able to put every finite reality in perspective and give each its due. That's why Christians ought to avoid idolatry.¹³

Being loyal to God does clearly mean, then, that one can't act as if a friend—or, for that matter, a car, a house, an institution, a nation, even a planet—is the only thing that really matters. Loyalty to God relativizes all of our particular loyalties. It puts each one in its proper place. Loving God means that we cannot view any finite reality as ultimate in importance.

It doesn't mean, however, that we can't or shouldn't care deeply, intensely, about particular people and communities and things. Indeed, love for God manifests itself precisely in our love for and attachment



"Loyalty to God relativizes all of our particular loyalties. Loving God means that we cannot view any finite reality as ultimate in importance."

to particular goods.¹⁴ We need to take seriously not only the claims of those realities that are central to our own particular projects, but also those we haven't chosen to focus on, but which may matter profoundly to others.

It is not our job to replace God. We are not responsible for the universe. To act as if we were would itself be an especially pitiful and futile kind of idolatry. We can and should have particular, finite projects of our own, causes and relationships that matter to us deeply. And, obviously, if we care about some things we will be able to devote less attention to others.¹⁵ But we can avoid idolatry as long as we don't treat the things and people we care about primarily as the only things and people worth caring about at all.

Idolatry as a Moral Concept

Avoiding idolatry means being morally responsible by respecting each element of the creation for what it is. Idolatry is wrong, not so much because idolatrous behavior doesn't give God what God is due, but because it doesn't give the creation what it is due. "God does not stand in line waiting his turn at the wicket, not even at the head of the line. Rather, he brings this or that neighbor to the head of the line, and demands our best attention for him. And at another moment, perhaps, he closes the wicket, sends the whole line away, and demands to inspect our books."¹⁶

We refuse to succumb to idolatry by choosing to live morally responsible lives, not by forsaking life in the world. Provided we don't attempt to be God, there's no reason our particular commitments should come into significant conflict with our general loyalty to the good of creation most of the time. Rejecting idolatry means that when conflicts occur we must be willing to let our particular loves take their proper places in relation to the other elements of created reality.

Idolizing someone else is bad for her or him as well as for others whose legitimate claims we may ignore because of our idolatry. Treating a friend as a source of

absolute good imposes a crushing burden on her or him. Being treated as the center of the universe imposes an enormous responsibility on the idolized person for the idolater's well-being, one the idol is incapable of bearing. In turn, the idolater may use this sense of responsibility as a basis for trying to control the idolized person. That it tempts the idolater to manipulation and control, however, isn't the only thing that makes idolatry bad for the idolater. Enchanted by the idolized person, she or he may give up freedom, agency, and responsibility. She or he may find the failure of the idol to deliver the ultimate

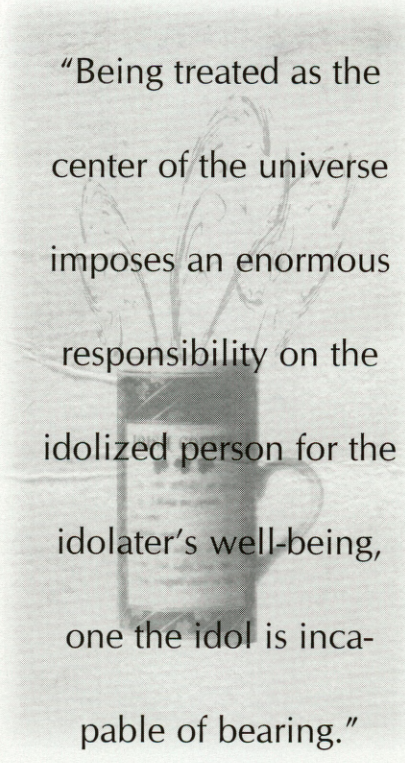
satisfaction for which she or he seeks profoundly disappointing. Recognizing persons as infinitely precious and cherishable, but nonetheless incapable of substituting for God, incapable of trumping absolutely the claims of other creatures, is the only way to relate to them properly. Idolatry is a bad idea. However, passionate desire, devotion, and care aren't idolatrous: they are appropriate responses to the immeasurably precious creatures human beings are. Idolatry is wrong because of what it takes away from the idolater, the idolized person, and from others.¹⁷

Understood correctly, then, we should avoid idolatry for the sake of the creaturely world. Loving friends, loving them intensely, needn't be idolatrous. It doesn't have to keep us from loving God. We don't have to

ration our love for our friends to make sure we've got enough left over for God. We can love God precisely as we love our friends. God is not in competition with the world, or any part of the world, for our loyalty. Any reality to which we could be loyal only as we turned away from things in the creaturely world wouldn't be God at all: it would be an especially demonic idol.

Disagreeing with Friends in a Religiously Plural World

This is especially important in an environment like the one in which many, if not most, contemporary



"Being treated as the center of the universe imposes an enormous responsibility on the idolized person for the idolater's well-being, one the idol is incapable of bearing."

people live. People in our world confront a dizzying array of religious options. It should not surprise us that people we care about, people who care about us, disagree with us about some or all of the things that matter most to us.¹⁸

Proselytization is not the purpose of friendship. One doesn't become someone's friend to win her over to one's own religious community or convictions. A relationship with a person directed toward converting her isn't a friendship. At the same time, beliefs—our own and other people's—ought to matter to us. What we believe can determine how we experience our world, how we relate to ourselves and other people. Our religious convictions can significantly influence the kinds of lives we lead and different convictions have the potential to shape very different lives, so some disagreements are certainly worth taking seriously. Just because someone says, "This belief works for me," it doesn't follow that the belief in question really does work for her, that it doesn't lead her to engage in self-destructive behavior, that it doesn't prevent her from reaching her full potential. Precisely because we care about people, then, we need to care about what they believe.

Any disagreement about important issues can be stressful, but disagreements with friends about religious matters can be especially painful if we feel that our loved ones' disagreements with us may prove that they are outside the circle of God's grace. We may have learned somewhere to fear that God will accept friends who disagree with us about important religious matters only if the friends change.¹⁹ Thus, we may be tempted to shun people who disagree with us, or to view prospective friends as suspect if their convictions differ from ours. Even if we do open ourselves to people who differ with us, we may secretly fear that they are outside the pale of God's grace.

Friendship as a Sign of Spiritual Health

Realistically, it is likely that loved ones with whom we differ are morally flawed, struggling, divided human

beings—just like us. That means that their devotion to us may be fitful and that other loyalties may compete with their loyalties to us. But it doesn't mean that their love for us isn't at least as genuine as ours for them. If their love for us is real and respects the claims of the rest of creation, then friends who disagree with us give good evidence of God's work in their hearts and lives. We can understand their friendship for us as love for God, as the fruit of God's grace, and as appropriately responsive to God's love.²⁰

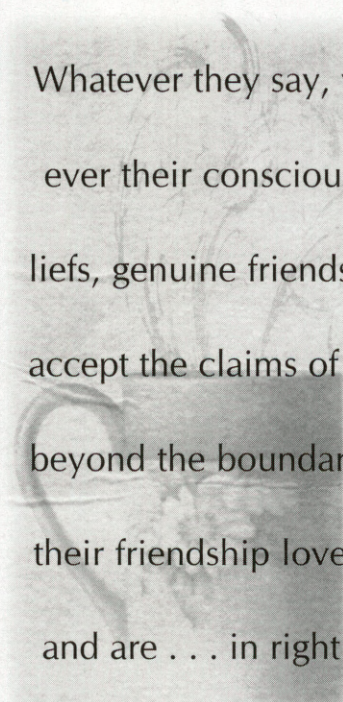
This realization frees us to share lovingly our convictions about the most adequate way to be fulfilled and responsible persons in God's world. Because we love friends, we will want their lives to be as rich as possible with the gifts—relational, emotional, physical, and social—that God wants to give them. But we will not suppose that our efforts will determine whether they accept God's grace or not, whether God accepts them or not, or whether God is lovingly present and active in their lives.

People love God implicitly in friendship. Whatever they say, whatever their conscious beliefs, genuine friends who accept the claims of those beyond the boundaries of their friendship love God and are in an important sense in right relationship with God.²¹ Thus, even if they

disagree with us about things that matter profoundly, and even if they hurt themselves and others as a result, our friends' love gives evidence that they are not strangers to God's saving grace.

Loving Those with Whom We Disagree

Some Christian discomfort with close relationships across religious boundaries appears to be grounded in a concern with what we might label "purity." Some Christians seem to feel as if close contact with non-Christians will defile them, make them unclean.²² At its roots, the idea of purity involves maintenance of social



Whatever they say, whatever their conscious beliefs, genuine friends who accept the claims of those beyond the boundaries of their friendship love God and are . . . in right relationship with God."

order and group identity. Categorizing and classifying people, places, practices, objects, and events imparts meaning and structure to a seemingly chaotic world. Establishing group boundary markers—we are the people who do this, who don't look like that, or who don't go there—enables a community to feel secure and stable. Purity rules serve to maintain group identity.

Sometimes, of course, Christians worry about relationships with those outside the Christian community not only because of a vague fear of impurity, but also because they worry that their beliefs will be challenged, their perspectives altered, and their habits changed. Of course, it's possible that a person might give up valuable convictions and practices because of a friendship. However, there's no reason for this possibility to make anyone fearful of a genuine friendship.

Still, few if any friendships—and certainly none between people whose religious or moral beliefs differ significantly—will be free of tension. Such tension is no reason to forsake a friendship. Instead, it can provide an opportunity for growth. Friends who disagree should be able to learn from each other. The respect friends have for each other means that one friend won't force her beliefs on another, but each will still likely share her beliefs—not only verbally, but also (and more importantly) by embodying them.

Seeing what a particular vision of life looks like in practice can be a profound challenge to one's assumptions about fulfilled, flourishing human existence. Obviously, that can be very unsettling. But unless one supposes that one already has everything figured out and has nothing to learn, one will seek to learn from a friend instead of ignoring, denying, or rejecting the things that make her different from oneself. To close oneself off to a friend's challenge—even for supposedly religious reasons—would be to indulge in an excessive self-confidence that represented an implicit denial of one's creatureliness.

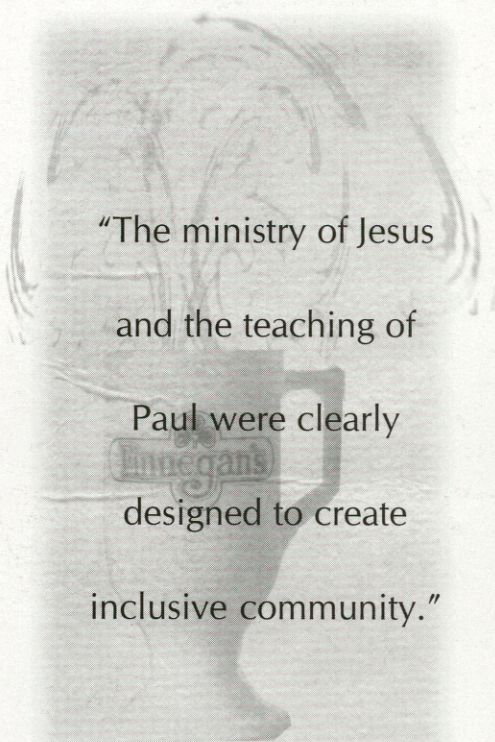
Breaking Down Boundaries That Separate People

The conviction that God is the world's transcendent Creator, that God's truth is infinitely greater than our beliefs, that God's world is far vaster than our particular communities, should make us question any attempt to keep our beliefs or lives pristine, pure, unchallenged, and unchanged. The church, like any other community, has come to exercise demonic power in our lives if we refuse, whatever the price, to allow contact with those outside its boundaries to upset our orderly lives within it, if we seek to protect our identities at any cost.

Any community must be open to challenge and change if it is to avoid idolatry. The Christian church has a particularly strong reason to reject rules about purity that divide people. The ministry of Jesus and the teaching of Paul were clearly designed to create inclusive community. Christianity was founded on the premise that boundaries separating people and communities should be broken down.²³

Throughout his letters, Paul wrestled with the question of how a movement that started Jewish could become a truly universal community. His solutions and prescriptions were, of course, carefully shaped—albeit pragmatic—responses to the particular challenges he confronted, but the consistency with which they exhibit his commitment to inclusiveness in the face of prevailing purity rules is both obvious and noteworthy.²⁴

Shunning those whose views might unsettle us or challenge the convictions of our communities is a manifestation of idolatry and should be avoided—not embraced. Paul and Jesus were both committed to fighting the idolization of human communities and the consequent creation of boundaries designed to keep outsiders at arms' length. Thus, a central Christian belief and a fundamental trajectory of the Christian tradition militate against Christian exclusivism.



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Learning Through Religious Disagreement

A friend with whom one differs about religious issues will usually have reasons for viewing things the way she does. If she holds her beliefs responsibly, if she has thought about them carefully and reflectively, engaging with her will enrich one's own understanding. One undoubtedly has things to learn. One should expect to change in the course of sharing life with one's friends. Indeed, one should be disturbed if one does not change.²⁵

It is certainly possible that one may find one's own convictions essentially unaltered by one's relationship with a friend who does not share them. Even then, however, one may well find that this relationship enables acquisition of a clearer understanding of just what it is one believes, what one's beliefs mean, and how important they are. Dialogue helps to clarify one's thinking whatever the outcome.²⁶

A true friend is another self. This means letting her into the inmost core of one's being, being vulnerable to her, accepting that one can and indeed will change in relationship with her. So respect for a friend's otherness cannot mean keeping her at a distance. The call to fidelity in friendship is a call to remain in relationship with another despite stresses and tensions. The recognition of one's own creaturely finitude is a challenge to continue learning from disagreements with a friend.

Experiencing God and the World Through Friendship

People find it difficult to believe in a loving and empowering God for an enormous variety of reasons. But it is certainly unlikely that someone will be able to believe if she lacks the experience of genuine community, if she is closed in on herself—fearful, self-protective,

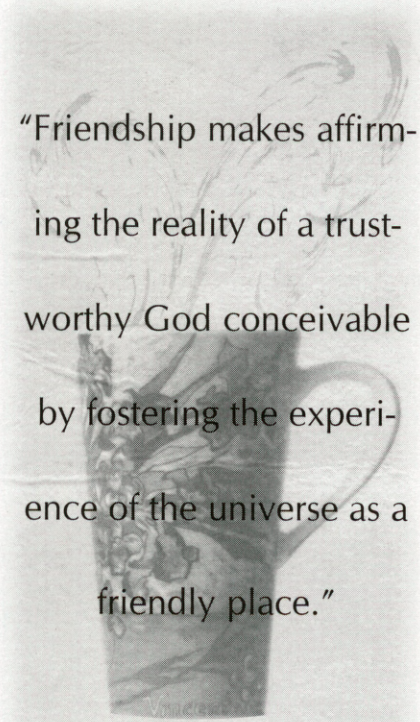
or arrogant. Friendship can help to make healthy religious belief possible for such a person. It can contribute to the development of basic trust: the confidence that the universe is, despite its darkness, danger, and undeniable obscurity, a fundamentally friendly place, a place in which it is worthwhile to risk oneself in love.²⁷ Thus, it can nurture an openness of spirit that makes dialogue, including dialogue about ultimate questions, possible. It can also encourage recognition of the self's

limited character, its inherent relatedness, as a result of which relationship—including relationship with God—can come to be seen as empowering rather than threatening.

One will find it hard to experience the world as a benevolently ordered, meaningful whole if one's own social world is in chaos. A personal life void of purpose or bereft of evidence of love, affirmation, and support is hardly a fertile breeding ground for religious belief. The collapse of the social structures that have given one security and hope may occasion the collapse of one's belief in God as well. Without a sense of basic trust, fostered in relationship and community, one's attitude toward God will be no different from one's attitude toward any other reality different

from oneself. The only kind of God one will be able to imagine will be an object—an object to be manipulated or a competitive oppressor. One may thus distort one's picture of God beyond recognition, or deny that God-talk refers to any kind of reality at all.²⁸

If "the absence of human community . . . renders prayer well-nigh impossible,"²⁹ then only when such community exists will authentic, appropriate religious believing be viable for many people. This is obviously a societal and political as well as personal problem. A small group rarely has enough power to stabilize or reconstruct other people's social worlds on its own, but what happens on the personal level matters, too. As friends offer each other love and trust, fear can be exchanged for love, and doubt can give way to hope. When people learn to trust each other, and when, as a result, they come to experience the world in trustful ways, they will be able to believe in a trustworthy God



"Friendship makes affirming the reality of a trustworthy God conceivable by fostering the experience of the universe as a friendly place."

as well. Close friendship provides a setting in which people can acquire the sense of basic trust crucial to the formation of belief in God.

Friendship makes affirming the reality of a trustworthy God conceivable by fostering the experience of the universe as a friendly place. It does so by encouraging the kind of dialogue within which friends can explore the possibility of God. Being a friend, existing in friendship, makes one a certain kind of person.

Friendship expresses and reinforces a basic commitment to be in the world dialogically, to attend to the surprises with which things and other people present us, to relativize our own perspectives and projects as we listen—literally and figuratively—to others. Attending to what is other than oneself, allowing one's preconceived notions to be challenged is essential if one is even to consider the possibility that a religious interpretation of reality might be appropriate.

This kind of openness is necessary if dialogue about religious questions is to get underway. It is not simply a prerequisite for discussing belief in God, however; it is to a significant degree the goal of the dialogue as well. A healthy belief in God is expressed, crucially, as one opens oneself to the rest of reality, recognizing one's inherent finitude and fallibility. This is precisely what the kind of openness required for dialogue is about.³⁰ One can offer implicit love to God without being overtly religious, but one cannot be overtly religious in a healthy way without adopting a basic stance of openness to the world.³¹ Such a stance, characterized by readiness for dialogue and respect for otherness, can be both generated and sustained by the experience of friendship.

Friendship cannot create religious convictions on its own, but it can foster a way of experiencing the world—one marked by venturesome openness and hopeful trust—that make religious belief an option. If a person's social world has been shattered, or if it never cohered in a meaningful way at all, it will be very hard for her to see the world as anything but a place of threatening darkness. The experience of friendship can serve to light a candle in that darkness, to begin the

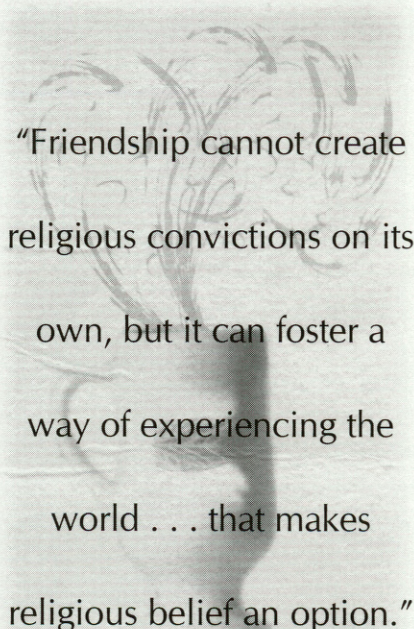
painful and tedious process of constructing or reconstructing a social reality within the context of which she can find it possible to believe.³²

Is That All There Is?

In love relationships such as friendships, we experience the quest for more than we could ever

possibly have. We may unreflectively expect those we love to provide us, not just with fidelity, but also with ultimate security—including security that comes from knowing they will never die. Our behavior suggests that we want them to offer, not merely deep and committed love, but a total acceptance that will permanently heal our doubts about our standing in the universe. Friendship is an arena in which we struggle against—and thus, ironically, affirm—our contingency.

The anxiety to which these unfulfillable demands are reactions is one that our friends cannot assuage. They cannot secure us against fate. Even as we realize this and struggle against it, however, we confront the demand within ourselves for something that can. Again, the secular person can conclude that this striving for ultimate security and acceptance is finally futile, that it is the product of self-deception. But she must at least acknowledge that it expresses a desire for more than secular reality seems able to deliver, which raises the question whether secular reality truly is all the reality there is.³³



“Friendship cannot create religious convictions on its own, but it can foster a way of experiencing the world . . . that makes religious belief an option.”

Friendship and the Desire for Total Acceptance

Friendship provides us with distinctive opportunities for evil as well as good. The vulnerability to which

we commit ourselves in friendship gives us the opportunity to do each other profound harm. Sometimes—unfortunately—we can erase from our memories the faces of strangers or mere acquaintances whose lives we have damaged. It's a lot harder to forget the pain we cause our friends.

If our moral failings are especially evident in our friendships, then these relationships also challenge us with particular intensity to seek healing and acceptance. While a friend from whom one has become separated can accept one anew, our moral failures may prompt us unconsciously to want more—an acceptance that covers, not merely this particular failure, but all possible failures, past and future. Such an acceptance must represent an affirmation of who one is in one's totality, without illusions—otherwise, what would it be worth?³⁴

How can we find such acceptance? The secular response must be, again, that is not forthcoming, that our desire for it is finally unrealistic. So it may be. But secular people who continue to search for it can at least be pardoned for finding their quest an anomaly with which secularity itself is ill-equipped to deal.

Various features of friendship—the basic trust it fosters; the hope it reflects; the protest it registers against futility, decay, and death; its embodiment of the search for meaning; its inability to offer the ultimate fulfillment with which it may seem to tempt us; and the desire for acceptance it occasions—all fit somewhat uneasily within the confines of modern secularism. Christian theology discloses friendship as a form of implicit love for God. However, a theological analysis of contemporary culture also suggests ways in which aspects of the experience of friendship can point to discontinuities within secular experience, discontinuities that might spur some secular people to raise the question of God explicitly.

Celebrating One of God's Richest Gifts

Friendship and the love of God do not conflict; they would do so only if God were a finite thing in the world, instead of its infinite Creator. It is precisely in and through our encounters in the world—including those with our friends—that we respond in love to God. We don't avoid idolatry by regulating or suppressing our human loves to make appropriate room for God in our lives (how much room would be enough?), but by acknowledging the claims made upon us by the diverse

constituents of the creation and refusing to give any of them—including ourselves and our friends—a pseudodivine absoluteness. Even if, fearful of vulnerability and contingency, we could flee from the world to God we would be ignoring the example of Jesus and our hope for life beyond death as well as denying ourselves the opportunity to experience the rich gifts God has given us in creation.

Taking friendship seriously requires us to own ourselves as parts of God's good creation. Thus, friendship is a form of faithful response to God—whether explicit or implicit. Because friendship is a kind of implicit love for God, religious differences need not prevent Christians from seeing friends with whose convictions they differ as nonetheless inside the circle of God's grace—simply in virtue of their genuine friendship. While some conflicts may occur between persons with differing religious convictions, this need not keep them from being friends. Indeed, their differences may spur each to growth and a greater appreciation of God's truth.

Basic trust is crucial to belief in God. Indeed, community—including the community of friendship—is the only thing that makes religious belief a live option for some people. The experience of friendship can help foster basic trust, and thus render belief possible. Numerous features of friendship also raise questions contemporary secularity may find it hard to answer, and in so doing help nudge people toward explicit love for God.

Loving friends is neither irrelevant to Christian spirituality nor a distraction from the love of God. As a form of love for God and an inspiration for basic trust and explicit Christian belief, it can play an important role in contemporary Christian life. That friendship is a way in which divine love is shared and experienced gives us yet another reason to celebrate it as one of the richest of God's gifts.

Notes and References

1. I am especially indebted to Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," *Theological Investigations 6: Concerning Vatican Council II*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton; New York: Seabury, 1974), 231-49. See also Rahner's *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, trans. Robert Barr (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

2. Cf. Rahner, "Atheism and Implicit Christianity," *Theological Investigations 9: Writings of 1965-67*, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder, 1972), 153: "The person who accepts a moral demand from his conscience as absolutely valid for him and embraces it as such in a free act of affirmation—no matter how unreflected—asserts the absolute being of God, whether he

knows or conceptualizes it or not, as the very reason why there can be such a thing as an absolute moral demand at all."

3. Cf. Rahner, "Anonymous and Explicit Faith," *Theological Investigations 16: Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*, trans. David Morland (New York: Crossroad-Seabury, 1979), 55-56: a person "accepts God when he freely accepts himself in his own unlimited transcendence. He does this when he genuinely follows his conscience with free consent, because by such an action he affirms as well the condition of possibility of such a radical option which is implicitly bound up with this decision, i.e. he affirms God."

4. See Rahner, "Unity," 239-44. Cf. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 40: "there is one limit to man's attempt to draw all content into himself—the other self. . . . One can destroy . . . [the other self] as a self, but one cannot assimilate it as a content of one's own centeredness." See also, Rahner, "The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments," *Theological Investigations 5: Later Writings*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton; New York: Seabury, 1966), 456: the "commandment" of love "does not command man to do something or other but simply commands him to fulfill himself, and charges man with himself, i.e. himself as the possibility of love in the acceptance of the love in which God does not give something but gives himself."

5. Rahner, "Unity," 242.

6. *Ibid.*, 243.

7. Persons and communities of persons are not the only sources of value in the universe. Paintings and dogs and trees and cars and houses also exert distinctive claims on us. But it's easy to forget this when we deal with inanimate objects. They don't overtly resist us. It is not always easy to secure the results one desires from a piece of metal or wood. But we are confident that in such cases technological manipulation will suffice to ensure that we will finally get our way.

By contrast, persons are free. They present us with special challenges. They're not pliable in the same way inanimate objects—or even animals—are. They respond unpredictably, sometimes perversely, to what we do. Our relationships with them put us in our places more directly and obviously than our relationships with nonhuman elements of the created order. They challenge us more directly than do the nonhuman creatures (animate and inanimate) we usually encounter. Relationships with people require us more insistently to ask fundamental moral questions about our identities than relationships of other kinds.

8. My analysis here depends on Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 242-46.

9. On this point, see Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Putnam, 1951), 200-208. Weil's view appears to be that only God's grace could empower friends to respect each other as other. When they do so, they give evidence of openness to God's work in their lives. In *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 24-34, Tillich offers a nuanced analysis of the balance between identity and difference in love relationships (including friendship) as he reflects on the tension between *philia* and *eros*.

10. Ladislaus Boros, *Meeting God in Man* (London: Herder, 1968), 57; cf. Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, 245.

11. Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, 246.

12. Luke Johnson, *Faith's Freedom: A Classic Spirituality for Contemporary Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 82-83.

13. The notion of "radical monotheism"—the Christian

alternative to idolatry—as an essentially moral and political concept is ably developed in H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, with Supplementary Essays* (New York: Harper, 1970); see also Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 13; and Langdon Gilkey, *Shantung Compound: The Story of Men and Women under Pressure* (New York: Harper, 1966), 230-35.

14. Cf. Robert Merrihew Adams, "God as the Good" (unpublished Wilde Lecture 1, 1989).

15. Cf. Adams, "Idolatry" (unpublished Wilde Lecture 3, 1989), 3.

16. Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Leicester, Eng.: IVP, 1986), 232-33.

17. The work of Diogenes Allen has helped inspire this insight. See Allen's *Love: Christian Romance, Marriage, Friendship* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1987).

18. This issue is addressed sensitively, though with explicit reference only to family members, in Karl Rahner, "The Christian Among Unbelieving Relations," *Theological Investigations 3: The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton; New York: Seabury, 1974), 355-72. My analysis and response to the problem represents largely an extension of Rahner's, and I am indebted to him here as in many other places. Rahner does not employ precisely the same solution to the problem as I do—i.e., that the very fact that a genuine, nonexploitative love relationship exists at all is evidence of what he would call "anonymous Christianity"—but my response is consonant with his overall perspective.

19. If we accept this supposition while also caring about people whose beliefs are, we think, inadequate, we may find ourselves torn. On one hand, we may want to share the good news contained in (what we hope are) our more adequate beliefs. On the other hand, we may discover deep within ourselves the secret, vaguely guilty hope that our beliefs don't really matter very much. That way, differences of belief won't separate those who care about us from God's grace (and perhaps also from us, its presumed recipients).

20. This is not, in and of itself, an interpretation of non-Christian experience that Christians should expect non-Christians to find appealing. It is not a kind of "natural theology," an argument designed to convince non-Christians of anything. It is a Christian reading of experience, a theological interpretation of human existence that follows from basic Christian convictions about God and creation. Its function is not to convince anyone to join the Christian community, but to emphasize to fearful or arrogant Christians that God is present as accepting and transforming love throughout the entire creation.

21. Joseph A. DiNoia, "Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians," *Thomist* 47 (1983): 209-41, has argued that the notion of implicit faith is unhelpful as a general way of talking about the spiritual status of non-Christians. In response, I have avoided this expression—despite its popularity—in place of alternatives like "implicit love." However, I am not persuaded that DiNoia's challenge to some Catholic discussions of "implicit faith" is decisive against the view I have articulated here.

First, DiNoia focuses on "faith" in a rather narrowly propositional sense, seeking to show that non-Christian morality and spiritual sensitivity do not imply belief in the central doctrines of Christianity. These arguments do not count against a view of implicit faith dependent on a Protestant conception of faith as trust.

Second, DiNoia's arguments depend on the claim that a

Christian account of a person's experience within a non-Christian religious tradition must be congruent with the person's own self-understanding. (For instance, he asserts: "The ascription of truth in other religions to divine inspiration is sometimes framed in terms of the doctrine of revelation. This is a secondary or extended use of the doctrine which may or may not be appropriate given non-Christians' self-descriptions" [230; but cf. the hair-splitting distinction on 231].) How are these self-descriptions relevant? As DiNoia himself asserts on the same page, "Truth, wherever it occurs, comes from the one source of truth.") But this claim hardly seems supportable. The Rahnerian claim is not an empirical analysis of the content of non-Christian experience; it is a theological reading of the underpinnings of that experience. While the empirical character of non-Christian experience is not irrelevant to such a reading, it does not bear directly on the validity of the Rahnerian position, which is not empirical in focus. Thus, DiNoia's claims do not render implausible, or even improbable, the claim that the moral and spiritual dispositions of non-Christians are such that they relate appropriately to God, even should they conceptualize their relationships with God inadequately.

DiNoia develops his argument further in *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992). In this book, DiNoia suggests that some non-Christian responses to reality may count as implicit faith, and some may not.

22. The standard discussion of purity is Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966). Jeffrey Stout examines how Douglas's work might be appropriated by ethicists and theologians in *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

23. See, e.g., Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision—Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989); and E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1983).

24. Paul addresses the question of community boundaries throughout his writings. The issue of eating with believing "Gentiles" is addressed in Gal. 2:11-17 (cf. Acts 15). In 1 Cor. 10:27-30, he explicitly affirms the appropriateness of table fellowship with those outside the Christian community. The central importance in Pauline thought of the notion that the boundaries between the supposedly "pure" and "impure" are broken down is highlighted in Eph. 3:4-6, which asserts that "the mystery of Christ" is the fact that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

With its call not to be "mismatched with unbelievers" and its injunction to "touch nothing unclean," 2 Cor. 6:14-17, might appear to be an exception to Paul's general commitment. Read in context, however, the text does not represent a call to the Corinthian Christians to separate themselves in general from those outside the Christian community, but a demand—making pragmatic use of traditional purity language—that they refuse to give their loyalty to opponents whose views Paul implicitly critiques throughout the letter.

25. Cf. Lorentz Gregory Jones, "Formation in Moral Judgment: An Essay on the Social Context of Christian Life" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1988), 124: "the good life inevitably entails friendship . . . because intimate friendships extend and redefine the boundaries of particular conceptions of the good life."

26. Cf. *ibid.*, 121: a friend different from me can enable me "to learn who I am by contrasting myself with others." See also Stanley Hauerwas, "How My Mind Has Changed: The Testament of Friends," *The Christian Century*, Feb. 28, 1990, 213: "Unfortunately, I am unable to remember 'my position' or the arguments I use to support it. Without friends to remember my claims I am at a complete loss. But I discover that in their remembering, which is often expressed in disagreements, there is often more than I knew. I continue to be graced with graduate students who understand me better than I understand myself and can show me where I have got it wrong." When Hauerwas says, "many of my friends are churchd" (214), he clearly implies that some are not. There is no reason to suppose that he does not include them among the friends who help him to grow by challenging and disagreeing with him. Cf. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM, 1983).

27. Wolfhart Pannenberg evaluates the significance of basic trust for theology in *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 220-42.

28. Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, 202.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Such openness can, of course, be encouraged in friendship whether or not dialogue about religious matters is a feature of the relationship.

31. In Dennis Guernsey and Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Family: A Socio-Theology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 132-36, Guernsey highlights the possibility that the structure of a person's family may play a greater role in shaping her religious convictions than the explicit content of the beliefs taught her by family members. Guernsey's argument seems to suggest that, whatever its religious or antireligious orientation, a warm, accepting family that provides each of its members with a sense of order, meaning, value, and purpose is more likely to foster the religious development of its members than one marked by chaos and authoritarianism. It is reasonable to assume that structural features of other intimate relationships, including friendship, have similar consequences for personal religious experience.

32. Adrian Furnham, "Friendship and Personal Development," in *The Dialectics of Friendship*, eds. Roy Porter and Sylvana Tomaselli (London: Routledge, 1989), defends from a psychological perspective the view that friendship makes a significant contribution to the formation of healthy personalities in children. Furnham criticizes the view, which he attributes "mainly to psychoanalytic thinkers," that mother-child relationships are "of paramount importance in child development," and that children's friendships are thus "far less important, indeed themselves 'determined' by the parental relationship." Friendship, too, plays a key role in the positive formation of the self (93).

33. *Ibid.*, 316-33.

34. *Ibid.*, 402-7.

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Linda and Juli, San Diego, 1998

The Afterlife of Friends

By Juli Miller

The fax machine burps and then beeps to indicate an incoming transmission as pink light brightens the eastern sky above the Sierras. Holding my morning cup of ginger tea, I walk over and tear off the fresh fax.

I laugh out loud. It's a certificate of admission to membership in the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) addressed to Linda K. Olson. The printed reminder in the corner says, "You must be fifty or over. You need not be retired." A neat handwritten note at the top edge reads, "Juli. Do you already belong to this elite group?"

I pick up the phone and dial. One ring. "Hello!"
"No, I am not a member of AARP!" I announce.
I tell Linda I had tossed the same invitation I received last year. "I don't think I'm ever going to retire, but I probably should join just to get those senior discounts." We laugh. She argues for joining. I imagine both of us presenting our AARP membership cards at some motel or restaurant in November when we celebrate our birthdays. We'll not be able to keep a straight face.
"You're right," I reply. "We should both be dead. But we're not. So let's. As another way to celebrate being alive."

"Okay, I'll send in my application," Linda responds. "Have another great day!"

"You, too. Bye," I say as I behold the sun rising from the peaks. We've both come to appreciate every sunrise.

The Wake-Up Call

I cannot recall what time it was when the phone rang on a muggy August night in 1979. The caller was weeping. It was soft-spoken Janice, younger sister of Linda, my former college roommate and close friend.

There had been an accident in Europe, near Berchtesgaden, Germany. Linda had been hit by a train. She might have lost several limbs. She might not live. Dave Hodgens, her husband of less than two years, had minor injuries. Linda's parents, brother Albert, and Janice were going to Europe as soon as passports and travel arrangements were in order. They would call me again from over there.

It was as if the point of a long knife blade had been shoved into my stomach, drawn through, and twisted. I doubled over and screamed into my lap. I shivered as I imagined a gigantic locomotive lumbering down the tracks. Goose bumps covered my arms. I was so afraid for Linda. For all of us. I awakened Barry, my husband, told him the news, and cried for a long time. In the morning, I called the school where I taught and asked that officials there find a substitute teacher for a few days. It was a personal emergency.

Then, I began navigating my way through the Valley of Waiting, a place haunted by familiar places and activities in a surreal light. I continuously heard organ music, big throbbing chords and arpeggios, because I used to go with Linda to hear her practice on the church organ late at night. I also did what Linda and I had done countless times together when we needed a break from studies: I went to a stationery store. We'd spend hours

looking for cards—cards with stunning photographs, art reproductions, or howling humor.

But I was stumped. Should I be looking at sympathy cards or get well cards? No, I'd better look for blank cards so I could be prepared for any outcome. But I had to flee the store before I found anything suitable. The rows and rows of cards celebrating birthdays, new babies, anniversaries, or a new home brought on too many tears for what now might never be. I decided Hallmark should develop a line of cards for people facing The Unknown.

As an alternative, I went to the Berkeley post office and bought a dozen blue aérograms. Writing would be my chosen therapy until I figured out something better to do in order to deal with the panic, fear, and grief. This was my version of praying without ceasing. The words poured onto the blue paper as I talked about anything and everything, just like we always did. Weather, sports, politics, books, work, weekends. As soon as I received an address, I'd send everything I had written so she'd know I had been thinking about her continuously. Between writing sessions, I took long walks with my dog Star to pass the time and nurse the sadness until I heard more news.

The call I needed finally came a few days later.

"Juli?"

"Linnnnnnnnnda!" She was still alive.

"What are you doing?" She always asked me that. In that very tone of voice, as if always suspecting I might be having more fun than she was. After all, she was in radiology residency training at the White Memorial Medical Center in Los Angeles.

"What do you think!?" I said, returning the challenge. Neither of us was able to speak for a while after that. But I understood at that moment the power of simple, direct communication in keeping hope alive. As long as Linda and I could talk or laugh with each other—no matter what her permanent disabilities—we'd be okay.

When I was younger, I had often wondered what my personal Moment of Truth would be. Stories of Ruth, Moses, Joan of Arc, Sir Thomas More, Martin Luther, the Boston Tea Party, the French Resistance, the Underground Railroad, and D-Day left me wondering if I had what it took to stand up for something, to die for something, to live passionately committed to something. Yes, I longed to paint my life in vibrant colors on a large canvas. Though I was a fan of Thoreau, I wasn't quite ready to head for a Walden Pond. Hemingway's life as a war correspondent suited my restless and romantic imagination much better.

Yet, after graduate school and marriage, I meandered innocently into what would later be identified as the “yuppie” life. I didn’t take the road less traveled. Barry and I moved to the San Francisco area where, attired in suits and carrying bulging briefcases, we both climbed corporate ladders. We were also casually building “net worth” through the real estate magic of the late 1970s. We moved every year in order to take advantage of the amazing appreciation of residential property. When we weren’t buying, selling, or installing track lighting or wallpaper on weekends, we skied, climbed rocks, fished, or hiked. We drove a BMW, snacked on Brie, and soaked in a Jacuzzi. One of my graduate school classmates who visited me said, “Juli, you really have lost it. You’ve sold out.” His words stung me for months.

Linda’s call from the hospital in Europe echoed with enriched significance. It connected me with my earlier readiness for a unique call to action. However, I sensed my mission would be on a very tiny and private stage, and it was going to be a long engagement.

Confirmation came in the form of a letter written to Barry and me on August 30, 1979, in which Dave detailed the tragic accident and gave us progress notes on Linda’s condition. She had been taken to a trauma hospital in Salzburg and plans were being made to fly her home to San Diego “where we will begin again. Goals that have been ambiguous or nebulous to us before have become straightforward and clear-cut, and I think, Juli and Barry, that with the help of friends, and with our combined strength, we can make it. Please write soon, or come down and see us when we get back. We love you and need you.” Next to Dave’s signature was Linda’s new one, written with her remaining limb, her left arm.

Linda could have perished. We could have attended a heartbreaking memorial service. And then most of us would have eventually gone on with our lives as we did before, though there would have been terrible grief packed away inside somewhere.

But she was alive. This was a far bigger and deeper challenge. It required deliberate and conscious actions. “With the help of friends. . . .” Enough of corporate ladders, net worth, and weekend adventures. This was the timeless and profound call to friendship.

Fear settled into me, deep and heavy. I didn’t know how to help a severely disabled person just a year younger than me. I had no idea what I would say or do. But I was not going to run away. I would show up for practice, as it were. Linda would have to coach me. I would trust her to only throw me balls that I could return, one at a time.

And so we have kept the rally going for about twenty years, one stroke at a time. We have gone from being sharp young thirty-somethings to being dependent on Advil and canes, but we both keep showing up. And we never keep score.

From Tuna Sandwiches to Champagne

I flew down to see Linda soon after she was brought back to San Diego. There was so little of her left, and I was scared as to how she would get around in the big, fast world without getting run over. Her wounds were so fresh and frightening for me, but I vowed not to close my eyes or refrain from touching Linda. I was determined to learn how to help her put on her artificial legs someday and get her in and out of the shower as soon as she was ready. But would she let me? I had lived with her: I knew how stubborn and independent she was.

I wanted to learn how to take care of Linda so we could someday take road trips together again, just like we did so often in college. Supplied with a few cans of sardines, a sack of apples, a couple of books, and our sleeping bags, we would head out Friday afternoons for a weekend in Death Valley, Monterey Bay, Yosemite, Palm Springs, or Lake Arrowhead. The dean, Mrs. Cushman, always shook her head as she registered her concern for



Linda, Boulder Mountains, Idaho, 1991

our safety when we turned in our campus leave slips.

Everyone left us alone for a while when I first arrived at Dave's parents' house. I sat on the bed with Linda as she proceeded to tell me her plans for a different future. She took up no more room than a regular pillow. I felt so gargantuan in comparison. She had already drawn up goals on four pieces of paper labeled with the headings "personal," "professional," "rehabilitation," and "social." Always the list maker, always the one to lay things out clearly. I was stunned by how often she laughed as we talked about goals, but ever so grateful that she did.

After we talked for an hour or so, she suggested we go down to the beach, just as we would have done before the accident. We packed tuna fish sandwiches and books, and headed to the surf and sand, Dave carrying Linda like a new baby. Linda and Dave refused to dwell on what had been lost. They fiercely focused on what remained to be discovered and enjoyed. I was learning by their example. In the warmth of the sun, we talked about the rehabilitation program she would begin soon and the promise we would make to each other to stay in touch no matter what it took, no matter how bad things might get at times. Ever since that day, I cannot see a can of tuna without remembering us huddled together in front of the waves, talking ourselves through the ocean of sadness that almost drowned us.

Linda wrote regularly with her left hand, sharing details of her new life, establishing a new penmanship. The letters were direct and detailed. I always felt a surge of energy and purpose after receiving one. I mopped floors or took out trash with real joy because I could still do it. I cast out green fly-fishing line while wading in a river, skied in cold white powder up to my neck, or played a Bach fugue—for the two of us. I practiced fixing my hair, getting dressed, preparing a meal, opening mail, or working at my desk with just my left hand in order to better appreciate what she was up against.

December 12, 1979

It's Friday again. Starting my fourth week of living at home. We've developed a comfortable routine. The alarm goes off at 4:30 a.m. It has barely stopped ringing before Dave is out the front door for his seven-mile run. Meanwhile, I manage to stretch out in the middle of the bed, encase myself between all the pillows and sleep on my left side for the last hour. It's awkward to sleep on my left side because my arm is pinned underneath me and I can't keep my balance.

Dave always returns between 5:29 and 5:31. Then I have the distinctive pleasure of being picked up by a cold



Linda and Dave, January 1980

sweaty runner. It does make one wake up quickly. I sit on a seat in the shower while Dave washes my hair and soaps me up. I'm able to do all this myself but Dave insists on doing it for me. He gets an early morning charge out of it. One morning I thought I'd be helpful and squirt the shampoo on my head. The only problem was that I couldn't tell how much I had on my head until I put the bottle down. At that point I discovered the shampoo completely inundated the entire top of my head. It took five to ten minutes to rinse my hair because it kept sudsing.

January 4, 1980

I thought I'd write about my prostheses today. I've found that depending on my mood, I call them "my legs," "the legs," or "my prostheses." Technically, my residual limbs are called stumps but I dislike that term immensely. It sounds like a forestry term. Even though it is only semantics, it just accentuates the image I see as being a chopped up person.

I have a real "love-hate" relationship with the prostheses. Now I understand why Rancho Los Amigos said that I'd give up. Physically it would be much easier to remain in a wheelchair. It's tedious to put the prostheses on and get them dressed. They're hard to walk with and they require so much energy and strength that you're apt to travel greater distances in the wheelchair than by walking. Up to this point, it's more comfortable to sit without them on than with them. The reasons I use them are really all psychological. If I never learned to walk a single step I think I would wear them in the

wheelchair just for the sake of appearance. It makes interaction with the general public much easier and gives me some respite from feeling that I am always on display or from feeling that I always am having to sell myself.

... I don't remember the exact date [we looked it up—Oct. 16] I got my legs but it was a Tuesday night. There was a World Series game being played. That night I was propelled around my room by Dave and John Webster. It was very emotional for everyone—none of the hospital personnel had ever seen me standing up. My excitement was somewhat tempered because it quickly became obvious that it was going to be a lot of work.

The next morning when I tried to stand up on my own between the parallel bars, I thought it was next to impossible. I was drenched in five minutes. In ten minutes I was so exhausted that I had to quit. . . . For the first couple of weeks I perspired so much that my hair was soaked. Sometime during the first week I remember sitting down and feeling like this should be all over. It was like someone had given me the prostheses for some consumer rating. I had tested them and now I could give them back and my own legs would return.

After a while, the prostheses were cosmetically covered. When Linda saw that for the first time, she was upset.

The ankles were thick and they had support hose on. It hit home that these were going to be my legs and yet were never going to ever be like real legs. It was one more of those places along the way that confirms the permanency and magnitude of my loss.

Linda and Dave flew to northern California that fall for dinner with Barry and me. Observers would not have understood the significance of the four of us walking the short distance from the entrance of Narsai's, the trendy restaurant in the Berkeley hills, to our reserved table. This was the first time after the accident that Barry and I saw her walk. Those steps were as monumental as Neal Armstrong's steps on the moon. We ordered a bottle of very fine champagne to celebrate those twenty steps. All eyes were moist as we raised our glasses. "To friendship, to the future," we toasted.

Standing Happy

Linda was very realistic and practical about her progress, just as she had always been about life before the accident.

January 4, 1980

At Christmas time, I cut physical therapy down to only once a day. . . . After observing the "separation anxiety" of many PT patients, I wanted to make sure I was prepared to make a clean break. It's very hard for many patients to accept the fact that they're not going to regain 100% function. They become angry when they are discharged from PT and accuse the staff of having given them inadequate care. Leaving PT often is the first realization that they will always be disabled. Also it's nice to be able to be a patient and work every day and receive the staff's praise for working so hard, having such a good attitude, and making so much progress. It's a lot more difficult to be on the outside where people tend to wonder what's wrong with you, and praise is usually lacking.

February 5, 1980

The enclosed picture was taken the first week of January. I love looking at pictures of me standing. . . .

Sunday night we attended our third class reunion in Pasadena. . . . It was very informal but it wasn't until after dinner that most of them felt comfortable to come talk to me about the accident. . . . There are two unknowns: how Linda will react and how each person will react. Most of them are scared of their own reaction the most.

In the first place, when they see me the first time, they have to finally accept and believe that it's really true—we had an accident. Then they express their reaction and finally they quite often state that they've felt guilty. . . . It's part of the reaction that I don't understand.

The final part of this process usually includes people saying that they've seen something between Dave and me that they're jealous of.

It surprised me at first but so many people have said it by now that there must be something to it. They all feel that somehow we've found out what life is all about and we seem outwardly happier about it. And that's the saga that I know is true. We really are happy, in fact, we think we're even happier than before. That's what I like about this picture—it's happy.

Onward

After a period of rehabilitation, Linda went back to the White Memorial Medical Center to complete her residency in diagnostic radiology. An apartment was remodeled to accommodate her needs, and the radiology department made whatever adjustments they could to support her training. Meanwhile, Dave completed his training in radiation oncology at the Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego. They saw each other on weekends.

On Wednesday, July 23, 1980, Linda called early in the morning to tell me she was pregnant. This was as magnificent as the rainbow after the flood. Not only did this baby symbolize the powerful love between David and Linda, but it also gave us all something wondrous to look forward to that had never been. We were freed from always being reminded of what had been lost.

September 25, 1980

On Sunday I had my second OB visit. They did a real-time ultrasound and boy was it amazing. That kid was sitting in there just punching away with both arms. You could even see its fingers. Dave re-named it Christopher Muhammad Ali Hodgens.

Undated letter

This child-to-be of ours started making its presence known two nights ago. It didn't kick hard enough for me to be sure of what it was for over an hour. I had to sit here with my hand on my abdomen for an hour to be sure it wasn't gas. I called San Diego, woke up Dave and his folks and told Dave that his kid was kicking. . . . It's a real wonderment to me that there's actually a little combination of Dave and me growing inside of me. I think it would be a real treat to have a little Dave around!

February 17, 1981, from Dave to Juli and Barry

I am now preparing myself for hermaphroditic fatherhood and am installing bottle warmers, cradles, and other accoutrements of infancy in my bedroom (out goes the stereo—in comes the sterilizer).

March 5, 1981

It was amusing to see Dave's bedroom last night. The cradle at the foot of our bed (with a "running" teddy bear sitting in it) and all the books on the bookshelves replaced by baby clothes, blankets, sheets, and towels.

Tiffany Marque Hodgens was born on March 12, 1981. When I arrived the following week to meet my godchild, she was in the kitchen sink smiling as



Linda and daughter, Tiffany, 1997

Dave gave her a bath. Later that day, we drove out to the lot where Dave and Linda were going to build a home equipped with an elevator, rails, and other features to give Linda the most independence and mobility possible. It would also have a yard where Dave and his precious little girl could play catch and he could share his passion for baseball. I was going to have the distinct pleasure after all of sending Linda cards congratulating her on the birth of a child, Mother's Day, a new home, and many more birthdays and anniversaries. "Normal" moments or passages of life were now never taken for granted. They were major celebrations.



Brian, Linda, Dave, and Tiffany, 1998

August 25, 1981

I'm sure it will be a long time before the full impact of motherhood is realized. I'm so caught up in work from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. that sometimes I forget I'm a mother. But once I walk in the door and see Tiffany smile, I enter a totally different world.

In three days it will be two years since "the accident." Believe it or not I may go through the day and be too busy to give it much thought. I know my disability is still obvious but I feel now that people are really reacting to me as Linda, a good radiologist who's fun to work with and who's reliable. Life for me is continuing its upward swing.

Linda eventually became a professor of clinical radiology at the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine. There she also received the Distinguished Teaching Award and the Silver Spoon Award, a recognition from the radiology residents that means a lot to her because of the unique relationships she developed with many of her students. The American Association of Women in Radiology honored her with the Marie Curie Award in 1991, and she was the

Honored Alumnus of the Loma Linda University School of Medicine in 1994. She has volunteered much time to educating the public about breast cancer and training mammography technologists. She is renowned for compassion, dedication to patients and students, and excellence in diagnosis.

On the home front, a son named Brian was born, and Linda and Dave have raised their two smiling children to love chocolate, classical music and art, and the San Diego Padres. As a family, they have spent more time camping in the wilderness and participating in outdoor activities than most of their friends and colleagues.

Side by Side

While Linda resumed her professional and personal life, I made some adjustments in mine because my frame of reference was forever altered. I listened to people more carefully because it could, after all, be our last conversation. I no longer wasted time wishing I were somewhere or someone else. I became grounded in the present tense. The past and future were history and fiction. I'd better do a good job NOW. I didn't put off until another day what could be done today. Above all, I made time for our friendship.

We have canoed and kayaked on rivers and lakes in Montana and Idaho, fishing for trout along the way, leaving her legs on shore because it's easier without them.

I have put on cross-country skis and pulled Linda on a mountaineering sled through the snowy wilderness, nearly dumping her a few times on tight downhill corners. I always worry about her getting too cold; she always reminds me she's usually too hot since her blood doesn't cool down very much without the missing extremities.

We have picked huckleberries high in the Montana mountains and gone home to bake huge pies that we devour immediately. At lower altitudes, we usually mix up a batch of chocolate chip cookie dough or apple pie filling made with just the right amount of cinnamon. Neither ever gets into the oven since we prefer to nibble the raw stuff. Steamed artichokes served with mayonnaise and a splash of lemon are our signature hors d'oeuvres, a tradition dating back to our days in the dining commons at La Sierra University.

I have surprised her in places like the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., or the Santa Cafe in Sante Fe, walking in just in time for dinner when she's

attending medical conferences. We've eaten sushi in San Francisco and Orlando, and we've shared pizza in Denver and scones in Ashland, Oregon. She and two other friends surprised me with an incredible fiftieth birthday party at the Sundance Resort in Utah, bringing in very special people from around the country. Silly me thought the two of us we were going there to attend a medical conference. Her present to me was a can of Crown Prince skinless and boneless sardines. Perfect.

We have an autumn ritual of watching the World Series together and exploring towns and art museums as our husbands take the dogs duck hunting. We share our war stories from work and our latest family concerns or celebrations. We swap books. We confess our insecurities, our grudges, our quiet truces.

Her two children have "grown up" on my refrigerator door, and we have shared many of the highlights of their lives. Linda and Dave get photos of our dogs in exchange.

We do what friends do.

My Turn

Then, one spring day in 1995 while flying my Cessna 210 over Mt. Shasta, the engine of the plane blew up. Luckily, I was with a friend, a flight instructor, who had far more experience flying. Together, we made our Mayday calls, worked through the emergency checklist, selected a landing zone, and tightened our seat belts as the black lava and trees loomed closer. Then we crashed. A flight of F-16s on their way to Anchorage spotted us and radioed our position to Seattle so that a rescue helicopter could be sent. I thought about Linda many times as I lay in the lava for several hours with a broken ankle, a hole through my chin, and blood spurting from my eyebrow. "You still have your arms and legs," I reminded myself. "You're in America. Piece of cake."

It was Linda's turn for a call. Barry phoned her saying that I had been in a plane accident somewhere near Mt. Shasta and that my condition was unknown. He immediately began the four- to five-hour drive, unaware of the nature of my injuries. Linda began calling all the hospitals in that region of northern California until she found the one where I waited on a gurney after x-rays for my face to be sewn up.

"Hello," I mumbled, my throat dry and swollen.

"Juli!" she commanded. "What are you doing?!"

And so I knew everything would be fine. We had contact. She supported me during those difficult first

weeks with continual calls, cards, and surprises. We did our usual autumn trip four months later, but this time we each used a cane. It was a bittersweet moment when we saw our shadows, two crippled friends off to have fun. The new scars on my face were reminders of what could have been.

Last year, I had major hip surgery because of congenital hip dysplasia. It just so happened that the only surgeon in the West that could do that particular procedure was in San Diego.

Linda took care of me the first week after I left the hospital. She drove me to my medical appointments, she brought toast and the newspaper to my bed in the mornings, she took me to the movies and out to lunch, and she let me use her elevator, her special shower, and her extra wheelchair. When we took her son and one of his friends to the bowling alley, we received some very strange looks as we went in with crutches, wheelchair, and cane. Her kitchen was a dangerous place that week when we cooked dinner, our two wheelchairs flying around without turn signals or backup beepers.

The Journey

For us, getting older is not a tragedy or terrible ordeal. It is a sweet victory because we have each looked death in the eye. We have many plans of how we're going to take care of each other and what we're going to do when we get even older. Needing help from others to get around or recognizing how much slower we are now is not uncomfortable for us. It's just part of our ongoing routine. We are both so thrilled to be alive. And to be sharing the journey. Accidents happen to all of us. Friendships don't. There is no time to waste. Each of us two must keep showing up for the other.

And so I shall indeed send in my AARP enrollment form.

Juli Miller is a marketing communications consultant in El Dorado Hills, California. Before there were microwave ovens, ATMs, and laptops, she received a B.A. in political science, journalism, and public relations, and an M.A. in English from La Sierra University.
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Fear of Friendship



By Gail Catlin

I learned about true friendship late in life, at the age of more than thirty-eight years, to be exact. Up to that time I drew a boundary, a line of demarcation, that kept me safe from intimacy, trust, and surrender—all the spiritual realms, in fact, that make friendship sacred territory and a window into God's love and promises. Now that I've been given the gift of friendship—and I've given myself back to it—I am convinced that it is in the action of faith within our one-to-one relationships that we discover God's covenant of love for us—not a contractual fulfillment of redemption by works, but a promise of love for faith.

I learned about friendship from my women friends, the ones who saw me through my humanization at midlife, when my illusions were cracking, my dreams drifting away, my persona growing tight like a straitjacket. That was

the time I realized that I had given up my life for a professional career and persona that represented only a part of me, not all of me.

Eventually, the suits and bows at the collar and need to compete in the board room showed in my brow and my friends said, "speak to us." Not being able to hold myself back, I did, fearing what might happen when I became real instead of "perfect." The miracle was that my friends stayed when the corporate titles were gone and the desk accessories packed away. My friends have remained as a statement of their commitment that my life should be lived and fulfilled, not erected and bronzed. In surrendering to their love, I have discovered the most spiritual realm—what I call "the covenant of connectedness"—and it lives in my belief in God the Father and Jesus.

When I started to speak with others about my interest in friendship and its relation to the concept of covenant, it surprised me to hear them immediately link the covenant of the Bible to God's law. This, of course, reveals my sketchy knowledge of theology. But I did not arrive at my understanding of covenant through the Old Testament, where God's covenants were laws of faith first handed down to Moses as rules for the people.

The Old Testament often records circumstances and consequences for violating the rules. God eventually realized that the people had missed the mark and the law was incomplete. He made a new covenant, that of the New Testament, Jesus Christ, and people's relationships with God.

It seems to me that Jesus' story is primarily that of one-to-one relationships, a ministry of love between individual people. He was even persecuted for not promoting salvation for masses instead, or the ascent of a single large group. He moved as one man, surrounded by close friends bound in love and conviction, and administered to individuals in need of love and healing in body and soul. He brought a message of one person's love for another as the kernel of faith and promised that each of us could be in a personal relationship with God. He asked us to turn from the incomplete things of this world—the hollow laws—and invited us into the

wholeness of relationships with each other and with God.

I'm writing a short story. A woman flees to Paris, seeking fulfillment after struggling with her marriage. She wants to actualize herself, to express herself. First she joins a commune, thinking it will liberate her. Then she falls in love with its leader, only to be jilted. She retreats to a hospital as a volunteer on the cancer ward.

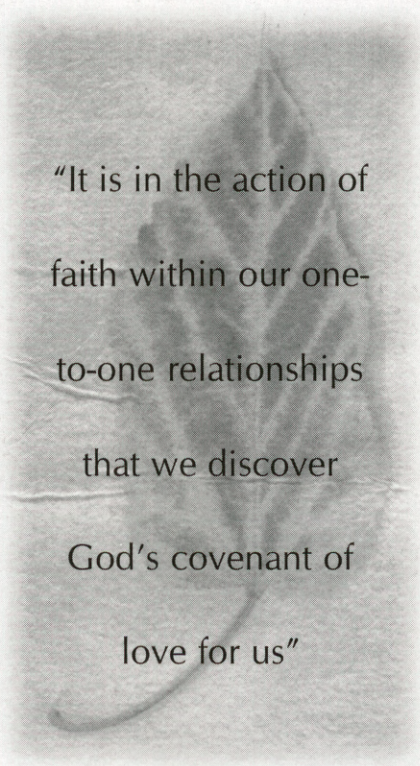
There she meets an elderly woman, a miraculous person with an incredible life story and a remarkable mind, but the woman is dying of cancer. This elderly woman wants the young woman to care for her until she dies, to take her back to the old women's apartment, to sit with her, to be there, to pack up things and give them to appropriate charities or family members after she dies. Without the young woman's care, the old woman will end life in the hospital.

The young woman is petrified. She did not come to Paris for this! It is far too scary and intense and she shrinks from the request. But the elderly woman's desire to die in her own home haunts the young woman, and, in an act of faith, she consents, not having the slightest idea how to get through the experience, particularly after avoiding emotional and spiritual cliffs all her life.

After arriving, she is amazed at the beauty of the elderly woman's apartment, the richness of her books, the sweet and loving conver-

sations that they have day-to-day as the old woman dies. Discovery of her own gratitude for this experience, this relationship, and the manifestation of love between them, stuns the young woman. When she finally cleans out the apartment, alone, the young woman realizes that the relationship, its love, and commitment took her to a place of understanding, mystery, and abiding faith. She had witnessed a mysterious realm of friendship and love, one that carved her inside like a vessel, capable now of holding more of life, love, and spiritual things.

This is not simply a short story, it also explains my understanding of covenant, evidenced by friendships in my life, my sacred friendships. When we truly commit in love to a friend, partner, or family member it is an act of faith. We don't know where it will take us. We might



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want to set up rules, accounting for our friend's behavior, ready to sever ties if violated, but true friendship is much more alive.

By definition, living things grow and change. They act, react, and grow in reflection to one another. Rule-based relationships are brittle and dead, they shatter when we violate legal requirements. Yet we are often afraid to surrender in ways required by covenants between people, and we lack faith in the promise of Jesus, the promise of one-to-one love as a spiritual gift.

Fear kept me from this kind of friendship—fear of where it might lead me, how much commitment it would take, how messy it would be. I wanted to be in control and kept a rein on myself.

I have a friend like this today. She counts my phone calls, visits, and cards as if we had a contract. When I violate her rules, she gets angry and challenges me and my commitment. This reaction gets in the way, and demonstrates that we are not operating at a deep level of trust or faith. Fear of relationships is a reflection of our ego-centered need to control and restricts gifts of faith that are available to each of us.

There is a story about St. Francis of Assisi. It is well known that he was affluent and privileged as a boy and that he shed these privileges to walk in total surrender and faith, ministering to individuals and animals. His is a story of complete faith. Yet Francis supposedly had an intractable fear of and aversion to lepers. In this, he knew he held back his faith and commitment to others.

One night he had a dream. God told St. Francis that he would meet a leper on the road the next day and that he should run up to that man and embrace him in God's love. St. Francis was terror stricken. Oh no! Not this!

He dressed in the morning, hoping that his dream would not happen; maybe the day would pass by and the leper would take another road; maybe he would not need to confront his own limited faith. But, as promised, he soon spotted the leper. He struggled with his faith, with his commitment to all people, with his ability to love.

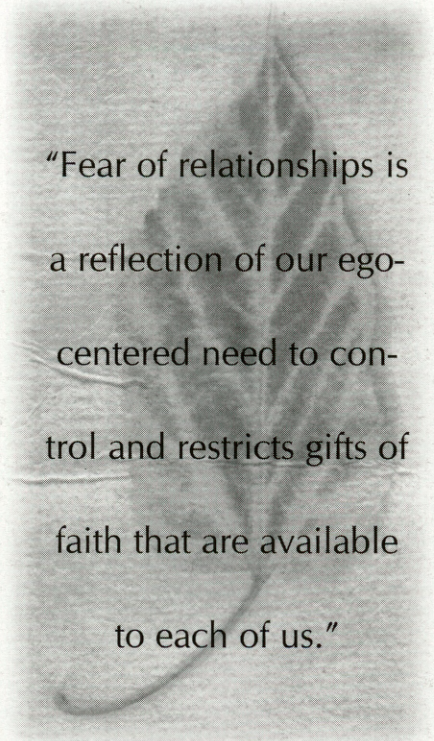
Then, in an act of faith, he ran to the man and embraced him. At that moment, the leper turned into an angel of God. In hugging the man, St. Francis hugged God and learned that by risking his faith to love someone else he had received evidence of God's promise to him.

We see God most clearly when we enter places we can't go alone as mere humans. God is not revealed in human constructions that are known and safe. We must step into the unknown and unpredictable to see his working, just as missionaries enter the unknown, expand their faith, and witness the divine gifts of safety and security each day. So it is with our friendships.

What distinguishes a promise from a contract? How do we understand God's love? These questions get at the root of the matter. A promise is a commitment buttressed by hope, resilience, and perseverance, with faith in details and trust in the outcome. In comparison, a contract is characterized by hypervigilance and pessimism. Contracts require us to relate to God through adherence to rules rather than loving relationships, which are based on the scary and intense task of day-to-day, step-by-step care for each other. As illustrated in the story of the two women, the important things are fulfillment of the promise to be there, the spiritual struggle together, and faith in God's rewards. The Jesus that I know offers us a promise, not a contract.

My father was six feet tall, gentle and dignified. He moved like a saint and healed people as a busy Denver surgeon. He left early in the morning and came home late at night. He was quiet but extremely attentive, and his words revealed a sharp mind, deep knowledge, and studied discipline. He seemed bigger than life to me and I felt safe and protected by his love and strength.

One evening we sat in the living room talking about spiritual things as I prepared for college. Perhaps I asked if he believed in God. He was quiet for a moment, then with a long, slow sigh, he said, "You know, I have four years of medical school, an internship, and a residency. I know every part of the human body; I can take it apart and put it back together. But I cannot make it live. I cannot breathe life into it. That is God's gift and I am aware of it every time I do surgery."



"Fear of relationships is a reflection of our ego-centered need to control and restricts gifts of faith that are available to each of us."

Time stopped for me at that moment. I think of this conversation frequently, even today. This impressive man with huge and precise hands, powerful and skilled, yet dwarfed and reverent of the Holy Spirit and sensitive to the difference between physical assembly and the living soul. To me, this illustrates the difference between law and the spiritual covenant. The whole is not the sum of the parts. God breathes in the sanctity of friendships. They are not simply results of law.

I once met another doctor. He said he was an atheist. This bothered me for days; at first I wasn't sure why. Then I realized that his disbelief was the ultimate act of arrogance. To think that he heals by himself! To think that life and death are in his hands—or in no one's! (I'm afraid to ask which.) Do we believe such things about God's promises and covenant? Do we believe that we can build them out of laws of nature or intellectualized rules? Or do we receive them when we surrender, not knowing what we will experience?

As the atheist doctor, are *we* arrogant about spiritual things? Do we really think we can operationalize our relationship with God through exact compliance with rules? A person can follow all ten commandments and still not have a relationship with God. Like friendship, God's covenant calls us to make a promise, walk in faith, and follow where it leads. We put this into practice daily through friendships, family commitments, and daily interactions. Through Jesus, God gives us one-to-one relationships to learn about him and his love.

My mother died in May. Our relationship had not always been easy, but we were promised to each other in my birth and we kept that promise until she died. We made it through good times and bad, not saying goodbye even when the going seemed too hard to endure. I watched disease take more and more of her and was grateful that I hadn't abandoned her, that I participated in her last trial. I know that she felt the same way.

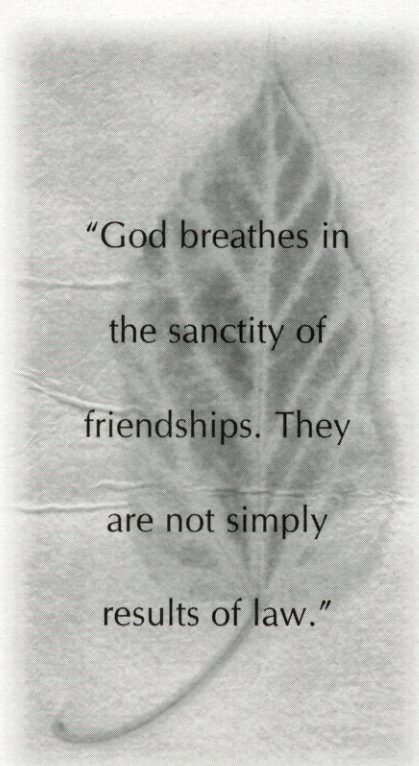
My siblings came for the memorial service. They did not have the same close relationship with my mother and, at times, had none at all. Today they grieve for

something they wish they had, often thinking of the relationship between the two of us as a gift that was uniquely mine. I know that it actually came from a long-term commitment between us and the way we faithfully lived it each day. This is not mysterious; it's a promise from God.

The day that my mother died dear friends called wanting to come to my house. No, they said, it wasn't a bother, and, no, they would not ask any questions. They would make a list, shop, and buy flowers, and, yes, they would let themselves into the house if I had gone to the mortuary with my father.

In years past, I would have felt indebted and concerned about paying them back. In my days of legalistic friendship, I measured phone calls, visits, and gifts like a science. But these friends have taught me about promises, friendship, and love in a way that lets me know love is big enough to encompass this trauma and that they are committed to me even if my mother dies and I'm standing like a deer caught in the headlights. They have taught me this lesson every day for more than a decade and I now have the capacity to give friendship to others. So moves the Holy Spirit.

We learn about God and his love through the permeable, living, and mysterious space between people—not the mechanistic rules of dogmatic spirituality. As my father suggested, I can tell you the parts of friendship and about love between two people, but I can't blow life into it and make it breathe. That is the domain of God's covenant and promise, and I surrender more to it daily.



"God breathes in
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What do we affect during our lifetime? What, ultimately, is our legacy? I believe, in most cases, our legacy is our friends. We write our history onto them, and they walk with us through our days like time capsules, filled with our mutual past, the fragments of our hearts and minds. Our friends get our uncensored questions and our yet-to-be reasoned opinions. Our friends grant us the chance to make our grand, embarrassing, contradictory pronouncements about the world. They get the very best, and are stuck with the absolute worst, we have to offer. Our friends get our rough drafts. Over time, they both open our eyes and break our hearts.

Emerson wrote "Make yourself necessary to someone." In a chaotic world, friendship is the most elegant, the most lasting way to be useful. We are, each of us, a living testament to our friends' compassion and tolerance, humor and wisdom, patience and grit. Friendship, not technology, is the only thing capable of showing us the enormity of the world.

—Steven Dietz, playwright

CREATION

Is It Chance AND Dance?



The Metaphor of Design

How Shall We Talk About The Creation?

Presentation Made at the 1999 Biblical Research Institute Science Council Session (BRISCO) in Carlsbad, New Mexico

By Edwin A. Karlow

Resurgence of the Design Metaphor

Design as a mode of scientific explanation fell out of fashion after Darwinian evolution provided what appeared to be a completely naturalistic explanation for the origin of species. Though initially focused on biological entities, the Darwinian mode of thought subsequently permeated physical, social, as well as life sciences, effectively purging design and its attendant references to a designer from all scientific discourse.

Within the past thirty years or so the progress of science has driven many people (including atheistic scientists) to recast their descriptions of what's going on in the universe in terms of design. Christian believers welcome this resurgence of the design metaphor, but must take caution to note that reaffirmation of God as designer is generally not intended. Even among believers the range of meanings attributed to design can be bewildering. Phrases like "divine blueprint," and "engineered existence" at one extreme vie with "gapless economy," and "cosmological anthropic principle" at the other. People are impressed with the evidence for "fine tuning" in the universe, and some believe that living things show "irreducible complexity" that requires "intelligent design," while others affirm that nature has been endowed by the Creator with the capacity to explore all avenues lawfully open to it through the action of random processes.

It was my original intention to catalog the spectrum of meanings or uses the design metaphor currently entails, and to delineate their relative merits. But I've chosen rather to contrast and compare two views of design that I think dog Christian believers the most: the "divine blueprint" meaning of design, and the "process model" of design.¹

The Blueprint Model

Design—what comes to mind when you hear that word? A pretty pattern for a dress or a stained glass window; the sleek shape of a new concept car or advanced aircraft; or perhaps a carefully executed engraving, as suggested by 2 Chronicles 2:14:

Huram . . . is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. (NIV)

The Bible also uses design in reference to architectural drawings, as in 2 Chronicles 24:13:

The men in charge of the work were diligent, and the repairs progressed under them. They rebuilt the temple of God according to its original design and reinforced it. (NIV)

The word appears only a few times in Scripture (and just where depends upon the translation), but is also used to indicate cunning intentions, as in Esther 8:3:

Then Esther spoke again to the King; she fell at his feet, weeping and pleading with him to avert the evil design of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. (NRSV)

Ellen White used design rarely, but seems to assume the meanings noted from Scripture.

The artistic skill of human beings produces very beautiful workmanship, things that delight the eye and these things give us something of the idea of the designer. . . .²

God designs that the Sabbath shall direct the minds of men to the contemplation of His created works.³

Used in these ways the word conjures vivid images of blueprints, drawings, and specifications to be strictly followed. It suggests intention, engineering, and adherence to a plan. Not merely a mechanical obedience to rules, the act of rendering or fulfilling the design can be very personal. Such an idea echoes in the words of Genesis 1:26, 27 and 2:7:

God said, "Now we will make humans, and they will be like us. . . ." So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women. God gave them his blessing. . . . The Lord God took a handful of soil and made a man. God breathed life into the man, and the man started breathing. (CEV)

Early this century James Weldon Johnson drama-

tized these verses of God's personal involvement in the poem entitled "The Creation."⁴

Then God walked around,
and God look around
on all that he had made.
.....
and God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down—and
on the side of a hill where he could think;
.....
till he thought: I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
.....
this great God,
like a mammy bending over her baby,
kneeled down in the dust
.....
till he shaped it in his own image;

Then into it he blew the breath of life,
and man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

The Designer God of William Paley

It was no doubt such an intimate picture of God's involvement that inspired the Rev. William Paley to construct the now well-worn story of finding a watch upon a pathway and inferring a designer from its intricate "contrivance." Such designer stories are the homiletic backbone of contemporary preaching about Creation.

Human life is not an accident; it was a choice by God to make us in his image. . . . We believe that we are the product of a personal, intentional choice by a loving God who wanted us to be here for a relationship with him.⁵

Not only is this earth and our little cocoon made to be for us, but the whole universe, all that is out there, trillions of stars, had to be designed exactly the way it is and all in perfect balance for the earth to be here. God had us on his mind when he made the universe as it is.⁶

Paley justified the existing social, economic, and political arrangements with his view of a benevolent Creator who intended only good for his creation.⁷ His emphasis on teleology, or ends and purpose in nature, became repugnant to the society of his day and was rejected with the onset of the industrial revolution in the 1800s.⁸ Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection was eagerly seized by social reformers who sought release from the constraints of the "given order." Not only Paley's God and his argument for God from design in nature, but also the very concept of design as an attribute of nature was discarded from scientific and philosophical discourse for nearly 150 years.

This silence has been broken within the past thirty years by many who declare no belief in God. Paul Davies suggests that "the laws which enable the universe to come into being spontaneously seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design."⁹ He urges that "these rules [of physics] look as if they are the product of intelligent design. I do not see how that can be denied."¹⁰

Even Richard Dawkins, whose book *The Blind Watchmaker* caricatures Paley's design argument for the existence of God as "wrong, gloriously and utterly wrong," flatly states that "biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose."¹¹

The design metaphor is so natural and seems so appropriate for describing the beauty, complexity, and order in nature that, even without intending to, scientists who use the word, but avow an atheistic philosophy, appear to affirm an intelligence behind it all.

Process and Design

Theologians, too, have given design renewed vigor by broadening its meaning to include process as well as plan.¹²

There seems to be the chance of a revised and revived argument from design, [by] appealing to a cosmic planner who has endowed the world with a potentiality implanted within the delicate balance of the laws of nature themselves. . . . In short, the claim would be that the universe is indeed not "any old world" but the carefully calculated construct of its Creator.¹³

If all were governed by rigid law, a repetitive and uncreative order would prevail; if chance alone rules, no forms, patterns or organizations would persist long enough for them to have any identity or real existence and the universe could never be a cosmos and susceptible to rational inquiry. It is the combination of the two which makes possible an ordered universe capable of developing within itself new modes of existence. The interplay of chance and law is creative.¹⁴

We recognize in both of these statements tacit acceptance of an evolutionary scenario within the cosmos. Before rejecting the concept of a dynamic, unfolding universe because of its apparent basis in evolutionary thinking, let's notice that just such dynamic involvement is suggested by Scripture. Speaking of Christ, Paul writes in Hebrews 1:2, 3, "He is the one through whom God created the universe. . . . He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word." (TEV)

Ellen White affirms an ongoing creative activity in the following passage:

The same creative energy that brought the world into existence is still exerted in upholding the universe in continuing the operations of nature. It is not because of inherent power that year by year the Earth continues her motion round the sun and produces her bounties. The word of God controls the elements.¹⁵

John Polkinghorne asserts the same idea. "Creation is not something that God did, once and for all, a long time in the past. It is something that he has been doing all the time and that he is continuing to do today."¹⁶ Arthur Peacocke agrees: "God's actions as creator is both past and present: it is continuous. Any notion of God as creator must take into account, more than ever before in the history of theology, that God is continuously creating. God is *semper creator*."¹⁷

Process Involves Randomness

At every level, from the atom to the stars, the universe is characterized today by both order and disorder, regularity and randomness, law and novelty, necessity and chance. Laws describe the microscopic behavior of large numbers of atoms in a gas, for instance, but the detailed behavior of any one atom cannot be prescribed. Instead, we must infer its behavior from the statistical average of an ensemble of similar atoms modeled by probability functions appropriate to the situation.

The inherent cloudiness of probability talk gives statistical stories a bad rap. Everyone has heard the calculations that show the enormous odds against random events alone accounting for the assembly of the simplest biochemicals, let alone fashioning a simple one-celled organism. Such is the stuff of fundamentalist blasts against Darwinian evolution we hear touted from the pulpit.

In fact, unbelievers agree. Here is Richard Dawkins:

Since living complexity embodies the very antithesis of chance, if you think that Darwinism is tantamount to chance you'll obviously find it easy to refute Darwinism! One of my tasks will be to destroy this eagerly believed myth that Darwinism is a theory of 'chance'.¹⁸

We are entirely accustomed to the idea that complex elegance is an indicator of premeditated, crafted design. This is probably the most powerful reason for the belief . . . in some kind of supernatural deity.¹⁹

We must pause here and note that Dawkins' view of design is synonymous with the blueprint image we described at the opening of this paper: static, rigid, given, unadaptable, and mute. At most he allows the "illusion of design."

Natural selection is the blind watchmaker, blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view. Yet the living results of natural selection overwhelmingly impress us with the appearance of design as if by a master watchmaker, impress us with the illusion of design and planning.²⁰

He makes us feel like he's on our side, however, when he assures us:

My aim has been in one respect identical to Paley's aim. I do not want the reader to underestimate the prodigious works of nature and the problems we face in explaining them. . . . [Paley's] hypothesis was that living watches were literally designed and built by a master watchmaker. Our modern hypothesis is that the job was done in gradual evolutionary stages by natural selection.²¹

The battle is drawn! Either evolution is true (random mutation with natural selection) or creation is true (intentional planning by a designer God). But I say, "Whoa!" We've let Dawkins capture the moment. It is just this rigid picture of design that Peacocke and Polkinghorne have been trying to replace.

Is It Chance AND Dance?

Let us try for a moment to hold in one breath both regularity and randomness, both "chance and dance," as C. S. Lewis once stated the matter. Let us try to view

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them both as complementary, even necessary, to God's cosmic design. This means we shall have to cease representing randomness as an enemy and accept it as part of the creation.

Adventists have been struggling with this for some time, and it should not surprise us that we find little mention of these concepts in publications by our church. Over the past fifty years, however, we have been warming to the idea that change and adaptability are part of God's design. Specific mention of design in nature does not occur in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, but the idea is implied by reference to "compatibility" and "harmonious existence" of complex living things within their surroundings. Chance, on the other hand, is pejoratively described as "mere chance in a self-originating, self-evolving, reckless, crashing chaos."²² That was 1953.

In his first book, *Creation: Accident or Design?* published in 1969, Harold Coffin used the word "design" only once in the running text (page 394) and only once in a section heading (page 380), and the word does not appear in the index.²³ Apparently he assumed that the reader would understand the meaning he intended. But it seems clear from the general context of the book that his concept was that of a given order.

Fourteen years later, in *Origin by Design*, the word "design" still does not appear in the index (nor do "chance," "accident," or "random"). But Coffin allowed that

... clearly living organisms are not fixed or static. They change either naturally or through man's manipulations. New varieties, races, sub-species and even species have and are forming. In a sense evolution is taking place, but it is not the kind of change evolutionists need. . . . Yes, new species of plants and animals are forming today.²⁴

Though attributing "many of the adaptations seen in plants and animals today . . . because of changes that have marred the perfect creation since sin came into the world, especially since the Genesis Flood,"²⁵ Coffin nonetheless acknowledged change. Coffin allowed that at least adaptability may be inferred as part of God's design.

Ariel Roth's recent book, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture*, not only uses design language liberally (pages 91, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100), but also affirms that "organisms with limited adaptability were purposefully designed."²⁶ Roth conjectures that "living organisms are remarkably adaptable within their limits, and we cannot

discount the possibility that harmless 'parasites' (symbionts) may have been part of an original creation."²⁷

Throughout the book Roth generally uses design to refer to the need for intelligent planning to account for the complex functioning of living things. But he allows for process, change, and adaptability under the design rubric,²⁸ a much more expansive position than the one taken by the editors of the first volume of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.

Can we find a comfort zone in which change, adaptability, novelty, and even randomness are included as legitimate partners in the process of creation, that is, in God's design? No doubt, some would be unwilling to go as far as Arthur Peacocke does in declaring God's creativity through random processes:

To a theist, it is now clear that God creates in the world through what we call chance operating within the created order, each stage of which constitutes the launching pad for the next. The Creator, it now seems, is unfolding the potentialities of the universe, which he himself has given it, in and through a process in which these creative possibilities become actualized.²⁹

We know that Peacocke accepts the general evolutionary scenario for the development of life on earth,³⁰ and we know that there is good reason to doubt the efficacy of that story on biochemical grounds alone,³¹ but we needn't discard all of Peacocke because we don't agree with his accommodation to evolution. We still need to hear that process is part of God's design and with it randomness as a legitimate attribute of the universe.

Consequences of Design through Randomness

John Polkinghorne, in replying to Jacques Monod and George Gaylord Simpson, who would have us believe our existence is meaningless owing to its origin in "blind chance," wants us to have a "picture . . . of a world endowed with fruitfulness, guided by its Creator, but allowed an ability to realize this fruitfulness in its own particular ways. Chance is a sign of freedom, not

blind purposelessness."³² Randomness is not an enemy, but "a way of referring to the openness of reality, the character of that world in which God is ceaselessly at work and in which we are given the opportunity of cooperating with him."³³

Polkinghorne is very clear about the implications of this view of chance. The universe is endowed by the Creator, he says, with fruitfulness, and is allowed to be fruitful. When new conditions arise, new phenomena are elicited from the same old laws. Thus chance is God's way of introducing novelty into the world, and law is his way of guiding the outcomes.³⁴ He pictures the lawful necessity of the world as a reflection of God's faithfulness, and the role of chance in the world process as a reflection of the precariousness inescapable in the gift of freedom by love.³⁵

But Polkinghorne also believes we should expect the world to have ragged edges, where order and disorder interlace each other.³⁶ Thus we recognize that sickness and disease can occur, as well as what we call natural disasters. Not attributing evil intent to God, he sees the creation being open to perils like cancer and murder.³⁷ Roth is not far from this position when he says, "Because of freedom of choice we have to cope with both good and evil. The presence of evil challenges neither God's omnipotence nor his love if freedom of choice also exists. True freedom of choice requires that evil be permitted."³⁸

To those inclined toward the blueprint model of design, these consequences of the process model are hard to swallow. The Bible clearly states that the result of each day's creation was good, and at the close of the sixth day "God saw everything he had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1:31 KJV) The deliberateness of the Creation narrative gives no hint of an exploratory process, with its attendant blind alleys and adaptations to changing conditions. It's difficult to read Genesis as general directions without a detailed plan.³⁹ Yet that is where the process model appears to come down. "God didn't produce a ready-made world. He's done something cleverer than this. He's created a world able to make itself."⁴⁰ But this conclusion seems to fly directly in the face of the testimony of Ellen White.

It is supposed that . . . nature is endowed with certain properties and placed subject to laws, and is then left to itself to obey these laws and perform the work originally commanded.

This is false science; there is nothing in the word of God to sustain it. God does not annul his laws, but He is continually working through them, using them as His instruments. They are not self-working. God is perpetually at work in nature. . . .⁴¹

If God is continually working through his laws, might it not be that what we call "chance" is an evidence of that process? If the creation is designed with the possibility for change and adaptability, might it not be that a part of the development of the universe is left to the contingencies of history? Polkinghorne reminds us

The physical world seems to have an openness to the future about it, which is no doubt how we are able to act in a free and responsible way within it. . . . I don't think that the effect of purely physical causes is drawn so tightly that it rules out either human choice or divine providence.⁴²

My belief is that we can take science with all seriousness, yet not conclude that the fabric of the physical world is so rigid in its structure that there cannot be powers of human and divine agency exercised within its unfolding history.⁴³

Thus rather than referring to "blind chance" as an agent in a pointless universe, we can accept the freedom implied by the openness of creation as a gift from God.

Middle Ground

We must seek to find some middle ground between two extreme pictures of God's relationship to the creation. Quoting John Polkinghorne again:

One is the picture of the universe as God's puppet theater, in which he pulls every string and makes all creatures dance to his tune alone. The God of love cannot be such a cosmic tyrant, but neither can he be an indifferent spectator, who just set it all going, then left the universe to get on with it. We have

to strive for an understanding that lies in between these two extremes.⁴⁴

I have not explained how this middle ground might be found and maintained. I shall be pleased if others more capable than I should set about that task. But I believe the blueprint meaning of design too rigid to allow for a meaningful relationship to develop between God and man;⁴⁵ while the picture of the cosmos creating itself as it explores the gamut of lawful necessity⁴⁶ is too remote from the God who formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life.

It is the sign of a mature subject to be able to be true to experience however hard that experience may be to understand. . . . One cannot tell the wave-particle story of quantum physics without thinking of the God-man duality of Christ. If Christian experience finds in Jesus elements both human and divine, as I believe it does, then it must hold fast to that experience whatever the intellectual problems involved.⁴⁷

To paraphrase: if the cosmos possesses elements of both law-like regularity and the openness and unpredictability of chance, then we must incorporate both into our metaphor of design.

Notes and References

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Age Dating of Rocks

By Richard J. Bottomley

Few things on earth are so underrated as rocks. They seem so dull. Yet from rocks we create the metals and materials used for home and industry. Rock is the source of petroleum, which makes modern transportation and plastics possible, and the dominant factor in the shape of the natural world around us. But more fasci-

nating than any of these insights is the fact that rocks can speak to us—not in the English language, of course, but they speak nonetheless. Every rock is like a miniature “black-box” flight recorder that can be examined in a lab. There it can reveal such things as what temperatures and pressures it has seen, the direction of the north pole when it was formed, often the climate in which it was created and, most surprisingly, how old it is.

Let’s consider why rocks have different ages. Why don’t they all have one age that reflects the time of their creation? The answer to this is that natural processes like wind and water eat away at rock and reduce it to sand and mud, which eventually drain to the sea. There they become deposited and glued together again into “new” rocks called sandstone and shale. “New” carbonate rock such as limestone can also be created by reef-building organisms in the sea. Other processes such as metamorphism and volcanism also create “new” rock. This “new” rock often remembers only the age of its latest reincarnation.

I would like to explain how simple it is to date a rock. This technique is not cloaked in mystery. The fact that we can do this is a result of God’s natural laws, the master plan by which he structured the universe. Everything we can see in the earth or universe can be described by four basic forces. You are already quite familiar with the gravitational force, which holds you down, and the electromagnetic force shown in phenomena such as light and chemistry. The other two forces, the strong and weak nuclear forces, are not as easily observed in everyday life. The sun is an example of an environment where strong and weak forces predominate. It is an astounding and yet humbling thought that with these four forces, the whole universe as we know it can be described—clearly a tribute to the creative genius of God.

One of the results of the interactions of these forces is the periodic table (Fig. 1) we all remember from high school chemistry that describes how the different elements relate to each other. You will remember that an

Editor’s Note

Creation Reconsidered
Scientific, Biblical and
Theological Perspectives
James L. Hayward, Editor
Association of Adventist Forums

In August 1985, under the aegis of the Association of Adventist Forums, a group of 104 registrants and their families examined firsthand evidence of the earth’s past recorded in the rocks and fossils of the Rocky Mountains. They also spent four days evaluating the implications of this evidence for faith and belief at a conference on Geology and the Biblical Record held in West Yellowstone, Montana. Papers presented at this conference form most of the twenty-seven chapters of this provocative volume.
—from the book jacket

Understanding the time element of Creation occupied much of the scientific discussion at this conference. Other presentations in addition to the following presentation by Richard Bottomley, included addresses by Ervin Taylor on radiocarbon dating’s problems for young earth creationists and P.E. Hare on pleochroic halos and time as well as amino acid racemization dating of fossils.

We are pleased to bring this book to the attention of our readers by including this chapter.

atom is a dense central core made up of particles called neutrons and protons, and that a cloud of electrons circles the nucleus. The number of electrons equals the number of protons for any one species of atom. The periodic table is a manifestation of the basic structure of matter. Start with hydrogen, the lightest element, then keep adding protons and neutrons to make up successively heavier atoms. For the moment let's ignore neutrons. If you add one proton to hydrogen you get helium. You can keep adding protons until you have a nucleus with eighty-three protons. This is the element bismuth. If you add one more proton, something rather surprising happens. The element you form with atomic number eighty-four (polonium) is radioactive! It doesn't want to stick together. If you leave it long enough it will decay into other nonradioactive elements. It is unstable—the nuclear glue is no longer strong enough to hold the nucleus together and thus it decays. This explains why there isn't an infinite number of chemical elements. All nine natural elements heavier than bismuth are also radioactive and decay. Humans have tried for over forty years to glue heavier elements together, but each one is radioactive and eventually decays to lighter elements. Thus we see that radioactivity is a natural phenomenon tied to the fundamental structure of matter. It is related to the strong and weak nuclear forces and is not an independent physical quantity that can be varied at will; it comes about when the nuclear glue is no longer strong enough to hold a particular nucleus together. Because it is a nuclear process, virtually nothing we can do externally can affect the process. Heat, pressure, electricity, and explosions all involve the electrons of an atom, not the nucleus.

In a simple radioactive decay, we call the radioactive atom the "parent atom" and the stable atom that results the "daughter atom." The rate of transformation from parent to daughter is constant for any particular radioactive nucleus. Every radioactive atom has a characteristic half-life. The half-life is simply how long it takes for one-half the radioactive atoms to decay. Some radioactive atoms have half-lives of billionths of a second while others have half-lives of billions of years.

1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9		10		11		12		13		14		15		16		17		18			
hydrogen 1 H 1.00794(7)		helium 2 He 4.002603(2)																																			
lithium 3 Li 6.941(2)		beryllium 4 Be 9.012183(3)																																			
sodium 11 Na 22.989770(2)		magnesium 12 Mg 24.30409(4)																																			
potassium 19 K 39.0983(1)		calcium 20 Ca 40.078(4)		scandium 21 Sc 44.95591(2)		titanium 22 Ti 47.88(7)		vanadium 23 V 50.9415(4)		chromium 24 Cr 51.9961(6)		manganese 25 Mn 54.938045(3)		iron 26 Fe 55.845(3)		cobalt 27 Co 58.933200(9)		nickel 28 Ni 58.6934(2)		copper 29 Cu 63.546(3)		zinc 30 Zn 65.38(2)		gallium 31 Ga 69.723(1)		germanium 32 Ge 72.61(2)		arsenic 33 As 74.92160(2)		selenium 34 Se 78.96(2)		bromine 35 Br 79.904(1)		krypton 36 Kr 83.80(1)			
rubidium 37 Rb 85.4678(1)		strontium 38 Sr 87.62(1)		yttrium 39 Y 88.90585(2)		zirconium 40 Zr 91.224(2)		niobium 41 Nb 92.90638(2)		molybdenum 42 Mo 95.94(1)		technetium 43 Tc 98.9063(5)		ruthenium 44 Ru 101.07(2)		rhodium 45 Rh 102.90550(2)		palladium 46 Pd 106.9051(2)		silver 47 Ag 107.8682(1)		cadmium 48 Cd 112.411(8)		indium 49 In 114.818(1)		tin 50 Sn 118.710(1)		antimony 51 Sb 121.757(1)		tellurium 52 Te 127.603(1)		iodine 53 I 126.90447(3)		xenon 54 Xe 131.29(4)			
cesium 55 Cs 132.90545(2)		barium 56 Ba 137.327(7)		lanthanum 57 La 138.90547(2)		cerium 58 Ce 140.12(1)		praseodymium 59 Pr 140.90766(2)		neodymium 60 Nd 144.242(3)		promethium 61 Pm 144.9127(2)		samarium 62 Sm 150.36(3)		europium 63 Eu 151.964(1)		gadolinium 64 Gd 157.25(3)		terbium 65 Tb 158.92534(2)		dysprosium 66 Dy 162.50(3)		holmium 67 Ho 164.93032(2)		erbium 68 Er 167.259(3)		thulium 69 Tm 168.9341(2)		ytterbium 70 Yb 173.04(3)							
radium 88 Ra 226.0254(7)		actinium 89 Ac 227.027(7)		thorium 90 Th 232.0377(2)		protactinium 91 Pa 231.03688(2)		uranium 92 U 238.02891(3)		neptunium 93 Np 237.04817(2)		plutonium 94 Pu 244.0642(2)		americium 95 Am 243.0614(2)		curium 96 Cm 247.0703(2)		berkelium 97 Bk 247.0703(2)		californium 98 Cf 251.0795(2)		einsteinium 99 Es 252.083(2)		fermium 100 Fm 257.081(3)		mendelevium 101 Md 258.10(2)		nobelium 102 No 259.10(11)									

Fig. 1. The Periodic Table of Elements

The term "decay constant" is related to half-life and is simply a measure of the probability that an atom will disintegrate in a unit of time.

Because the decay rate of radioactive atoms is constant, we can use it to tell time in the same way that the constant movement of hands of a clock enables us to tell time. Even a small piece of rock contains trillions of atoms, some of which are naturally radioactive. Throughout the life of this rock these radioactive parent atoms decay into daughter isotopes at a steady, predictable rate. If we count the parent and daughter atoms, we can tell how old the rock is.

Let's demonstrate how this can be done. Think of a rock as a box made up of golf balls of different colors, each color representing a different type of atom such as iron or silicon. Assume that the box contains one hundred radioactive white golf balls and that they decay at a rate of one ball per year. Every time one decays it turns green. I can come back anytime during the next hundred years and tell how much time has passed simply by noting how many golf balls have turned green. If there are seventy-five white balls and twenty-five green balls, we know that twenty-five years have passed. In this simple situation we could tell the amount of time that passed by looking solely at the white balls (100 - 75 = 25 years) or just at the green balls (25 years). This is because we knew how many balls there were at zero time. In a real rock we don't know how many radioactive atoms there are to begin, so we must count both the parent and the daughter atoms because the total number of white balls plus the total number of green balls add up to the original number of white balls before the

decay process started. Rock dating is basically that simple. The machine used to measure the atoms is called a mass spectrometer, and it allows one to count the relative number of each type of atom in a rock. The people who make these measurements are called geochronologists.

Now we can think of three problems that may interfere with the accuracy of this process:

1. Radioactive decay constants change with time.
2. Someone steals balls from the box or puts extra balls into the box while we're away.
3. There are extra green balls in the box before we start.

Radioactive Decay Constants Change

As we have seen, decay constants are a natural function of the nuclear glue that holds the universe together. You can't change them at random without destroying everything around us. What would be the result of weakening the nuclear force enough to compress the radiometric ages into a short time scale? First, many atoms that are stable now would decay into different atoms. All life, which is dependent on complex molecules such as DNA, enzymes, and proteins, would cease as the delicate binding and shape of these molecules became totally disrupted by atoms turning into different atoms.

Second, increased radiation from decay would be lethal to life. Third, the amount of energy given off during decay would probably be enough to totally melt the surface of the earth. Radioactive decay even at its present slow rate is a major reason that the core of the earth is presently molten. Lastly, if this had happened in the recent past, we would still find naturally occurring simple radioactive elements with short half-lives (less than ten thousand years) not related to the decay of the longer-lived isotopes, but this is not observed in nature. Changing the nuclear force by enough to make the dates fit a six-thousand-year chronology would be equivalent to making gravity a million times weaker in the past. In short, any change of this magnitude in nuclear forces is bound to leave behind evidence that we could see today.

Extra Balls Added to the Box

In some rocks, atoms can be added or subtracted by natural processes such as water percolating through pore spaces. Geochronologists avoid this problem by choosing minerals that are known to resist these pro-

cesses and keep the parent and daughter population locked in. In addition, certain laboratory procedures can help identify whether loss has indeed happened.

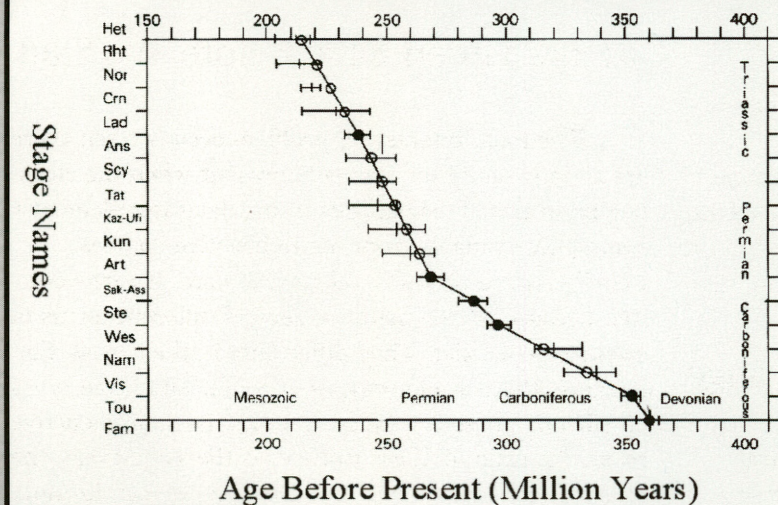
Extra Green Balls Before We Start

The most interesting problem occurs when there are already daughter elements present when the clock begins to tick. This happens if the daughter element is commonly available from nonradioactive sources. Luckily nature comes to our rescue here. It turns out that because of the neutron, several different forms of each element exist. They differ only in their mass. For instance, there are four types of sulfur and three types of silicon. These are called isotopes. In nonradioactive rocks, the ratio of these isotopes is the same everywhere on earth. By measuring these isotopes, we can formulate ratios that represent the amount of contaminating isotope at zero time. The calculated amount of contaminating isotope can now be subtracted from the total in the rock we are attempting to age.

The idea is much easier to understand in terms of golf balls. Let's consider a box of one hundred white balls, with six green balls and two red balls already present. If we didn't account for the green balls, we would estimate that the box was already six years old before the clock even started. But if we know that in nonradioactive rocks there are three green balls for every red ball, we know that when we find the two red balls we have to subtract the six green balls before we calculate any age. For instance, suppose we came back some years later and found thirty-one green balls and two red balls. We subtract three green balls for each red ball we find. Thus we have $31 - 6 = 25$ green balls due to radioactive decay, and we know the box is twenty-five years old.

But what about the scientists who do the dating? Aren't they atheists who will hide any six-thousand-year dates and only publish the ones that are hundreds of millions of years old? Surprisingly, most scientists whom I have met over the years have a belief in God and are not out to prove that he doesn't exist. Physical scientists are quite honest and forthright in their publications for two very good reasons. First, the purpose of publishing is to let everyone know what you've discovered by your research. These results are almost always checked by someone else sooner or later. If you lie or cheat, you will be caught and your career ruined. Second, as one geochronologist (who is an avowed atheist) once told me, "I would love to prove the earth is six thousand

Plot of Radiometric Ages vs Stratigraphic Sequence



A plot of the radiometrically determined age (with error bars) plotted against the stratigraphic sequence of fossil life. The width of each vertical stage is based on the assumption that they represent equal units of time. If this assumption was nonsense, then we would expect a broad scatter of points across the diagram indicating there is no relationship between the order of fossil development and their radiometrically determined age.

Diagram is modified after Harland, Cox, Llewellyn, Pickton, Smith and Walters, *A Geologic Time Scale*, Cambridge, 1982.

years old if I could.” What he meant was this: He would be world famous and be remembered as the man who made a really significant discovery in earth science—the equivalent to finding a cure for all heart attacks in medicine.

So it is basically simple to get a rock to tell you how old it is. Even potential problems that might interfere with this radioactive clock can be solved, and the method is constantly being improved and refined. Many rocks can also be dated by two or more separate and independent methods. This gives us confidence that the ages we get from rocks are reliable, and, as you already know, many of them are extremely ancient. They must be saying something important about the age of the earth.

Significance of Radiometric Dates to the History of Life

From a Christian point of view, the most startling aspect of radiometric dating is the relationship between ages and fossils in rocks. The different layers in rocks imply a sequence—the bottom rock being laid down before the younger rock, which is on top of it. But we also observe a sequence of “critters” in these rocks. Certain critters are only found in young rocks and others only in old rocks.

When the rocks on earth are classified into groups on the basis of distinctive critters they contain, we call each of these units a “stage.” Stages are defined strictly by fossils and relative stratigraphy, and stage bound-

aries are usually marked by a distinctive change in critter morphology or population. They represent a sequence of younger to older rocks, but without further information we don’t know whether this sequence represents one year or a billion. It is possible, however, to radiometrically date rocks that are associated with each stage. As expected, we find that stages at the top of a series are younger than stages at the bottom. But what is really surprising is that the dates spread over hundreds of millions of years! Even more amazing is the consistency of the dates. Rocks containing a certain type of critter only give a small range of ages for that critter.

Each stage, then, appears to be associated with rocks of a certain age range. This is really astounding because stages are defined by fossils in rocks and stratigraphic relationships while ages are totally independent. Radiometric ages, as we have seen, are dependent on nuclear processes, not geology or critters. Yet, clearly, certain critters and certain ages are always correlated. The simplest explanation of this link is that the stages really do represent long intervals of time and that the rocks involved could not have been deposited over a short period of time. Any model we propose to describe early earth history will have to satisfactorily explain results such as these.

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imagination!

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THE MAKING OF FICTION-BY ALL OF US-IS CRUCIAL TO THE ENACTMENT OF OUR DAY-TO-DAY FAITH

creativity

original



FICTION

verbal felicity is the fruit of art and diligence and refusing to be false.

All she knew to do was to go on choosing.

He doesn't ask, anymore, why this is the only story she wants to hear.

Later, the soft music of metal, soil and grass woke me from my stupor.



THE AGE OF THE EARTH

By Mary Pat Koos

At the top of the steps Eugene held her back. "Aren't you going to knock?" Mary Margaret laughed, her breath fogging the air. "This is my house," she said, and opened the door.

"Mama, Daddy?" she called. It was only then, as she waited, that she felt a tremor of fear.

Last night, Friday, February 28, 1948, they'd been parked out behind the stadium. Mary Margaret's dormitory curfew had long passed, and she said, "I can't go back now." So they'd driven north, aiming for Oklahoma, or maybe the North Pole, but they only got as far as Gainesville before Eugene's car blew a tire. Some people might have considered that an omen, but they just waited for a filling station to open and had the tire fixed, and then they found a justice of the peace. When they came out of the little frame house, blinking in bright sunshine, she kissed him and said, "I guess we better go tell my mama and daddy." He looked at her with such alarm that she said, "You weren't planning on keeping it a secret, were you?"

"Of course not," he said. She wondered then, who does Eugene have to tell? Since last night she'd felt like they were one person, as if she were being carried around inside his skin, but now here she stood looking up at this man, and she couldn't ask. "Then let's go," she said, suddenly, overwhelmingly homesick.

Mary Margaret knew they'd be back in the kitchen—Daddy reading the paper and Mama getting a head start on Sunday dinner. And now here they came, startled as if from sleep—she drying her hands in her apron and he with his glasses sliding down his nose, still clutching the sports section.

"Memo—" her daddy said, which was her own baby name for herself, but then he caught sight of Eugene, and whatever else he'd been about to say died on his lips.

"You're letting in all the cold air," her mama said. Mary Margaret turned to see Eugene still standing on the porch. At last he ducked through the door and closed it behind him, a tall stranger who by now needed a shave.

"I'd like you to meet my husband," Mary Margaret said. Her mama and daddy exchanged a look, so full of pain it made her catch her breath. But what could she have expected? She was their only child, their baby girl, and

the last they knew, she was practically engaged to a preacher.

They all sat down in the living room. Mary Margaret tried to look at her mama and daddy through Eugene's eyes. Even if she hadn't already told him, (or had she?) Eugene might have guessed that her daddy was a high school principal, from the way he sat with his arms crossed, saying with his steely gaze, Well, young man, what do you have to say for yourself? Eugene sat in a wing chair, the one with scratchy upholstery, with his hands dangling between his knees. She wondered if her daddy could tell, just by looking, that Eugene had never finished high school. Never mind that he'd gone on later to college; in her daddy's view, quitting meant a lack of gumption.

"We met at a dance," Eugene blurted. "At the college." Her mama and daddy frowned, exactly alike, and Eugene looked at her as if to ask, What did I say?

"I wasn't dancing," she said quickly. She was looking at her parents, but she heard Eugene's intake of breath, felt the pain in his expression. He was only trying to be helpful, she knew. She imagined him scrambling to remember the list of activities forbidden to hard-shell Baptists . . . drinking, card-playing. She sighed, her heart sinking. Compared to what she'd done now, a naked fandango would hardly seem shocking.

She remembered that night she'd been bored with studying and bored with writing letters to Dwight Davis, who was off in Arkansas on his first revival tour, so she'd gone along with her roommate who was a Methodist and could dance. And she stood watching the dancing feeling not bored now but kind of restless and sad, when this tall boy came up and started talking to her. No, a man, she realized, and from the very first she couldn't keep her eyes away from his. Brown—not light but not dark either, almost with a glint of red. Later he told her he and his buddies from the crew had



come to the dance looking for girls, but soon as he saw her he knew he'd stopped looking. She wanted so bad to make her mama and daddy see how it had happened, how they couldn't help it, but she didn't have the words.

Her mother spoke. "Where is your home, Mr.—?"

"Partridge," he said. "Eugene Partridge." He held out his hand for her to shake, but she did not take it. She was looking at her daughter, who was thinking, in wonder, Partridge. Mrs. Eugene Partridge. That is my new name.

"I don't exactly have a home," her new husband said. At this all eyes flew back to him. He looked despairing, as if he could have bitten his tongue right out of his mouth. "It's my job—you see we move around?" It was sounding worse and worse, and Mary Margaret

knew Eugene realized it. She held her breath. "I was born in Oklahoma," he said. Another glance exchanged between her parents. Not a Texan, she read clearly. And in that case where he was from didn't amount to much. She saw sweat break out on his upper lip.

"And you have family there?" Her mama's voice

HE HELD OUT HIS HAND FOR HER TO
SHAKE, BUT SHE DID NOT TAKE IT. SHE WAS
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was low and sweet and insistent.

"No," he said. Her mama looked full at him, her eyes widening in question. He took a deep breath and looked at Mary Margaret. "They're all gone," he said. "Dead. At least I think they're dead. The letters stopped coming."

Mary Margaret made a small sound. She knew her mama and daddy could see in her face that she was hearing this for the first time.

"Back during the drought," Gene said. "They went to California, and I stayed behind."

"But that was years ago," her mama said. "How old were you?"

"Fifteen."

Mary Margaret bit her lip to keep back the tears. Why hadn't he told her? Why hadn't she asked? It seemed they had talked for hours in the twenty-one days, no twenty-two, they'd known each other.

Gene ran a hand through his hair. "Look," he said, "it's ancient history." And a history unknown to her, Mary Margaret thought, while hers was on display right here in this room, with its gleaming furniture brought west in covered wagons, its pictures of solemn-faced ancestors in silver frames atop the piano. As if he'd followed her gaze, Eugene said suddenly, his voice

straining for a way out, "That's a beautiful piano. Who plays?"

Her mother gave a little gasp and looked at her daughter as if she couldn't believe her ears. "Lord have mercy," her father said. Mary Margaret blushed furiously. "I do," she said, with a little smile and a sort of defeated shrug.

They stared at each other helplessly—he'd told her he was one-quarter Chickasaw and that he'd named his Ford coupe after the owner of a café in Texarkana, but not that he was an orphan, or good as; she'd recited him a list of all her best friends since first grade and told him how her Cousin Alger taught her to spit, but not that from the age of five up until three weeks ago she'd spent

two hours a day practicing the piano, every day but Sunday, when she played hymns.

Before supper she'd always played the piano for her daddy—"Sugar, come play me a piece," he would say. They were all pieces to him—the Chopin étude that was his very favorite, or the Rachmaninoff concerto she'd memorized for his Christmas present. He called her playing his "balm in Gilead," from the words of the spiritual. When she was a little girl Mary Margaret had thought it said "bomb" in Gilead, and she couldn't figure out how that was supposed to calm anybody down.

This morning she and Eugene had stopped at a café for breakfast. "You must be starving," she'd said to him, feeling wifely and protective. He'd ordered eggs with biscuits and gravy, so she did, too. There was too much pepper in the gravy, but he ate it all, taking one of her biscuits to scrape his plate, while she just pushed food around with her fork and watched him. My husband, she kept thinking.

Now soon he'd figure out she knew far more about scales and arpeggios than pots and pans. What other surprises did they have in store?

When her daddy spoke at last it sounded like the voice of God. "How do you support yourself?"

"Eugene's in the oil business," Mary Margaret said

brightly, with a proud little nod.

Her daddy's eyebrows rose just a fraction. "I'm on the exploration end," Eugene said. Her daddy's eyebrows sank back into a frown. Not the money end, Mary Margaret imagined him thinking.

"Tell them how you do it," Mary Margaret said. "How you find the oil. Daddy used to teach science so I know he'll find it fascinating." Her voice sounded so eager and pathetic, like a hostess at a dying party.

"First they dig these holes in the ground, right? And then they put in dynamite and blow it up."

"Land sakes," her mother said.

"Oh, it's not dangerous," Mary Margaret said quickly. "Not one bit—is it, darlin'?"

He blushed as if she'd kissed him right in front of God and everybody. "We take precautions," he said. Her daddy shook his head with a disgusted expression. Then both her parents looked at her, not at her face, but at her middle, and at first she didn't understand. Then her hands flew to her head, which was hot, pounding with blood. "It's not like that, she wanted to cry out, but the words would not come. How could she make them understand?"

On the night they met she'd asked him about his job. He said, "I'm a doodlebugger," and she burst out laughing. Then she was embarrassed, but he didn't seem to mind—he just began to explain it to her, so slow and careful, but not like he thought she was dumb, or anything. And his voice had this sureness about it.

"Tell them the part about unlocking the secrets," she said.

Eugene looked at her. "Maybe we've had about enough secrets for one day," he said softly.

Her daddy cleared his throat, as if the words came with difficulty. "We'd like to hear." It was more a challenge than a polite invitation.

"Unlocking the secrets is what my friend Jud calls it," Eugene said. Mary Margaret's heart lifted just a bit. This was a part of Eugene's background she did know—he'd told her how Jud took him under his wing, taught him about the work—not the science part, because Jud never finished college. But what the work meant. His face always lit up when he talked about Jud, and now she clung to that. She smiled at her husband.

"Tell us," she said.

Eugene squared his shoulders and looked right at her daddy. "What we do exactly," he said, "is map the subsurface." He told how the dynamite creates sound waves that speed downward through deep layers of the earth. And how these sound waves bounce back from ancient structures, way down deep.

How intense Eugene's expression as he explained all this, how eloquent the movement of his hands. Mary Margaret had never noticed before the beauty of those hands. Last night in the car, as he'd touched her, she'd felt waves, way down deep, folding and unfolding.

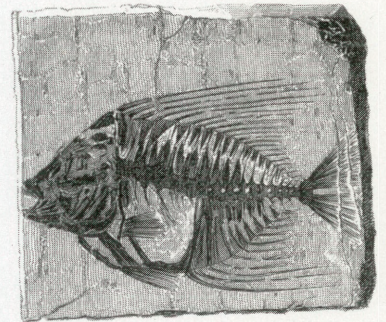
The returning waves, Eugene was saying, cause less vibration on the surface than a human footstep. Had Eugene known when it happened? The shock and surprise had struck her

very still, her breath caught in her throat. Had the pulsing deep inside vibrated clear through her skin?

This vibration is received, he said, by sensitive instruments called seismometers, which convert the infinitesimal about of energy into electrical impulses which are then amplified hundreds of thousands of times.

It was like the pleasure was amplified hundreds of thousands of times, she thought. No one had told her this was part of the act of love, which near as she could tell, they hadn't even completed. But Eugene's hands had unlocked this deepest secret of her body.

The impulses, Eugene explained, are recorded on photographic paper in the form of a seismogram. "A doodlebugger like me reads those wavy lines and draws a map. And that's how we locate the oil, hidden in folds of the earth, laid down who knows how many eons ago." He paused to look at her parents, who were staring down at the floor as if it would give them answers. "It's all pretty simple," he said. His voice had that confident tone it always got when he talked about his work, and



Mary Margaret felt proud.

Her daddy's head turned suddenly, his eyes snapping into focus. "We know how old the earth is," he said, tight-lipped. "There's no doubt whatsoever about that."

Mary Margaret watched the flicker in Eugene's eyes. Dear Jesus, she prayed, don't let him say anything.

"WE KNOW HOW OLD THE EARTH IS," HE SAID, TIGHT-LIPPED. "THERE'S NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER ABOUT THAT."

MARY MARGARET WATCHED THE FLICKER IN EUGENE'S EYES. DEAR JESUS, SHE PRAYED, DON'T LET HIM SAY ANYTHING.

"How old, exactly, do you think?" Eugene asked. Lord, she thought, doesn't he see it coming?

"Not quite six thousand years," her daddy said.

"It's what the Bible says," her mama affirmed.

The Bible didn't say, exactly, Mary Margaret thought, but please, Eugene, don't point that out. They'd just say you could figure it out from prophecy, from signs and wonders. Please, Daddy, don't start on signs and wonders.

"You don't believe that, do you?" her daddy challenged.

Gene stared back at him. "The fossil record—" he began.

"The fossil record is nothing but a cruel hoax thought up by the devil—planted in the earth to confuse and beguile."

Eugene looked at Mary Margaret. Help me, his eyes pleaded. Tell me what to say. I can't, her eyes said back. And I'm so scared.

"That's what we believe," her daddy said. "And Mary Margaret believes it, too." He hadn't called her by her full name since she could remember. "Don't you, Mary Margaret?" he insisted.

Mary Margaret was still looking at Eugene. What did he expect? Did he want her to lie? "Yes, Daddy, I

believe it." Her voice was small but certain. It was Eugene who broke their gaze.

Mary Margaret didn't understand how she could believe with all her heart what she'd been taught from the cradle, and yet believe Eugene, too. She thought of that verse in the Bible, Choose ye this day whom ye will serve. And she heard it in her daddy's voice—she couldn't be certain he hadn't said it out loud. She looked at her daddy and then she looked at Eugene. She felt like a crack in the earth was opening beneath her feet, and she had to jump to one side or the other.

"I have to believe the evidence," Eugene said.

"The word of the Lord is evidence enough," her daddy answered.

With a tremor of pure despair Mary Margaret felt the crack widen past healing. "Don't do this," she wanted to scream at them both. What difference does it make how old the earth is? But to her daddy and to Eugene it made a world of difference. And she had to choose. What should she go by, her whole life before, or the past three weeks? Or just last night, and the wondrous shock waves that made her say, I can't go back now? What if that feeling was a trick of the devil, a cruel hoax planted deep inside her body to confuse and beguile? She looked at her mama. Why didn't you tell me? she asked silently. Had her mama ever felt it? Was it real? Her mama just stared back.

Now Mary Margaret had the strongest desire to play for her daddy again. She moved toward the piano, but her mama stepped quickly in front of her and shut the piano lid so hard the keys jangled.

Mary Margaret thought the sound would never stop, but when it did the silence was worse. She made herself look at her mama. Her eyes were like ice. She turned to her daddy—his eyes, too, were hard and cold. Then she turned to look at Eugene, whose eyes were blazing with the heat of his conviction, and she crossed the gulf of hooked rug to his side.

"I have to believe what the earth tells me," Eugene

said, with his wife's hand on his shoulder like a blessing. Mary Margaret felt the vibration of her husband's voice, strong and sure, and for now that had to be enough.

After a while, her daddy said, "Well," in this kind of strange, hushed voice. Mary Margaret saw him and Mama look at each other, and then Mama pressed her

but she righted herself and walked carefully the rest of the way down. Her parents were standing there in the front hall. Eugene reached to take the clothes from her; in a split second she imagined herself, arms free, hugging her mama and daddy, afraid she'd cry if they held her tight, more afraid they might refuse her embrace.

She said, with a strange little laugh, "No, I've got it—if I turn loose they'll all spill." They all stood there awkwardly, and finally Eugene said, "I'll take good care of her." Neither one of them answered, and so Eugene and his bride turned and started down the walk.

The car's trunk seemed to swallow up her few belongings. When Eugene slammed the lid it did not echo like the

"I HAVE TO BELIEVE WHAT THE EARTH TELLS ME," EUGENE SAID, WITH HIS WIFE'S HAND ON HIS SHOULDER LIKE A BLESSING. MARY MARGARET FELT THE VIBRATION OF HER HUSBAND'S VOICE, STRONG AND SURE, AND FOR NOW THAT HAD TO BE ENOUGH..

lips together tight and looked away, but not at her. And even though it was getting on toward supertime nobody said anything about staying to eat.

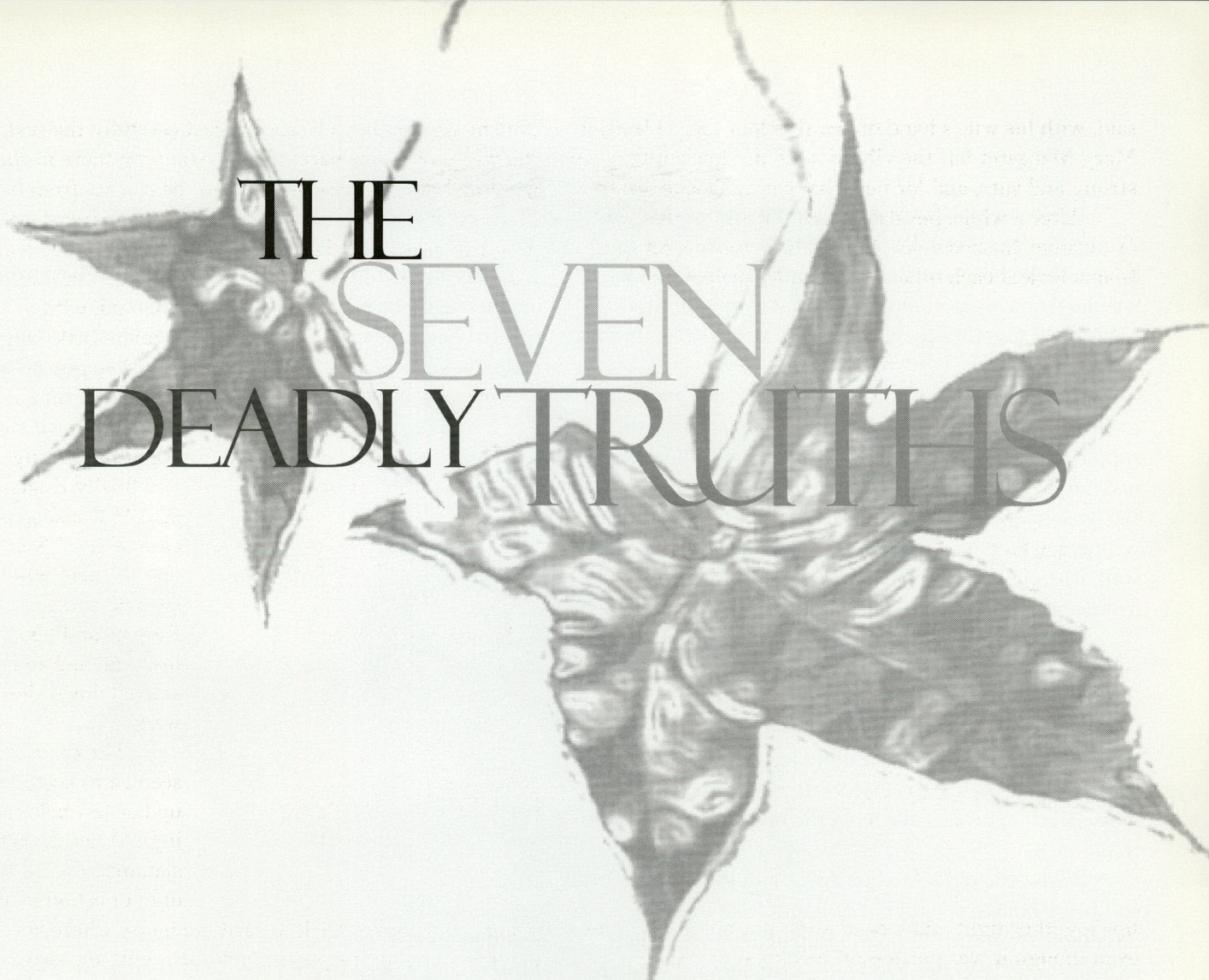
"I'll go upstairs and pack a few things," Mary Margaret said.

She didn't have much to pick from in her closet, since most of her clothes were in her dorm room, with her luggage. She moved the few dresses back and forth on the rod, not really seeing any of them, and in her mind was running a little refrain: the Bible tells me so. What the earth tells me, Eugene said. The earth had never said anything to her, not that she knew of. But her body had. Was that the same thing?

Eugene was standing on the porch when she came back down the stairs with a pile of clothes on hangers over her arm. She was hurrying so she nearly stumbled, and he yanked open the screen door to try to catch her,

piano. They looked back toward the house where her parents stood on the porch, their faces still impassive but now wet with tears. An involuntary cry came from Mary Margaret's throat, and Eugene took her chin in his hands and turned his face towards hers, searching, as if asking silently, Can you do this? Mary Margaret closed her eyes and looked into her future, saw it yawning open like the trunk of this car. All she knew to do was to go on choosing. She opened her eyes. "Yes," she said.

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THE SEVEN DEADLY TRUTHS

By Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson

1. He That Shall Endure Unto the End, the Same Shall Be Saved

When I was four, my mother lost a child—a nameless, shapeless, almost-embryo whose breath of life was snuffed out when it had barely been granted. The smallness of this child-to-have-been to the largeness of my mother's loss was grossly disproportionate.

During the following years, I was brought up in the hollow of that loss: cradled in the graven image of Lost Baby who had tried but failed to make it all the way through the slippery tunnel between my mother's thighs to the world of air.

My mother's fingers craved the touch of two children. Me, a tangible ten toes and ten fingers—pink and porous; Lost Baby, an allegory of joys and latent moments in an unfinished, cyclical dream. But in her love of two children, she loved Lost Baby an ounce more—an ounce that weighed 128 pounds, which is exactly how much my beautiful, slender mother weighed. She began to sink like a glass marble in waters of stolen memory. Five years after Lost Baby, when the Drover Estate had turned into a pool of gilded autumn leaves, my mother gave up. Nobody, not even the Angel of Life, could save her from drowning in that red lake of Lost Baby's stolen memory. I call it the Place of the Deadly Truths.

2. Seek, and Ye Shall Find

Before my mother's death, in the year of All Things Sought, Found, and Taken Away, we lived in a house whose bones rattled constantly. Its façade was wrinkled and cracked at the lips. It was an old, tired house held together perhaps only by a skin of umber paint.

An oak tree towered over the old house, its arms embracing the fragile structure in layers of smooth, supple leaves. Its trunk was black and so swollen that it had burst through the brick wall built ten strides from the back door of the old house. The oak tree now stood with craggy, chipped feet planted on both sides of the wall, its long arms unfurled in exaggerated liberation. It had been delivered of—and united with—the wall.

I was an eight-year-old boy lured by the oak tree's sweet, ticklish branches that offered freshness and comfort—something the old house could not. That spring, when I climbed up into that colossal green sphere for the first time, my bony legs shook from the sheer thrill of being so close to the sky. God the Father himself felt approachable from the branches of the oak tree.

Below, the old house lay silent and dwarfed. Saffron and beige houses spread out east and west in both directions from the old house. Lupine Hill—a violent exhibition of lavender and blue—erupted in the north. The long brick wall, interrupted only by the oak tree, divided the saffron and beige houses from the immense Shangri-la of flowering trees and flowers that lay beyond. The Drover Estate.

There, suspended in the branches of the oak tree above the old house and the Drover property, I built my Tower of Babel—a wild, grotesque contraption of scrap wood and linoleum that grew in almost organic proportions. Rough ladders wound upward on the massive branches. Crude portals and flimsy trapdoors opened on cubicles. I filled the tree's arms with my treasures of empty Coke bottles, nails, a rusted, silent clock, and cassette tapes with tails of knotted ribbon.

The tree was my Tower of Babel and my Jacob's Ladder.

3. For Where Your Treasure Is, There Will Your Heart Be Also

My mother and I shared the same birthday at the beginning of July. Every year for our birthday, we roasted Vegelinks and feasted on sweet, sticky watermelon before opening our gifts. Father always surprised us. One year it was an inflatable pool for all of us.



Another time it was a silver-plated wristwatch for Mother and a telescope for me. We never knew what to expect. Still, what happened on our birthday the year of All Things Sought, Found, and Taken Away, was completely unforeseen.

I looked across the smoldering barbecue at Father and Mother who sat stretched out on two faded green lawn chairs. Father's face was creased with years of wrinkles, but I thought Mother looked as young and brand new as she did in their wedding photos. The sunlight sparkled on her skin. I remember her looking beautiful just then. Now I think that it was partly because of the sunlight outshining the sadness that often filtered through her eyes during those days. Summer light encircled us, and weightless words and laughter floated between us. I believed we were utterly and fundamentally happy—Mother and I imagining the

presents Father had planned for us, and Father who knew the secret about what awaited us in the living room.

One thought spiraled in my head when I saw the grand piano sitting in the living room: *A piano?—But*

“YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY, BILLY?” I
REMEMBER THINKING WHAT A PRE-
POSTEROUS QUESTION THAT WAS.
THERE HAD NEVER BEEN A PIANO
IN THE HOUSE AS FAR AS I COULD
REMEMBER.

I'm a nine-year-old boy. The sleek, shiny piano looked absurd against the shabby backdrop of the old house.

I heard Mother inhale sharply.

“Frank, we can't afford this . . .”

“But Elsie . . . you used to love to play . . .”

He sounded so somber. I felt my throat tighten.

“Your mother used to play in an orchestra, you know,” he said to me.

I didn't know that.

“Frank, what is this? Some kind of ploy?”

“Elsie . . .”

“You think . . . Frank, you think I can just forget . . . ?”

“Good Heavens, Elsie, it's been almost five years. Five years! Don't you think it's about time you stop this madness?”

They had also never talked this openly about Lost Baby. All I knew about Lost Baby, I had gathered from snippets of conversations overheard.

Mother suddenly raised her hand to her white face and rushed from the room, her sundress flying wildly about her ankles. A pale, sweet fragrance lingered in the room, even after she was gone.

I stood there with Father, not knowing what to

say. He pointed at the piano.

“You know how to play, Billy?” I remember thinking what a preposterous question that was. There had never been a piano in the house as far as I could remember.

“No,” I said. I looked up at my father and had a distinct feeling that we were strangers to each other.

4. Children, Obey Your Parents

Late into that summer, Father took on extra landscaping jobs—while the grand piano sat like a giant, silent stone in our living room. He slipped out of the house before breakfast and didn't return until dinner, which he always ate in a hurry. Then he would be gone again until night had lulled the afternoon heat into a gentle warmth. When

Father stepped through the front door, the smell of vegetation trickled into the room. He looked very tired that whole summer.

Mother moved about the house like a ghost. Meals—outlandish concoctions of vegetables and spice—appeared mysteriously on the table. The piano was a polished mirror casting back a likeness of gloom and misery. Sometimes Mother sat at the piano with petrified fingers. Never playing, just sitting.

Except for the trailing scent of grass and leaves and the freakish meals, it was as if I was the only person living in that old house. I climbed my Jacob's Ladder more often—my Jacob's Ladder that lifted me up into a sanctuary of leaves and wind, away from the tiredness and gloom that clung to the old house. My eyes rested on Drover Estate.

A woman named Cat lived at Drover Estate. Every afternoon at four, Cat emerged from the white Victorian mansion in the far corner of the property with two matching black poodles on her heels. She was a tall, dark woman with a thin, long neck and sharp corners on her body. Cat wore delicate hats and garments that flowed about her sharp corners like waterfalls of cloth—

Sabbath clothes for everyday. Each day, Cat and the two poodles strolled the grounds of the Estate. Cat smelled the flowers and inspected the trees. The poodles smelled each other.

That day, the air was thick and acrid. Acorns lay dry and brittle on the platform of my Tower. The door of the white mansion swung open, and Cat and the two black poodles flooded out into the garden. Cat wore a seafoam green sleeveless dress and a flimsy ivory hat.

As always, I watched from the oak tree as the trio wandered clockwise through the garden. Dog collars rattled. Leaves rustled. Cat shrilled, "Stay with Mummi, come along now!"

The poodles came along, their curly heads bouncing. Halfway around the Estate, they drifted beneath the oak tree. A poodle paused at the foot of the oak tree and lifted its hind leg.

My hand flew up to my mouth.

On my oak tree!

I froze for only a split second. Then I reached for a jagged, splintered strip of wood. A loose rung of my Jacob's Ladder. I gripped it until my fingers hurt and then hurled it downward. It was a silent, weighted arrow hurtling through the air. My David's stone. A (giant) poodle stood in its way, piddling.

A dog's squeal.

A Cat's shriek.

A rushing of seafoam and poodle toward the white mansion.

I stood in my Tower of Babel, unacknowledged.

I forgot to go home for dinner, terrified of myself, of the awful wailing of dogs and Cats. The sky was paling in the west. A hushed wind murmured in the leaves of the oak tree. A woman's voice floated up through the leaves, *Come in for dinner, Billy*, but I didn't move.

Later, the soft music of metal, soil, and grass woke me from my stupor. Dusk was beginning to shroud the earth in a shadowy mask. A man worked in the garden in front of the white mansion. His wide, shirted back was turned toward me. With gentle, rhythmic strokes of a metal rake, he shepherded leaves that had gone astray. The cadence of his movements was strangely

familiar. I waited for him to show his face, but he worked with his back toward me. He raked. Trimmed bushes. Deadheaded rosebushes. Watered potted plants. Every so often, he stooped down to pick up a poodle dropping.

Suddenly, a block of light fell over the man. The door of the mansion stood open, and Cat floated out onto the porch, her garments flowing about her sharp corners, a single black poodle on her heels.



The man looked up from amongst the leaves and cuttings and stood up. He walked toward Cat, and they stood together talking softly, their bodies very close. Then Cat fingered the man's cheek with a silky paw, and he moved forward and kissed her very slowly.

The Cat walk.

A door closing—a man inside, a poodle outside.

Darkness returned to Drover Estate. But even after I turned away, the image of the man kissing Cat lingered.

5. Judge Not That Ye Be Not Judged

That night I dreamed that I stood near the Valley of Hell, a massive popcorn bowl filled with flames, and the crackling sound of bad people's bones exploded into the air. I crept to the large windowpane in the living room. Beyond the trees, where the mountain fell away

into the valley, I saw a churning fire that rose and fell like the abdomen of a heaving giant. My eyelashes stung in the fierce heat.

There were people in the fire. Their faces, leathered and scarlet, were streaked with sweat. They

THAT NIGHT I DREAMED THAT I
STOOD NEAR THE VALLEY OF HELL, A
MASSIVE POPCORN BOWL FILLED
WITH FLAMES, AND THE CRACKLING
SOUND OF BAD PEOPLE'S BONES
EXPLODED INTO THE AIR.

shouted, but I couldn't hear anything. Their arms, outlined in golden flames, flailed in the air. Maybe I could hear if I went outside. I moved toward the door.

"Come away, don't look at the people," Mother said.

I came away.

But Father wanted to hear what the people were saying. Shrugging at Mother's words, he flung the front door open and was gone. I rushed to the windowpane and watched as Father walked/ran toward the people in hell. He didn't look back.

"Come back, Daddy! It's hot there!" I shouted, but he didn't seem to hear me.

"Come away from the window!" Mother said sharply.

"But Father!"

"Let him go."

"He'll burn up!"

"We can't make him come back," Mother said.

Father stood at the brink of hell. There was only a metal railing between him and the burning place. He waved to hell's captives and shouted to them.

"COME AWAY!" said Mother. She grabbed me by the wrists and dragged me from the window. Parts of me torn away from the window. Parts of me still there at the window watching Father play with hell.

I awoke, feeling hell's heat on my skin. But I was cold.

The next morning, I asked Father if he was going to hell. He looked startled.

"Hell? Only people who don't love and obey God go to hell," he said.

"Are you sure?"

"That's the way it is," he said.

I decided not to ask him if he loved and obeyed God.

6. The Seventh Day Is the Sabbath . . . And In It Thou Shalt Not Do Any Work

Autumn. On good days, I awoke to the smell of almost-burnt oatmeal and wheat toast.

On bad days, there was only a gnawing, all-absorbing silence, save the rattling of the old house's bones.

Mother looked like a glass doll that autumn. Brittle. Transparent. Shattered on the inside. Father stayed away a lot, as if absence sheltered that fragile thing from impact. But he was always home on Sabbath, and somehow we always made it to church, a triangle of a family held together by toothpicks of hope.

That final morning, I awoke to a strange feeling of emptiness in the old house, as if it had inhaled deeply and let out a long sigh. A white morning light filtered through the curtains. Scarlet maple leaves pirouetted in the breeze beyond the window.

Father found her that Sabbath morning. A pale riddle baptized in her own lifeblood. Five godforsaken years after Lost Baby, drowned in memory. I stood in the doorway of that Sacred Place as he knelt there at the altar of my mother's body, in that Place of the Deadly Truths where All Things Are Told.

It was Sabbath, and Mother rested.

7. Love Thy Neighbor/Love Thy Enemy

The day of my mother's funeral, figures shrouded in black wool and silk filed in and out of the old house,

BELOW, THE JAPANESE MAPLES AND BIRCH TREES OF DROVER ESTATE STRIP-DANCED A SLOW NUMBER IN THEIR LUMINOUS SCARLET COSTUMES. THE BREEZE WAS SOUR, DRY, AS IF SWEETNESS HAD VANISHED FROM THE EARTH ALONG WITH MY MOTHER'S SPIRIT.

like ghosts coming and going upon death's threshold. I climbed my Jacob's Ladder into the arms of the oak tree. It was a gentle day, and I was consumed with anger.

Below, the Japanese maples and birch trees of Drover Estate strip-danced a slow number in their luminous scarlet costumes. The breeze was sour, dry, as if sweetness had vanished from the earth along with my mother's spirit. I stood there staring at the garden's taunting beauty. Behind me, an unbearable sadness. Before me a Shangri-la that refused to grieve.

I was a nine-year-old boy lured by the desire to right the world—to make the beautiful and the sad collide from my cathedra atop the oak tree. I was not a bad boy, but the oak tree gave a cluster of dry leaves, and there was a book of matches in my pocket.

I made the torch and lit it. Fire gnawed at the oak leaves with a vivid, lucid mouth. I held the glittering

scepter, the Moses-staff, in my hand—Monarch of Justice for a wink—and then let go. The fiery branch spun gently in the parched wind. A glittering falling star.

The fireworks that followed when it crashed into

Drover Estate's autumn leaves were dazzling. I watched, as if in a dream, as the gold and crimson leaves melted into fluid flames that washed through the garden. It was a beautiful sight. All of autumn chained together in the spectacle of sorrow.

I didn't notice until then that the oak tree, too, had joined the rite, a radiant glow of flames encircling its trunk. The warmth encompassed me. Long arms of fire reached upward through the branches, a glory dance.

The frenzy of the dance was making me perspire. I felt dizzy. It reminded me of my dream of Father playing with hell. I wondered, as the glowing hands beckoned, if I was the one in hell.

Through the flames, I saw a vision of my father's face. Then a pair of hands, blistered and raw, reached through the flames and clutched me.

"Hang on!" I saw his lips move.

We were descending my Jacob's Ladder, my burning Tower of Babel. I looked up to see the oak tree garnished in fiery garb. The sky and earth fused in a livid crimson. I remember thinking that winter followed autumn—a wet, sunless winter—and if we could make it through that, spring might follow.

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WAITING FOR ANGELS

By Chip Cassano

“Tell the angel story,” his daughter, Rachel, says over the telephone, and Tom Gellman smiles. He doesn’t ask, anymore, why this is the only story she wants to hear. It is a simple request, easily granted, and he is grateful for it. His wife’s voice in the background is clipped, louder than necessary. He is supposed to hear her.

“Come on, Rachel,” she says, “it’s time for bed.”

Gellman closes his eyes. Here it is again.

“Let me talk to Mommy,” he says. The teakettle on the stove gives out a tentative bleat, and he tilts his head to trap the telephone against his shoulder. He switches off the gas burner in the tiny kitchen, takes down a teacup, blows a smudge of dust from inside, wipes it on his shirt. He pours hot water and stirs in a teaspoon of cream for his stomach. His wife’s voice startles him.

“It’s almost ten o’clock here, Tom. She has school tomorrow.”

Gellman balances the teacup on his palm, bites his lip. She is not his wife anymore, not really. It’s been three years since they sold the house in Albany and she took the children and moved to California, near to her parents. She isn’t coming back. He suspects that she is, in fact, seeing someone else. His signature is all she needs to finalize the divorce.

“Loren, please,” he says, “she wanted a bedtime story. I thought . . .”

“Tom, why can’t you call at a reasonable time? You know she has school.”

What to say? That sometimes he calls only to reassure himself that there are other people alive and awake in the world?

“I had to work late, Loren, and I promised Rachel . . .”

“Work was never that important to you.”

“You heard,” he says, and, when she doesn’t respond, he feels his anger building. “It’s true, okay? I lost the marketing job—that marvelous job that you got me with all your connections. I’m back working in the bookstore. But this is not about me, Loren, about us. I am her father.” He pauses, squeezes his hand into a fist.

"Tom, I don't want to have this conversation now," she says quietly. "Is Christian home?"

Gellman shakes his head. She is a lawyer—the Brown half of Brown & Salter—and every now and again she surprises him by just how good she is. It used to bother him that she chose to keep her own name.

"I was shouting," he says. "I'm sorry. But you already know."

"I'm not playing a game," Loren says. "Is he there?"

"He'll be home soon. He's out with his friends,"

Gellman says, hoping that this is true.

"It's past midnight there."

"Loren, what can I do? I mean, if he just goes . . ."

"Tom, it's just, you know—that's how it started here. First he was staying out late, nothing more than that, and then the police were here."

"I know," Gellman says, suddenly desperate, "Loren, I know." And he wants to say to her—so many things. That he is baffled by his son and how to approach him. That he never meant for life to happen as it has—what man does? That he never meant to be so unsettled, so unsure, at forty-six years of age. Perhaps more than anything he wants to ask which part of it, if any, is his fault. There were so many things they could have done differently, but which were important?

He says nothing, of course. He closes his eyes and makes his voice level. "Can I please just talk to Rachel?" he asks. "Please." He rests his head against the doorjamb and waits.

"Tell the rest of the angel story," his daughter says immediately. Her voice sounds small and far away, and he imagines her curled in her bed, face to the wall, the telephone buried among her blankets and stuffed toys.

"I'll tell it," Gellman says, "but then you'll have to promise to go right to sleep."

"I promise."

He returns to the front room, balances the teacup on a stack of old magazines on the end table, switches on a lamp, and settles into the fraying recliner. It belonged to his father, and it is the only piece of furniture Gellman kept after he and Loren sold the house in Albany.

"It happened when I was little," he begins, "younger than you, and your Aunt Carol was only four years old." He hears his daughter sigh contentedly and he marvels, as always, at how different she is from her brother, her mother—even from him.

"Is it dark there?" Rachel asks.

"It's dark," Gellman says.

The story is a simple one. From time to time in retelling it, Gellman has stirred an old memory and wonders if he might not even have created new ones. He has heard that this is possible, but he doesn't suspect that he is guilty of outright invention. In many ways he feels that it would be easier for him if he were.

Gellman's mother died the summer he turned six. She was a warm and calmly purposeful woman, and her death left Gellman's father despairing and adrift. He lost his job at the local feed store, and turned to doing odd jobs to support the family.

"Grandpa was lonely," Gellman says, knowing that this is enough explanation for his daughter. The yard went over to dandelions and crabgrass, and their house—a huge, decaying, lemon-yellow Victorian—fell into disrepair. The foundation had cracked and shifted, and doors swung crazily in the canted frames. The windows leaked, the sills were dark with mildew, and the walls below them were water-streaked and yellow. At night, Gellman could track the movements of Mirabella, the upstairs boarder, by the tortured creak of the floors.

For some months, it seemed that the presence of Mirabella was all that held the household together. She moved in shortly after Gellman's mother died, and agreed to cook and clean in exchange for lowered rent. Soon, though, she was ironing the children's clothes, cutting their hair, and overseeing their evening prayers. She even accompanied them to church, oblivious to the stir she caused with her prayer beads and florid makeup.

At home, she murmured sympathetically whenever she saw Gellman's father.



"Pray," she told Gellman, in her accented English. "Your papa has a good heart. Pray the Virgin gives him peace. Pray for a miracle."

"So I prayed," Gellman says to his daughter. That is how he always tells the story. His life would challenge him, of course—the fallacy of post hoc reasoning. But

Sunday paper, spread across his lap, slid to the floor. Mirabella stood up, unperturbed, gathered her mass of black hair before her, twisted the water from it, flung it back across her shoulder, and stepped from the bath. Water ran from her in streams and pooled in her footprints. She walked to the hall staircase and opened the

door. She did not look back at Gellman's father, and he continued to stare for several moments after she was gone.

"Grandpa fell in love with Grandma Mirabella not long after that," Gellman says. He knows that someday his daughter will understand this story differently, and hopes she forgives him this little euphemism. The two were married in the fall. It caused something of a scandal in the Adventist community, of course. Gellman's father was removed from his position as head elder of the church, but he was unperturbed. The two were married more than

thirty years, and even on his deathbed, he called Mirabella "my angel."

"Rachel?" Gellman says, but she is already asleep. She almost always is by the time the story ends. He can hear the sigh of her breath. Rather than hang up the telephone, he pushes back the chair and closes his eyes.

The small apartment is silent, and he listens to the tick of the mantel clock beside him and the whisper of his sleeping daughter's breath, a full continent away. He waits patiently, as he has for years, but there is no sign, no heavenly messenger to tell him whether this is his birthright.

It is past 1 a.m. when a key finally turns in the lock and the door swings open. Gellman sits up, covers the mouthpiece of the telephone with his hand.

"Chris?" he says, quietly. "I'm in here, son."

The boy comes cautiously into the room.

"Everything all right?" Gellman asks.

"I guess." Gellman waits to see if he will say more. Nothing.

"I didn't know where you were. Your mother was worried," Gellman says, motioning to the telephone.

MIRABELLA WAS A VISION—A MONUMENT OF WOMANHOOD, HER BODY BROWN AND CURVED AND POWERFUL—AND SHE CAME DOWN THROUGH THE CEILING WITH A LITTLE SHOUT, STILL SITTING IN HER BATH.

would it be more honest to explain it otherwise? His father was lonely and sad and adrift, for reasons more complex than Gellman could grasp, and Gellman himself was frightened. So he prayed—to Jesus, as he had been taught—but still he asked for a miracle.

He prayed at church on Saturday. On Sunday morning, Mirabella was upstairs readying her bath, preparing for mass. The soft maple of the floor, swollen by water and riddled with decay, creaked and shifted. Some balance was overreached, a threshold crossed. A tiny popping noise from the living room ceiling heralded her arrival. A wisp of plaster dust trickled down, then the ceiling in the living room gave way with a crashing roar.

Mirabella was a vision—a monument of womanhood, her body brown and curved and powerful—and she came down through the ceiling with a little shout, still sitting in her bath. The heavy, enameled bathtub smashed down into the hardwood of the living room floor and stuck fast. Plaster dust hung in the air, and a thin stream of water played over her from above where the fixtures had torn away.

Gellman's father rose slowly, transfixed. It was easy to forget that he was a young man still. The

"Were you?" the boy asks.

"I—of course," Gellman says, startled. "Of course I was." His son is watching him narrowly. In the dim light of the table lamp, the boy's hair, bleached blonde, looks almost as Gellman remembers it—a soft, caramel brown. The shadows soften the angles of his face, and his oversized clothes make him seem younger, somehow, more fragile.

"I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE YOU WERE.
YOUR MOTHER WAS WORRIED," GELLMAN
SAYS, MOTIONING TO THE TELEPHONE.
"WERE YOU?" THE BOY ASKS.
"I—OF COURSE," GELLMAN SAYS, STARTLED.

"Well, don't be," he says. "I'm okay." He steps to the kitchen, pulls open the refrigerator door, shuts it. "Hey ho," he says. "I'm beat."

"Take the bed if you want," Gellman says. "I'll be up a while."

The boy hesitates. "Thanks."

Gellman watches as his son disappears into the bedroom.

"Sleep well," Gellman says. There is a lump in his throat. He leans back in the recliner again, the telephone still wedged against his ear. He scrubs his face with his hand, lets his gaze wander across the room. There are pictures of Christian and Rachel, of course, and a small one of Gellman and Loren with the children between them.

Above them all, on the false mantel, Gellman's father and Mirabella, side by side, their heads almost touching, smile gently, bravely, into the dim light of the apartment. Luck or providence? With so much depending on the answer, even they could not have told him. But Gellman knows that it is not evidence that he has been searching for all these years; it is courage.

His wife's voice calls him back from his reverie.

"She's asleep," Loren says.

"Yes. Well."

"I don't know how you do it," she says. He doesn't respond. He has never told his wife the angel story. Now he wonders if it would explain anything at all.

"Chris is home," he says, finally. "I—I'm going to talk to him."

"I tried," she says, "but he's not—or something's not . . ."

"I know."

"I know it's not your fault, Tom, the way he is. I know that."

"It's okay."

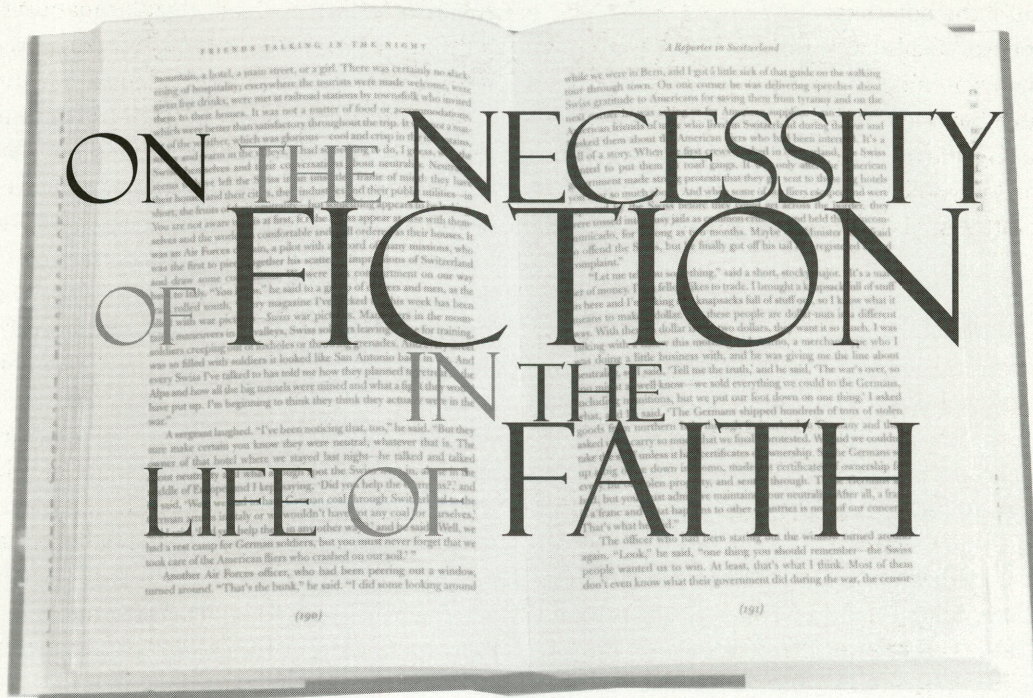
"You'll try with him, though, won't you?"

"I will," he says. "Whatever I can."

"Tom—," she says, and hesitates. "Thank you."

It is as much as he can expect and, right now, more than he has asked for. He doesn't realize that she is gone until he hears the buzz of the dial tone.

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“BROWN BAG LUNCH TALK” AT WALLA WALLA COLLEGE, FEBRUARY 1999

By David James Duncan

I'd like to talk briefly about the very close link between fiction—what I do—and faith—what we all do. Fiction and faith are, in my view, symbiotic, and mutually strengthening. To explain how this is the case, is, I suspect, at least a three-part process.

1. How Faith Can Become a Complete Lie

I'll be very brief on the first one—because we all experience it so often. And why mess around with examples of it from pissants of faith like me? The classic case is the Rock himself: Simon Peter. Here is a man—the foundation of the entire Christian tradition—who once stepped out of a boat onto deep water at the Son of God's gracious invitation, performed a miracle of faith for a second or two, but then proceeded to earn his nickname—by sinking like a rock. Peter flailed as he sank, cried out for help—“Lord save me!”—and a hand grabbed him and helped him scramble, terrified, back on board ship. The hand was Christ's.

But that episode was nothing. In a second story, which takes place on dry land, in the night, Peter sinks far faster, far deeper. Warming himself at a fire, while behind a nearby wall soldiers are torturing the very one who'd saved him from the waves, the one to whom he'd pledged his love and life, Peter is accused of guilt by association. And again, he plummets like stone: “I do not know that man,” he lies. Peter flees the fire. He weeps with bitter shame and regret. Yet when he is recognized by another enemy of his Lord, the poor guy cowers and sinks *again*: “I do not know that man.” Three times this happens. Three times, the Rock's faith becomes a cowardly, self-saving lie.

I believe Peter may be the Rock *because* of those lies. I believe he's the Rock because we all live each day between the paradox of his two cries: “Lord, save me!” and “I do not know that man.” Peter was nothing but a human being, like all of us. Who better to serve as the first great believer in this oh-so-human tradition?

Even St. Peter's faith can be a lie.

In other words, perhaps: Lord, I believe, help though my unbelief.

2. How Lying Has Nothing to Do with the Creation of Fiction

When fiction is truly fiction, lying has absolutely nothing to do with it. Lying and fiction are two different things. What's more, I don't believe we can incarnate our faith with much success at all, without living lives rich in the creation of certain fictions.

A strange sounding idea. I've got my work cut out for me here. But let's try the idea on for size.

Let me state, first of all, my belief that when wordmakers of any kind—fiction writers, poets, preachers, politicians, ad-people, rhetoricians, science writers—claim to be serving the truth by telling lies, you can be certain of one thing: they're lying.

As a voluntary, professional fiction writer, and an involuntary, amateur liar, I'm here to tell you that fiction making and lying are two very different things. Lying requires imaginative effort; the writing of fiction requires imaginative effort: this seems to cause the confusion of the two. But it's a pitiful confusion. To write *War and Peace* required imagination. To plan a bank robbery requires imagination. It should not be necessary to explain even to Senator Jesse Helms that this does not make Tolstoy any kind of bank robber.

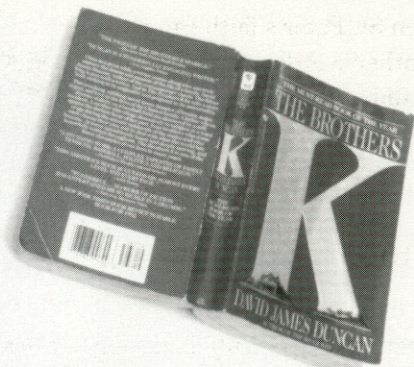
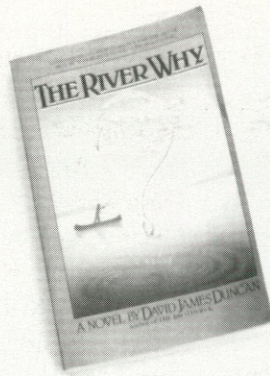
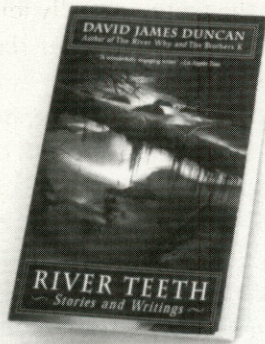
War and Peace is a work of fiction—an imaginative invention—but it is also, from beginning to end, a form of truth-telling. Lying is also an imaginative invention—but *only on the part of the liar*. What a huge difference! In reading *War and Peace* we share so fully in Tolstoy's invention that we forget he's inventing, just as Tolstoy did as he wrote. In hearing a lie, we don't share in the liar's invention at all: the recipient of a lie believes the words of the lie to be true. Only the liar knows he's lying. This a cruelty inherent in all lies. There is no corresponding cruelty in fiction. To lie is to place upon the tongue or the page words carefully designed to

suppress, sidestep, or kill the truth—usually for the sake of some self-serving agenda. This is neither the method nor the purpose of fiction writing.

Another difference between fiction and lying: lying is ugly. A lie can be artful, as can a work of fiction, but it cannot be beautiful, as fiction can. A lie can *appear* beautiful. But the instant someone believes a beautiful-looking lie, that someone has been betrayed—and betrayal is ugly. Remember Robert MacNamara's late-sixties arguments about the need for American troops and weapons to protect Southeast Asian peasants from communism? MacNamara's argument had, at the time, a definite altruistic shine, borrowed from a truly altruistic cause: the Second World War. Some three million Vietnamese and Americans died as a result of MacNamara's ripped-off altruistic argument. Then, in a book published in 1995, MacNamara admitted that his argument was based on lies; admitted that he knew, as early as 1965, that the so-called "domino theory" was a sham, that our country was in no way threatened by North Vietnam, that the puppet Saigon government was hopelessly corrupt, that the war was not winnable, that it was little more than a politco-military experiment with human guinea pigs. Yet *still* he let his argument go on shining, let the young men of my generation, the guys from my high school, go on killing and dying for a lie.

That is betrayal. That's the ugliness of a lie. And MacNamara's was far from unique in its stunning power. Mao Tse-tung's "people's" lie, Stalin's Soviet lie, the British raj's and American Manifest Destiny's "civilizing" lies, the conquistadors' and Inquisition's "Christianizing" lies—the list is terrifying and endless and brings out another difference between lying and fiction making: all the tens of thousands of fiction writers put together are nothing, in terms of destructive power, compared to even a half-dozen of history's greatest liars.

A great fiction writer, Anton Chekhov, once said that lying is dirty. He added that it's worse to lie in a work of fiction than in a conversation. Chekhov didn't elucidate, but I believe I understand: conversation is quick and often chaotic, so a spoken lie is frequently just



a fleeting impulse. But fiction writing is an act of concentration: the lie written into a fiction is therefore carefully calculated.

In a truth-telling work of fiction, author and reader begin with a clear agreement. Both know that the fiction is an imaginative construct, which the reader is free to reconstruct. The fiction is like a symphonic score: the author is the original composer, the reader the later conductor, and the imaginations of both are the orchestra. Author and reader hear the very same music. In lying there is no such sharing; there is a conscious perpetrator and an unconscious victim. The unconsciousness and helplessness of their victims gives liars something in common with necrophiliacs and pedophiles. If that isn't ugly, what is?

3. How the Making of Fiction is Crucial to the Enactment of Our Day-to-Day Faith

There is a common delusion—fed most savagely by television and big media these days—holding that what we experience firsthand is “true” and “real,” and that what we merely imagine is “untrue” and “unreal.” This is dangerously oversimplified. The truth is that firsthand experience can, and often does, lie. And imaginary experiences can open us to truth that would remain inaccessible unto death if we had to wait for firsthand experience to teach this truth to us.

Compassion is a beautiful word in its true sense—which means “to suffer with another.” But compassion is seldom born of firsthand experience. Most often, compassion is born from a distance, in a preliminary emotional state we call “empathy.” And empathy often begins with a purely imaginative act—an act of fiction-making:

What would it be like to be this black girl sitting in front of me? a little white girl wonders at school one

morning. Her imagination sets to work. She starts making fiction. In her mind, she becomes the black girl; fictitiously dons her clothes, her accent, her skin; walks down the street with her friends after school, goes home to her house and family, eats their food, lives that life. In the midst of her imaginative effort, the white-girl-turned-black finds herself sensitized to every nuance of skin color; she might also hear words that she herself uses—words as innocent as, say, “colored,” “black,” and “white.” Yet how different they suddenly sound. And when her imaginary game is over, certain words will *still* sound different. Empathy has begun. Compassion has begun. Yet the white girl has experienced nothing “real.” She has discovered some truth *via fiction*.

I give a lot of readings and lectures around the country, and answer lots of questions afterward. Once every few crowds I can bank on somebody wanting to know which events in one of my novels were “made up” and which “really happened.” This person is usually a bit nervous, as they sometimes admit, because my story has touched them, yet my story was fiction. To be touched by fiction, by something “unreal,” makes some people feel haunted—feel as if they’ve been violated, however, enjoyably, by something that has no physical being—so they want me to tell them which fictitious events *did* have physical being, in hopes that maybe the cute bits, the parts they got a bang out of, will survive this de-fictionalization process and they can still feel legitimately banged.

My reaction to such people is to tell them, in the gentlest words possible, that theirs is a completely wrongheaded approach to literature, if not to life itself. Fiction is everywhere. There is no escape. A dollar bill is a work of fiction. A credit card is a wildly imaginative and dangerous work of fiction. It is sheer fiction that we must drive our cars down the right side of the road, yet if we forget the fiction and choose the left, we die. Forget to reverse the lane choice in England or Australia, and you die for obeying the *wrong* fiction.

We go to the symphony and revel in works of pure fiction—veritable novels built of nothing but

mathematics, rhythm, and sound. Rock and roll, folk songs, dirges, rap, polkas—every piece of music is a purely imaginative, “unreal” construct. Every painting painted and sculpture sculpted, ditto. A lump of clay fashioned into the likeness of a human will never be human in the “hard copy” TV show sense. It is subhuman to expect it to be. The imagination and its works are something to revel in, not to fear or to feel cheated by. To be human is to immerse oneself in fictions—to find navels in oranges, lips on cups, fire in fastballs, meat in a wooden bat. To be human is to be slain by jokes, screwed by lawyers, hammered by beverages, and burned by the IRS. To be human is to enter bellies of beasts, fish mouths of rivers, make heads of state into butts of jokes.

It will never be literally ourselves that we see in a mirror, yet if the nonliteral self in the mirror has dirt on its face, our face, too, will remain dirty until we wash the reflected dirt away. Fiction, at its best, is a mirror made of words that *reflects* what humans and reality are. Some fictions strive for realistic reflection. Some are funhouse mirrors and deliberately distort. A lie, however, is no kind of mirror at all: it is a nonentity, a

complete nothingness made of empty words that nevertheless claim to reflect what is real.

The words *imagination* and *prevarication* are in no way synonymous. Lying requires imaginative prowess, certainly. But faith, love, and truth-telling require much, much more. And now we’ve come to my punch line: we need fiction to incarnate our faith. To be a Buddhist, a Vedantist, a Christian, Muslim, is to immerse oneself in unstinting imaginative effort. Christ’s words, “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” for example, demand an arduous imaginative act. These peculiar words order me, as I look at you, to imagine that I am seeing not you but me, and then to treat this imaginative me, alias you, as if you *are* me! And for how long? Till the day I die! Christ orders anyone who’s serious about him to commit this “Neighbor = Me” fiction until they forget, for good and all, which of the two of themselves to cheat in a business deal or punch in a fight or abandon in a crisis or shoot in a war—at which point their imaginative act, *fiction-making*, will have turned Christ’s bizarre words into a reality, and they’ll be saying with Mother Teresa, “I see Christ in every woman and man.”

The attempt to “imagine thy neighbor as thyself” is the great gift of literature. The attempt to imagine our neighbors is perhaps the only way we’ll ever begin to master Christ’s command to empathize with and love those annoying buffoons, our neighbors. Our first attempts at such a love are, at best, sheer fiction. But some of us, through a steady flow of words and actions that incarnate what initially feels like empty fiction, eventually turn this act of fiction-making into our daily reality. Mother Teresa, for example.

Ernest Hemingway, of all people, once made a wonderfully spiritual statement. “Make it up so truly,” he said, “that later, it will happen that way.”

I love this so much I’m going to say it once more: “Make it up so truly that later, it will happen that way.”

This is great advice—dare I say, Christ-like advice—not just for those practicing a rare art form known as fiction-writing, but for anyone trying to live an honest life, love a neighbor, seek the Truth itself.

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David James Duncan graduated from Portland State University and then took a long apprenticeship of manual labor combined with fiction writing. He moved lawns, drove delivery truck and produced two novels: *The River Why*, *The Brothers K*, and a book of essays, *River Teeth*. He now lives in Lolo, Montana where he writes, fishes, and hangs out with the local intelligensia and artists.

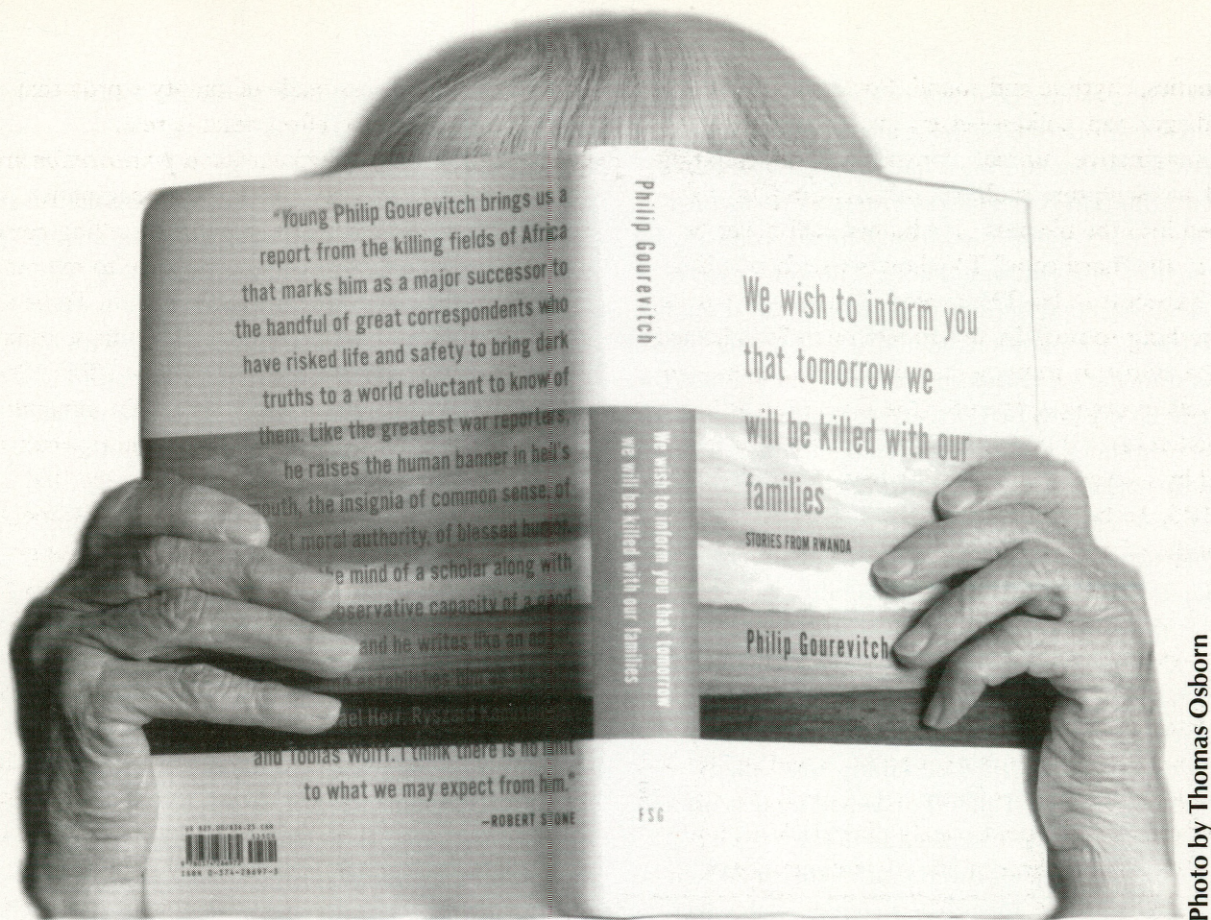


Photo by Thomas Osborn

We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda. By Philip Gourevitch. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999; 356 pages; \$25.00.

Reviewed by Donald R. McAdams

This is a very disturbing book. It does not make me proud to be a human being or a citizen of the United States. Philip Gourevitch, a young staff writer at *The New Yorker*, spent nine months in Rwanda between May 1995 and April 1998 visiting places of slaughter and interviewing large numbers of Rwandans who survived or participated in the horrors of 1994. His report, grounded in wide reading of published and unpublished works, is journalism at its best: thorough, focused, understandable, and compelling.

We Wish to Inform You may lack balance, but then how does one be fair to Hutu Power, the political movement that, following the death of President Juvénal Habyarimana in a mysterious plane crash on April 6, 1994, mobilized up to one million Hutus to murder at least eight hundred thousand Tutsis in just one hundred days? And how does one be fair to the international community for allowing this to occur?

With full knowledge of what was happening, the Western powers did nothing to stop the slaughter. Then they actively tilted toward Hutu Power, supporting Hutu refugee border camps in Zaire with more than a billion dollars of aid. These camps were nothing less than a rump genocidal Hutu Power state. Hutu militia from the camps continued to slaughter Tutsis until the army of the new Rwandan government closed them down in Novem-

ber 1996. The ensuing civil war in Zaire led to the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko, another longtime African dictator that the West had propped up.

The killing in Rwanda was low-tech, performed largely by machetes imported from China specifically for the purpose of slaughtering Tutsis. The killers were mostly neighborhood militias organized by local municipal authorities. Preparations included developing lists of Tutsis and moderate Hutus and learning how to use the machete most effectively. Tutsis were hunted down and killed by neighbors, sometimes even family members. Many were hacked to death at roadblocks or slaughtered in churches where they had gathered for safety. Workers killed colleagues. Doctors killed patients. Schoolteachers killed pupils. Everyone had a responsibility to kill.

The killers were methodical and seemed to enjoy their work. Many took tea breaks to refresh themselves from the hard labor of butchering humans and frequently preferred torture and slow death over efficient murder. One favored method of killing was called "cutting down to size." Taller Tutsis had their arms and legs cut off and were left to bleed to death.

Gourevitch does not dwell on the horror. When he does describe a killing, his prose is commendably lean. The images of purposeful, brutal death, however, are heart wrenching and unforgettable.

One man begged the Hutu militiamen not to dismember his family. Members of the militia instead allowed him to throw his children, alive, down a latrine over forty feet deep. Then he and his wife were thrown in. Three years later Gourevitch could still see the bones.

For a Seventh-day Adventist, the massacre at Mugonero is especially unforgettable. Here, according to witnesses, at the headquarters of the Adventist mission, the president of the mission, Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, and his son Dr. Gerard Ntakirutimana, worked with the local municipal authorities to organize the slaughter of up to two thousand Tutsis.

Gourevitch takes the title of his book from a letter that seven Adventist pastors wrote to Pastor Ntakirutimana. By April 12, 1994, Tutsis packed the Adventist mission—a large church, small chapel, hospital complex, and nursing school. Dr. Ntakirutimana refused to treat the sick and wounded because they were Tutsis and evacuated all Hutus. The refugees could see Pastor Ntakirutimana and his son driving around the mission with Hutu militiamen and members of the Presidential Guard.

On April 15, seven Tutsi pastors who had assumed leadership of the flock learned that the hospital would be attacked the next morning. They advised the refugees

that all would die, and then wrote the following letter to their president.

Our dear leader, Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana,
How are you! We wish you to be strong in all these problems we are facing. We wish to inform you that we have heard that tomorrow we will be killed with our families. We therefore request you to intervene on our behalf and talk with the Mayor. We believe that, with the help of God who entrusted you the leadership of this flock, which is going to be destroyed, your intervention will be highly appreciated, the same way as the Jews were saved by Esther.
We give honor to you. (42)

Pastor Ntakirutimana's response as reported by one survivor was: "Your problem has already found a solution. You must die." Another remembered the words differently: "You must be eliminated. God no longer wants you" (28).

On April 16, militiamen and local citizenry chanting the slogan "eliminate the Tutsis" attacked the church, chapel, hospital complex, and nursing school with guns, grenades, and machetes. In the evening tear gas was used to discover survivors. Those who cried were hacked to death. Survivors saw Dr. Ntakirutimana mixing with the killers, and Pastor Ntakirutimana's car was seen passing the hospital and stopping near his office.

We Wish to Inform You cannot avoid some stories like this. Gourevitch wants readers to see the work of genocide up close. But he makes no attempt to describe the genocide comprehensively with supporting names, places, and statistics. He does not prepare the reader for the coming of genocide with a thorough review of Rwandan history or an analysis of Rwandan politics. Nor does he show how the mostly Tutsi Rwandese Patriotic Front, which first invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990, managed to defeat the Rwandan army and bring an end to the genocide. But he does give enough background to place his stories in context and make them understandable.

We Wish to Inform You is not a political or military history of Rwanda during the 1990s, or even a history of the genocide. It is Gourevitch's first-person story of his travels and interviews in Rwanda and his attempt to understand how genocide could happen. His story flashes backward and forward, and through the words of survivors and killers shows what it was like to be in

Rwanda in 1994 and experience the horrible reality of one people rather cheerfully murdering another. The question that haunts Gourevitch and will haunt his readers is: How could this happen?

There are no satisfying answers. Tribal history played a role. So did a racist myth fostered by Europeans that the tall, light-skinned, pastoral Tutsis, with their narrow noses and thin lips, descended from Shem, while the short, dark, flat-nosed, and thick-lipped Hutu farmers were descendants of Ham. German and then Belgian colonialism exacerbated tribal differences. Tutsis were favored and told they were a superior race. Hutus were exploited and told they were inferior.

Independence after World War II and the Cold War added other burdens. The West supported elections in Rwanda, which meant Hutu power. And the Cold War required the West, or so it thought, to prop up anti-Communist regimes. So Hutu power became the political movement Hutu Power. President Habyarimana, a relatively moderate Hutu, became the front for Hutu Power. And Tutsis became the victims of repeated, widespread political violence. The West objected, but continued to support Habyarimana.

Another explanation for the genocide is that Rwanda had a long, almost overpowering tradition of authority. Leaders were supposed to lead. Followers were expected to follow. So, if the government said Hutus had a duty to kill the hated Tutsi cockroaches, the Tutsis were considered cockroaches and marked for death. Note the deference of the Adventist pastors to Pastor Ntakirutimana. Note how passively so many Tutsis accepted death.

Still there is no answer, especially for the West. Leaders of Hutu Power had planned the genocide for years and people throughout Rwanda knew it was coming. When the killing began, radio announcers broadcast daily encouragement to Hutus to leave no grave half-full, to take no pity on women or children, and to go here or there because more hands were needed to complete a large killing job.

The West knew exactly what was happening and did nothing quite consciously and purposefully. A United Nations force had been in Rwanda since 1993 to support a peace agreement between the Rwandan government and the Rwandese Patriotic Front. The commander, Maj. Gen. Romeo Dallaire of Canada, foresaw the genocide and was there when it began. He declared that with just five thousand well-equipped soldiers and a free hand to fight Hutu Power, he could halt the genocide rapidly. But the U.N. and the White House said no, and instead reduced the force to 270

troops. When the French intervened for a short time a few months later, they tilted toward Hutu Power. Then the West supported Hutu Power for two years by financing Zaire's giant refugee camps.

Though he tries hard, Gourevitch leaves unanswered another question, one with which Rwandans are currently struggling. How can two groups of people live together after one has tried to eliminate the other? All the killers cannot be tried and imprisoned. But how can survivors be expected to live with those who killed their families?

There can be nothing but compromise and enormous pain. The new Rwandan government is both Tutsi and Hutu and committed to ending ethnic identification. It is seeking justice for genocide leaders, including Pastor Ntakirutimana, but allowing most of the killers to go on with their lives. The past must be forgotten, yet it can never be forgotten.

There is one other question that Gourevitch does answer. Early in the book he describes a walk through a genocide memorial, a school where hundreds were killed. To preserve the memory of the event, the killing field was left untouched. Decomposed cadavers covered the floor. Dogs, birds, and bugs had done their work. But no human hand had disturbed the dead. Here was a scrap of clothing, a shoe, a Bible. Thinking of what had happened made Gourevitch uncomfortable. Why was he here looking so intently at the dead? he asked himself.

We Wish to Inform You will make readers uncomfortable, and some readers of this review will ask themselves why they should look more closely at something so horrible. Gourevitch's answer for himself is, I think, a good answer for all of us. As uncomfortable as it is to look closely at Rwanda, it is even more uncomfortable to look away.

Acknowledgments in this book list the authors of selected standard works on Rwanda, but it lacks a bibliography and an index. Both are missed.

Donald R. McAdams of Houston, Texas is professor and director of the Center for Reform of School Systems at the University of Houston. He holds a Ph.D. in history from Duke University. He is an elected member of the board of education of the Houston Independent School District. His latest book *Fighting to Save Our Urban Schools and . . . Winning: Lessons from Houston* will be published by Teachers College Press, Columbia University in February, 2000. He has served the Association of Adventist Forums and *Spectrum* as a writer, contributing editor, chairman of the Advisory Council, regional representative. dmcadams@tenet.edu

Excerpt: *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*

By Philip Gourevitch

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Chapter 2

If you could walk due west from the massacre memorial at Nyarubuye, straight across from Rwanda from one end to the other, over the hills and through the marshes, lakes, and rivers to the province of Kibuye, then, just before you fell into the great inland sea of Lake Kivu, you would come to another hilltop village. This hill is called Mugonero, and it, too, is crowned by a big church. While Rwanda is overwhelmingly Catholic, Protestants evangelized much of Kibuye, and Mugonero is the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist mission. The place resembles the brick campus of an American community college more than an African village; tidy tree-lined footpaths connect the big church with a smaller chapel, a nursing school, an infirmary, and a hospital complex that enjoyed a reputation for giving excellent medical care. It was in the hospital that Samuel Ndagijimana sought refuge during the killings, and although one of the first things he said to me was "I forget bit by bit," it quickly became clear that he hadn't forgotten as much as he might have liked.

Samuel worked as a medical orderly in the hospital. He had landed the job in 1991, when he was twenty-five. I asked him about his life in that time that Rwandans call "Before." He said, "We were simple Christians." That was all. I might have been asking about someone else, whom he had met only in passing, and who didn't interest him. It was as if his first real memory was of the early days in April of 1994 when he saw Hutu militiamen conducting public exercises outside the government offices in Mugonero. "We watched young people going out every night, and people spoke of it on the radio," Samuel said. "It was only members of Hutu Power parties who went out, and those who weren't participants were called 'enemies.'"

On April 6, a few nights after this activity began, Rwanda's long-standing Hutu dictator, President Habyarimana, was assassinated in Kigali, and a clique of Hutu Power leaders from the military high command seized power. "The radio announced that people shouldn't move," Samuel said. "We began to see groups of people gathering that same night, and when we went to work in the morning, we saw these groups with the local leaders of Hutu Power organizing the population. You didn't know exactly what was happening, just that there was something coming."

At work, Samuel observed "a change of climate." He said that "one didn't talk to anyone anymore," and many of his co-workers spent all their time in meetings with a certain Dr. Gerard, who made no secret of his support for Hutu Power. Samuel found this shocking, because Dr. Gerard had been trained in the United States, and he was the son of the president of the Adventist church in Kibuye, so he was seen as a figure of great authority, a community leader—one who sets the example.

After a few days, when Samuel looked south across the valley from Mugonero, he saw houses burning in

villages across the lakefront. He decided to stay in the church hospital until the troubles were over, and Tutsi families from Mugonero and surrounding areas soon began arriving with the same idea. This was a tradition in Rwanda. "When there were problems, people always went to the church," Samuel said. "The pastors were Christians. One trusted that nothing would happen at their place." In fact, many people at Mugonero told me that Dr. Gerard's father, the church president, Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, was personally instructing Tutsis to gather at the Adventist complex.

Wounded Tutsis converged on Mugonero from up and down the lake. They came through the bush, trying to avoid the countless militia checkpoints along the road, and they brought stories. Some told how a few miles to the north, in Gishyita, the mayor had been so frantic in his impatience to kill Tutsis that thousands had been slaughtered even as he herded them to the church, where the remainder were massacred. Others told how a few miles to the south, in Rwamatamu, more than ten thousand Tutsis had taken refuge in the town hall, and the mayor had brought in truckloads of policemen and soldiers and militia with guns and grenades to surround the place; behind them he had arranged villagers with machetes in case anyone escaped when the shooting began—and, in fact, there had been very few escapees from Rwamatamu. An Adventist pastor and his son were said to have worked closely with the mayor in organizing the slaughter at Rwamatamu. But perhaps Samuel did not hear about that from the wounded he met, who came "having been shot at, and had grenades thrown, missing an arm, or a leg." He still imagined that Mugonero could be spared.

By April 12, the hospital was packed with as many as two thousand refugees, and the water lines were cut. Nobody could leave; militiamen and members of the Presidential Guard had cordoned off the complex. But when Dr. Gerard learned that several dozen Hutus were among the refugees, he arranged for them to be evacuated. He also locked up the pharmacy, refusing treatment to the wounded and sick—"because they were Tutsi," Samuel said. Peering out from their confines, the refugees at the hospital watched Dr. Gerard and his father, Pastor Ntakirutimana, driving around with militiamen and members of the Presidential Guard. The refugees wondered whether these men had forgotten their God.

Among the Tutsis at the Mugonero church and hospital complex were seven Adventist pastors who quickly assumed their accustomed roles as leaders of the flock. When two policemen turned up at the hospital, and announced that their job was to protect the refu-

gees, the Tutsi pastors took up a collection, and raised almost four hundred dollars for the policemen. For several days, all was calm. Then, toward evening on April 15, the policemen said they had to leave because the hospital was to be attacked the next morning. They drove away in a car with Dr. Gerard, and the seven pastors in the hospital advised their fellow refugees to expect the end. Then the pastors sat down together and wrote letters to the mayor and to their boss, Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, Dr. Gerard's father, asking them in the name of the Lord to intercede on their behalf.

"And the response came," Samuel said. "It was Dr. Gerard who announced it: 'Saturday, the sixteenth, at exactly nine o'clock in the morning, you will be attacked.'" But it was Pastor Ntakirutimana's response that crushed Samuel's spirit, and he repeated the church president's words twice over, slowly: "Your problem has already found a solution. You must die." One of Samuel's colleagues, Manase Bimenyimana, remembered Ntakirutimana's response slightly differently. He told me that the pastor's words were "You must be eliminated. God no longer wants you."

In his capacity as a hospital orderly, Manase served as the household domestic for one of the doctors, and he had remained at the doctor's house after installing his wife and children—for safety—among the refugees at the hospital. Around nine o'clock on the morning of Saturday, April 16, he was feeding the doctor's dogs. He saw Dr. Gerard drive toward the hospital with a carload of armed men. Then he heard shooting and grenades exploding. "When the dogs heard the cries of the people," he told me, "they too began to howl."

Manase managed to make his way to the hospital—foolishly, perhaps, but he felt exposed and wanted to be with his family. He found the Tutsi pastors instructing the refugees to prepare for death. "I was very disappointed," Manase said. "I expected to die, and we started looking for anything to defend ourselves with—stones, broken bricks, sticks. But they were useless. The people were weak. They had nothing to eat. The shooting started, and people were falling down and dying."

There were many attackers, Samuel recalled, and they came from all sides—"from the church, from behind, from the north and south. We heard shots and cries and they chanted the slogan 'Eliminate the Tutsis.' They began shooting at us, and we threw stones at them because we had nothing else, not even a machete. We were hungry, tired, we hadn't had water for more than a day. There were people who had their arms cut off. There were dead. They killed the people at the chapel

and the school and then the hospital. I saw Dr. Gerard, and I saw his father's car pass the hospital and stop near his office. Around noon, we went into a basement. I was with some family members. Others had been killed already. The attackers began to break down the doors and to kill, shooting and throwing grenades. The two policemen who had been our protectors were now attackers. The local citizenry also helped. Those who had no guns had machetes or *masus*. In the evening, around eight or nine o'clock, they began firing tear gas. People who were still alive cried. That way the attackers knew where people were, and they could kill them directly."

On the national average, Tutsis made up a bit less than fifteen percent of Rwanda's population, but in the province of Kibuye the balance between Hutus and Tutsis was close to fifty-fifty. On April 6, 1994, about a quarter million Tutsis lived in Kibuye and a month later more than two hundred thousand of them had been killed. In many of Kibuye's villages, no Tutsis survived.

Manase told me that he was surprised when he heard that "only a million people" were killed in Rwanda. "Look at how many died just here, and how many were eaten by birds," he said. It was true that the dead of the genocide had been a great boon to Rwanda's birds, but the birds had also been helpful to the living. Just as birds of prey and carrion will form a front in the air before the advancing wall of a forest fire to feast on the parade of animals fleeing the inferno, so in Rwanda during the months of extermination the kettles of buzzards, kites and crows that boiled over massacre sites marked a national map against the sky, flagging the "no-go" zones for people like Samuel and Manase, who took to the bush to survive.

Sometime before midnight on April 16, the killers at the Mugonero Adventist complex, unable to discover anybody left there to kill, went off to loot the homes of the dead, and Samuel in his basement, and Manase hiding with his murdered wife and children, found themselves unaccountably alive. Manase left immediately. He made his way to the nearby village of Murambi, where he joined up with a small band of survivors from other massacres who had once more taken shelter in an Adventist church. For nearly twenty-four hours, he said, they had peace. Then Dr. Gerard came with a convoy of militia. Again there was shooting, and Manase escaped. This time, he fled high up into the mountains, to a place called Bisesero, where the rock is steep and craggy, full of caves and often swaddled in cloud. Bisesero was the only place in Rwanda where

thousands of Tutsi civilians mounted a defense against the Hutus who were trying to kill them. "Looking at how many people there were in Bisesero, we were convinced we could not die," Manase told me. And at first, he said, "only women and children were killed, because the men were fighting." But in time tens of thousands of men fell there, too.

Down in the corpse-crowded villages of Kibuye, live Tutsis had become extremely hard to find. But the killers never gave up. The hunt was in Bisesero, and the hunters came by truck and bus. "When they saw how strong the resistance was, they called militias from far away," Manase said. "And they did not kill simply. When we were weak, they saved bullets and killed us with bamboo spears. They cut Achilles tendons and necks, but not completely, and then they left the victims to spend a long time crying until they died. Cats and dogs were there, just eating people."

Samuel, too, had found his way to Bisesero. He had lingered in the Mugonero hospital, "full of dead," until one in the morning. Then he crept out of the basement and, carrying "one who had lost his feet," he proceeded slowly into the mountains. Samuel's account of his ordeal following the slaughter at his workplace was as telegraphic as his description of life in Mugonero before the genocide. Unlike Manase, he found little comfort at Bisesero, where the defenders' only advantage was the terrain. He had concluded that to be a Tutsi in Rwanda meant death. "After a month," he said, "I went to Zaire." To get there he had to descend through settled areas to Lake Kivu, and to cross the water at night in a pirogue—an outrageously risky journey, but Samuel didn't mention it.

Manase remained in Bisesero. During the fighting, he told me, "we got so used to running that when one wasn't running one didn't feel right." Fighting and running gave Manase spirit, a sense of belonging to a purpose greater than his own existence. Then he got shot in the thigh, and life once again became about little more than staying alive. He found a cavern, "a rock where a stream went underground, and came out below," and made it his home. "By day, I was alone," he said. "There were only dead people. The bodies fell down in the stream, and I used those bodies as a bridge to cross the water and join the other people in the evenings." In this way, Manase survived.

Appeals Court Says Pastor Must Be Turned Over to Rwandan Tribunal

By PATTY REINERT
Houston Chronicle Staff

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ARwandan pastor living in Laredo and accused of masterminding the slaughter of hundreds of Tutsis in his homeland must be turned over to an international war crimes tribunal, the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Thursday.

The New Orleans court affirmed a ruling by a Texas federal judge that there is enough evidence to allow Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, a Hutu and former president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Rwanda, to be turned over to the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

The tribunal, based in Arusha, Tanzania, intends to try the pastor for genocide and crimes against humanity in the 1994 massacre of Tutsis who had sought shelter at Ntakirutimana's church in Rwanda.

If Ntakirutimana is extradited, it will be the first time the United States has surrendered a defendant from America to a U.N. tribunal. If convicted, the pastor could face life in prison.

Ntakirutimana, 75, who legally immigrated to the United States to live with his son in Laredo, could not be reached for comment Thursday. The pastor, who was first arrested in September 1996 in Laredo, then released pending a decision on his extradition, is back in the Webb County Jail. According to his family, he is in poor health, suffering from heart and esophagus problems.

The pastor, a Hutu who is married to a Tutsi, has denied all the allegations against him. His lawyer, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, has vowed to take the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Clark

could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Ntakirutimana is accused of luring hundreds of minority Tutsis to take refuge in his church and then leading a gun and machete attack on the group. He also is charged with taking part in rounding up survivors of the massacre and killing them.

In upholding the lower court ruling by U.S. District Judge John Rainey, Circuit Judge Emilio M. Garza wrote that there is enough evidence, based on the statements of twelve unidentified witnesses who survived the massacre, to establish probable cause for trying Ntakirutimana. The court also said that although the United States doesn't have an extradition treaty with the tribunal, a 1996 law allowing Ntakirutimana's extradition is constitutional.

In a dissenting opinion, Circuit Judge Harold R. DeMoss Jr. found just the opposite, saying the extradition decision is unenforceable.

Circuit Judge Robert M. Parker concurred with the majority opinion, but wrote a brief, separate opinion, urging Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to "closely scrutinize the underlying evidence" before deciding whether Ntakirutimana should be extradited. Albright will make the final decision once the courts have ruled on the legal issues.

Calling the evidence "highly suspect," Parker said it "defies logic . . . that a man who has served his church faithfully for many years, who has never been accused of any law infraction, who has for his long life been a man of peace, and who is married to a Tutsi, would somehow suddenly become a man of violence and commit the atrocities for which he stands accused."

"I am persuaded that it is more likely than not," he wrote, "that Ntakirutimana is actually innocent."

State-sponsored massacres organized by Hutu extremists in Rwanda killed more than five hundred thousand people in 1994, mostly minority Tutsis.



We welcome letters to the editor.
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Christian Greetings from Uganda.

I am a lonely widow aged thirty-nine years but when I came across your earlier *Spectrum* magazine copy published some years ago, and when I read some articles, I felt a belonging to a certain family. "The family of God." Because my family got devoured by the devil when my husband was executed by the merciless terrorists in our country in these endless cruel wars, some six years ago!! Please send me a recent copy of *Spectrum* magazine and further inform me of the individual charges for a single copy monthly. My son and daughter who are adolescents also found this magazine a blessing. It will be soothing to our family.

Mawanda Catherine
Wobulenzi, Uganda

The Conditional Nature of Prophecy

The summer 1999 issue of *Spectrum* was, in my judgment, one of the best. I especially appreciated the article by Reinder Bruinsma on Adventists and Catholics. I am a retired Adventist minister, and I love our church very much. However, I have been troubled over our failure to recognize and appreciate the changes that have come in the Roman Catholic Church and the dogged determination on the part of many to enter into a fortress mentality and pretend it is "us" against the rest of the Christian world. I think we should appreciate other Christians when we can.

Bruinsma does state twice in his article that it is very difficult to bring about a change in our attitudes without appearing to be attacking Ellen White. Since I have been troubled over this issue for some time, I am being bold enough to offer at least an attempt in the direction of change. While I am very comfortable with the broad outline of the three angels' messages and the fact that they teach the soon coming of Jesus the second time, I have come to have some misgivings about the

rigidity with which we often feel that we have figured out every detail of the future, assigning other churches and groups their parts to play and believing it will infallibly happen as we have predicted.

There are several reasons for this disquieting feeling. First and foremost is a biblical reason. I wish to quote the words of Jeremiah the prophet: "This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as it seemed best to him.

"Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'Oh, house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does.' Declares the Lord. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.'" (Jer. 18:1-10 NIV)

Clearly, God has stated that dogmatic assertions about the future behavior of groups is inappropriate, since it is clearly conditional upon the actions of that group. Ellen White clearly agrees with this concept. She says, "It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional." (*Selected Messages, Book 1* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958], 67)

Since both the Bible and Ellen White declare unequivocally that prophecies and threatenings are conditional, it seems presumptuous for me to be so rigid as to declare without reservation that Protestants and Catholics are going to unite to do these negative deeds. In addition to that, it seems to me that if we are committed to a single possible scenario as to what may happen in the future we may be blind to threats that may

come from another quarter.

I wish that we would adopt the attitude of the prophet Daniel, who understood God's love and attitude toward conditional prophecy very well. When in Daniel 4, the prophet tells of a dream that brought a prediction that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar would become insane and be driven from his throne for a period of years, Daniel did not rejoice at the punishment of the pagan king. He did not even rigidly decree that God had predicted it and that nothing could be done about it. Rather he pleaded with the king to change his ways, with the clear inference that this might bring about a change in the possible prophecy of the future.

Sometimes our preconceived view of future events leads us to view other churches with so much suspicion that we fail to see the good that they may actually be doing. Ellen White warned us that systems of belief that undermine our basically Christian attitudes may be suspect. She said during the 1888 crisis, "God deliver me from your ideas . . . if the receiving of these ideas would make me so unchristian in my spirit, words, and works" as they had become. (Quoted in George B. Knight, *Angry Saints* . . . [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1989], 2)

Concerning rigidity in our ideas and cocksure belief that we are right on every point, she uttered these cautions, "As a people we are certainly in great danger, if we are not constantly guarded, of considering our ideas, because long cherished, to be Bible doctrines . . . and measuring everyone by the rule of our interpretation of Bible truth. This is our danger, and this would be the greatest evil that could ever come to us as a people." (Quoted in Knight, *Angry Saints*, 136)

In short, my plea would be that we remain open-minded about future events and not eagerly accuse other Christians of sinister plots, nor accuse each other of apostasy if we do not always view every detail of prophecy in exactly the same way.

Charles G. Edwards

Wenatchee, Washington

On Sabbath Keeping

In defending the validity of observing the seventh-day Sabbath (*Spectrum*, summer 1999) no writer made a point that is important to me.

Our native intelligence tends to support all Ten Commandments except the fourth. But while our reasoning powers can readily grasp the importance of not being a polytheist, not killing, not stealing, etc.,

those powers do not tell us why observing the seventh day as Sabbath is superior to observing the first.

After all, we can attend Christian services on Sunday, listen to excellent sermons, hear Jesus extolled and Christian morality upheld on Sunday as well as Saturday. Why make such a big deal about one day as opposed to another? We are all worshiping the same God, accepting the same Savior, and seeking to do God's will insofar as concrete aspects of our daily lives are concerned. Aren't we engaging in a lot of hairsplitting and nit-picking?

If I hadn't been raised in a Sabbath-keeping home, I would find this point of view persuasive.

My reasoning in support of observing Saturday as Sabbath runs somewhat differently. Doing God's will when our own intelligence concurs in the wisdom of his commands hardly acknowledges his supremacy in establishing matters of right and wrong. We agree with God, so we do his will.

But if God asks us to do something that may puzzle us—that may even seem a bit arbitrary on God's part—and we still obey, then we truly acknowledge God's authority over our lives.

I think God wants loyalty based not just on our own perceptions of right and wrong but also on faith in the righteousness of his divine commands, whether or not they coincide with our fallible human judgment.

Reo M. Christenson

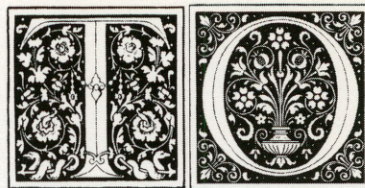
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Movie Review

Spectrum's issue of summer 1999 is only the second that I have received. I was rather surprised to see the review of *Star Wars* by Marilyn Glaim. To me, movie viewing is unchristian. Regardless how they are packaged, movies are counterproductive forms of entertainment for the growth of Christian faith, whether one is a Seventh-day Adventist or of some other religious persuasion. Granted, there are a few good movies around, but should one eat a barrel of trash to benefit from a capsule of vitamins? Traditionally, Adventists have opposed going to movies; however, in recent years the trend is to conform to this secular world's entertainment standard. It is sad to see that a high-caliber journal like *Spectrum* is sanctioning movie viewing in a subtle way. We should devote our time to nourishing our spiritual growth rather than allowing entertainment devised by Satan to influence us.

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My Grandfather's Voice

I remember standing next to my maternal grandfather, G. Arthur Keough, during a worship service in the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. I was thirteen years old and very embarrassed. Grandpa Keough was singing the hymn louder than anyone else. And, worst of all, he was singing badly; that is to say, he did not always sing the notes that other congregants were singing. Six or seven years later I again stood next to my grandfather during a Sligo worship service. This time, as the congregation sang "This Is My Father's World," I listened to the most beautiful sound I have ever heard: the sound of my grandfather's voice. He still sang loudly. He still varied from the notes on the page. What had changed was my realization and understanding that he was singing *with joy to God*.

I learned from my grandfather's voice that praising God with a joyful noise is both the path to, and the natural response of, a close relationship with our Creator. Whether you have that friendship, or desire it, praise him! In some Adventist circles, there is a danger in even using the term, "praise." The danger flows from the use of the term as shorthand for a particular kind of worship style. Setting aside shorthand and fear, we would do well to recommit ourselves to the activity—praise—that elevates us into the presence and power of God. In *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), Ellen White observed that "[t]he melody of praise is the atmosphere of heaven; and when heaven comes in touch with the earth, there is music and song. . . . So human hearts, in sympathy with heaven, have responded to God's goodness in notes of praise." (161) Wouldn't you be interested in having a slice of heaven on earth? It is possible through praise.

Nearly fourteen years ago, as the Andrews Academy choir was getting ready for a performance in Chicago, the choir director approached one of my friends and said, "During the performance, you don't need to sing. Just move your lips." I was standing next to my friend, and I did not have much time to be stunned at what I had just heard before the choir director then turned to me and said, "You might want to think about doing that, too." Like my grandfather, I sometimes have difficulty carrying a tune. That fact, among others, has made it difficult for me to praise; to put aside other "noise" in my life and to humble myself.

One of the last things Grandpa Keough completed before his death in 1989 was a series of lessons on the Psalms for the Seventh-day Adventist *Adult Sabbath School Quarterly*. In his lesson dealing with Psalm 66, he wrote: "Some of us are happy because, although we have not been gifted with musical voices, we know that we can make a joyful noise. Some sounds are not musical, but when they express joy they are music to our ears and to God's." Can the sound of *my* voice be music to someone's ears? In Mark 9:23, Jesus said: "Everything is possible for him who believes." (NIV) I do believe. Help me, Lord, overcome my unbelief.

Brent G. T. Geraty
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LOUD



By Pat Cason

The hallelujah forest is singing again,
from the wren to the river, voices
ring against the bell of the sky

and the astonished light sings out in surprise,
and color is declared to the ends of the earth
and blossoms burst forth
in praise of light's kindness to color

and the waters are rushing to find gravity's will
over stones rising up to give form to their song,
and the stained green glass of leaves held aloft
is also a hymn, and firs draw their breath
from the breeze to sigh *yes*

for nothing can curb
the praise of this day for its origin.

And the people saw that it was good
despite their affliction
with that particular blindness
which is a way of not seeing, and earth

hummed on her axis again.
Wildness broke out, and it was good,
for it was very loud,
and all the people, and all the earth

said *amen*.

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