



The Pursuit of Happiness | BY BONNIE DWYER

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While in the pursuit of articles about suffering and theodicy for our Bible section in this issue, I was also reading Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*. The juxtaposition of the two informed both readings. Greenblatt tells the literary detective story of how bibliophile Poggio Braccionini, a papal secretary, stumbled upon a five-hundred-year old copy of Lucretius's ancient poem *On the Nature of Things* in 1417. His discovery helped to bring the poem back to the attention of writers and thinkers, setting in motion Lucretius's influence on luminaries from Leonardo da Vinci, to Galileo, to Thomas Jefferson. Lucretius, a first-century BC Epicurean philosopher, did not believe in the afterlife, angels, or demons, but did believe in the idea of pleasure and beauty.

In addition to the detective story, however, Greenblatt's book is secondarily an antireligious polemic, and flat-out wrong in its depiction of the Middle Ages, according to Jim Hinch, who wrote "Why Stephen Greenblatt is Wrong and Why It Matters" for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. It matters because the book "is really a salvo in the culture wars: an effort to lend an aura of historical inevitability to the idea that religious faith has no place in a modern society," Hinch says. Greenblatt's *Swerve* won both the National Book Award for nonfiction and the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction, which also irritated Hinch, who felt that two distinguished prize juries managed to overlook the fact that "the book's animating thesis was at best questionable and at worst

unwarranted."

Describing the world of the fourteenth-century popes and their in-fighting, perhaps it is not surprising that Greenblatt arrives at his antireligion statements, but to me his assertion that there is no Intelligent Designer, for instance, smacks more of current atheism than Lucretius. But perhaps where the idea originates is not the point in the current cultural war. It is out there.

How do we as Christians make the case for a loving God that is present to people now in suffering, as well as in the pursuit of happiness?

In this issue we provide you with lively reading material from some of Adventism's best minds: Sigve Tonstad on Job, Richard Rice on theodicy, Ivan Blazen on personal suffering, Anne Collier-Freed on caring.

Petr Činčala tackles the topic of presenting the gospel to the secular city. Don Williams looks at new models for mission in higher education, and Ruben Sanchez takes us into the heart of New York for an Abrahamic Immersion.

Another salvo in the contemporary culture wars from the Christian side is Brian McLaren's *Naked Spirituality: A Life with God in 12 Simple Words*. Brenton Reading movingly reviews it for us in this issue. McLaren's description of God's pursuit of us here and now for me is the key to understanding a life of faith—and why it is such a blessing to life today, in the midst of pain and suffering or joy and the pursuit of happiness. ■

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum*.