

# Sacrificial Love

I was raised in a Christian home but, in my teens and early twenties, I became very skeptical of Christian claims, the good book and, especially, of God Himself. Looking back, I cannot say I really doubted the *existence* of God, although I think I made that claim. No, as I reflect upon it, I *did* believe that *He was there*, but I did not like Him very much, or at least not the God I thought He was at the time. I can honestly say I did not know who I was rejecting, because I really did not know Him as I do now. I did not see Him as a Father, but as a judge; not as a friend, but as a powerful bully.

I truly enjoyed doubting God, finding supposed problems in scripture, discussing with my friends the deep and good reasons why we should not have to believe in God or, if He did exist, reasons to doubt He was good. It is strange to recall that all the while I doubted God, nevertheless, I thought my doubts were hurting His feelings. Yet, if I was truly convinced God was NOT good, why would I suppose I could hurt His feelings? Illogical, as Spock might remark. Yes, perhaps, but it fits what we know about human nature: we are far more likely to test the forbearance of those whose goodness we are fairly sure of.

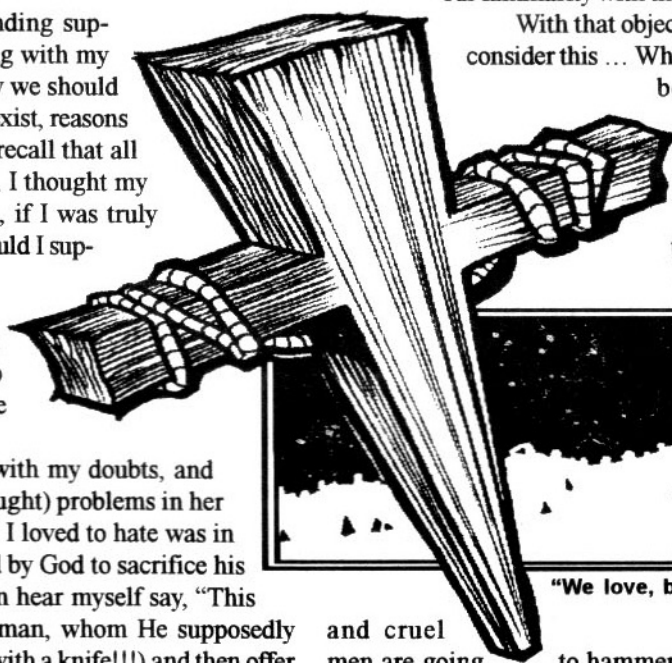
In any case, I vexed my mother with my doubts, and loved to throw up unanswerable (I thought) problems in her face. One Bible passage, in particular, I loved to hate was in Genesis 22 where Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. "WHAT?!" I can hear myself say, "This supposedly good God is asking this man, whom He supposedly loves sooooo much, to kill his only son (with a knife!!!) and then offer him up as a burnt offering on an altar? You have got to be kidding! This is sadistic! Sick! What kind of a "monster God" would even ask such a thing?!!!" What if He asks you to kill me? Would you do it??" And so forth ... Deliciously enough, my mom didn't seem to know how to answer that one at all, so I thought "had her." What a brat! Okay, so I had to endure the mother's curse of "hope you have one just like you," but I merely laughed in the face of danger and continued my daring taunts. (These curses cannot truly inspire fear until one is in a position to fully understand the implications of such

things ... when one has teenagers of one's own ... and then, of course, it is forever too late).

But, anyway, it is funny to me now this passage of scripture, once proof enough for me of God's basic barbarity, is now to me an awesome and wonderful picture of God's love for us.

When we think in terms of the sacrifice made for us nearly 2,000 years ago, we naturally think in terms of the sacrifice made by the Son. Braveheart. He *gave His life* for you and me, and the enormity of that fact should never be obscured by the passage of time or by our familiarity with the event.

With that object in view, please allow yourself to consider this ... Who would YOU die for? Your neighbor? ... The paper boy? ... A stranger? Maybe, but I think it highly unlikely for most people. Add to that the torture angle. Not only must you *die* but, *prior* to that, you will be whipped, publicly humiliated, beaten, stripped naked,



"We love, because He first loved us ..."

(1 John 4:19)

and cruel men are going to hammer huge spikes into your wrists and feet and suspend you from these horrible wounds until you die an agonizingly slow death. Even a very courageous person would likely blanch at the thought, and some folks are under the bed just *thinking about it*. Would you endure such abuse even for a very good friend? Your husband or wife? Certainly, some have endured torture and even death for God or country, or familial love, but such self sacrifice is rare enough to be quite remarkable ...

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Then we should consider how many would die for the likes of someone like of John Gacy? Saddam Hussein? Larry Flynt? And, yet, we know Jesus died for all of them as well as for you and me. In the Bible, the book of Romans speaks to this very issue in chapter 5:6-8: "For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man, though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His great love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

We were helpless, ungodly, and sinners when Christ chose to give His life on our behalf. Not mere "strangers," we were ENEMIES of God. Such a strong term, Joy! Enemies?? Take a look around you. Ask yourself why so many of those who say they "disbelieve" in the God of the Bible are *not neutral* towards Him at all, but actively *detest* Him! Just like I did myself once upon a time. Did you ever wonder why that is? According to the Bible, though, even if one has no *emotion* of animus towards God, we all are born enemies of God just by being part of the rebellious race of mankind. But Jesus Christ, who loves us, bore the agony of the cross for our reconciliation. Such an act of gracious heroism is rare indeed and is confounding in our vengeance-oriented society. We humans don't get mad at those who hurt or oppose us: we get even. ... And self sacrifice is looked upon almost as a defect.

There is something, though, I believe would get *me* willingly up on that cross and, if you are a parent, maybe you can identify. A simple choice might do it ... Mom or dad, either you or your daughter are going up on that cross; you or your son. We are either going to strip, beat, and torture your daughter and drive those nails into her flesh, OR ... you can go in her place ... what will it be? Parental love is so strong that, even from here, I can hear you say, "Take ME ... I'll go. Do what you must to me, but leave my daughter alone! Don't touch my son!"

I am strongly reminded of the truth of this even today. An article in the *Chicago Tribune* starts out with these words, "A 14-year old high school student convicted of plotting to kill his mother was released Monday into the custody of the mother who said, 'I love my son, and I have nothing to fear. He has told me that he was sorry.' " That really says it, doesn't it? Her trust in her son may be foolish, but it gives powerful testi-

mony to the unshakeable and sacrificial love of a parent.

That is the great love the Son has for us. It is so hard for us to accept His love at face value, but He loves us that much! As much as you love your son; as much as you'd die for your daughter. Torture and death on our behalf is the noble gift of the Son; to win your life and freedom.

But what of the Father? How did He show His love for us? Think about this: You'd go up on that cross for your son or daughter. For whom would you GIVE your child whom you love so much? On whose behalf would I send my daughter to her death? Whose life and security would I purchase with the well being of my own son? NO ONE'S. Yet, so great is the Father's love for me and you friend, He gave His only Son. From a parent's eye view, an unbelievable sacrifice.

1 John 4:10 says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and *sent His Son* to be the propitiation for our sins."

This is the connection we should draw from Genesis where Abraham is asked to make the supreme sacrifice. This example is given so we can, perhaps, conceive of the great sacrifice God made on our behalf thus to comprehend the depth of God's love for us.

I don't write this primarily to those who know God's love and already have become convinced by their relationship to Him that He loves and cares for them. I speak to those who are vastly unsure of God's love, who have been in cults or abusive churches, and the only emotion they feel from God is anger or disapproval, and the emotion they have for God is FEAR. I don't say there is no such thing as a healthy fear of the Lord, one that brings us to a place of recognizing our need for forgiveness and a savior. But, if your fear does not lead to conversion, but endless striving or, if conversion does not ease your fears, you've gotten the wrong message about God's love and grace.

Some have missed the message of grace because religious traditions have gotten in the way. Yes, they have been taught about the sacrifice of Christ, but the simplicity of the gospel has been obscured by add-ons, such as purgatory, penance, indulgences, and novenas. Must we live in fear of punishment for sins already paid for by the death of Christ? No. "Paid in full" is the message of the cross. His death brings us life. His suffering gives us peace. His



mediation offers us complete reconciliation.

Others have gotten the message that God merely sent a created angel, Michael, who became the perfect man Jesus, to earth to die merely to provide mankind with the opportunity to *save ourselves* through door-to-door preaching and other good works. Since there was such a great deal of work to be done to "seal the deal" and secure an eternal place in God's Paradise, it is not surprising to me that the love and sacrifice of the Father and the Son gets lost in the shuffle. The love of God *always* falls through the cracks of works-based religions. And logically, of course, an angel who became a perfect man could not atone for all of mankind. A perfect man could, perhaps, serve as the ransom for one sinner, but only the son of God, who was Himself also God, had the worth to ransom us all. God is as much above *us* as we are above animals; hence, the beautiful analogy that the Shepherd would lay down his life for his sheep. The Sheep/Shepherd analogy is not meant to depict one-to-one correspondence or tit-for-tat! A sheep, even a perfect one, could ransom only *one other sheep* with his life, while the *shepherd's* life would be worth the entire flock and more.

Now some may object by posing arguments such as these: "God is an invisible Spirit; if the Son were God, how could He be seen? Or, if the Son of God was also God, how could He die?" Good questions, ones that lead us to the very *necessity* of the incarnation! The Son of God had to take on humanity precisely *so* God *could* be seen, so God *could* lay down his life! A God of Spirit in heaven cannot do these things! Jesus was, and still is, "in his incarnation," as Justin Martyr so aptly puts it, "God and man united." He took on humanity in order to fulfill the law on our helpless behalf, to atone for our sins as the sin sacrifice, and to manifest God to mankind in the only way we could truly understand. John 1:18 says, "No man has seen God at any time: the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." The Father has never been seen by men, the only begotten God, the God-man, has shown Him to us. When the disciple Philip asked Jesus to "show us the Father", Jesus answered him, "Have I been so long with you and yet you have not come to know me? He who has seen me has seen the Father ..." (John 14:8 and 9).

I read a story (I do not remember where) about a man who came across an ant hill in a farmer's field and became inexplicably attached to it and vastly interested in the ant's day-to-day affairs. Who can figure it? We all know ants are common, lowly creatures, so far beneath this man that they were totally unaware of his presence, but that did not stop him from seeing them as his friends. He would drop little crumbs of food down so he could enjoy watching them "find" it.

One day, though, he looked up from his musing study of his dearly loved "friends" to see Old McDonald on his tractor making his way across the field, and he realized with horror that the ant hill, *his* ant hill, was right in the path of terrible destruction! Oh no!! What to do? He had to warn them! He knelt down as close to the hill as he could and told them what was coming and urged them to flee the coming destruction, but they could not understand what he was saying and, in fact, even did not seem to be aware of his efforts, or even of his existence. Things continued as before in Ant City. There were tunnels to build, dead insects to carry, and a queen to appease. Even if they could hear him, he realized with despair, they would probably think it was thunder or some other natural phenomena, since ants aren't equipped to recognize the voice of man. But, the farmer and the tractor were getting closer. Calamity was near. In desperation, he tried scooping up the ants in his hands, but they bit

him, and frantically tried to get away. How could he warn them? Then it dawned on him: to communicate with his ants he'd have to *become* an ant! And that's just what he did. Happy ending ... at least for the ants who accepted his message. They followed him to safety and rebuilt Ant City in a safer location.

Now, of course, men cannot become ants, but God can do difficult things when He has a mind to! That's why we call Him God! He had a mind to save you and me, so He allowed Himself to be born of a virgin girl in Bethlehem.

But Joy, you've spoken of the Father and the Son, clearly showing two persons, yet there is only one God! Yes, I know the nature of God is hard to grasp, but why should we be able to comprehend His nature entirely? God is a whole other *life form*! We are all very familiar with fire. Fire does not have our nature. It can generate individual flames, then come back together as one flame again. We don't say *fire* cannot do these things because *we* cannot. We let *fire be fire*. And, we are all so familiar with it, we do not think about how strange it is. But, what if we were to try to explain fire to someone who had no knowledge of it? How easy would that be? In the same way, we must let God be God.

As difficult as it can be to understand God's nature, it can be even harder to comprehend his love for us. We're ANTS, and we know it! And by nature, we DON'T love Him, and we know that too. I am so glad I did not get stuck in my rebellious agnostic phase for too long. So many people I know seem to be stuck there, unwilling or unable to move on to true discovery leading to true peace. Why is it some people do come to a place of loving God, while others hearts remain shut tight against Him?

Jesus, when asked what was the greatest commandment, said it was to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Wow! What an awesome task! How does a person do this? It is important to understand Jesus spoke these words to people who were still under the Old Covenant, and Jeremiah 31:33 tells us that under the New Covenant, sealed with the blood of Jesus, the laws or the commandments will be written on our *hearts*. What does this mean? How do the commandments; the *shalts* and the *musts*, the *shoulds* and the *oughts*, come to be "written on our hearts?" Simple. Under the New Covenant, loving God becomes a *RESPONSE* to God's love for us. We love Him, because we have come to recognize He loves us! Try as we might, we just can't pull the horse with the cart. And all cults and false religions are man's attempt to do just that. To love God by fiat. I'm gonna love him, I'm gonna serve him; then He'll spare me, He'll reward me, He'll overlook my faults. Nope, it just doesn't work that way. It is the realization of God's love for us that chisels our hearts, imprinting within the *DESIRE* to love Him in return, and then to please Him.

Think about it: if we *could* love God by an act of our will, it would produce much more "self satisfaction" than "God satisfaction." In fact, you'll never find any more self-satisfied folks than those who are convinced they love God more than anybody! There is no room for self love and self satisfaction in God's plan, however. We do not and CANNOT deserve God's love and only humbly can accept it.

Perhaps you are right now in a place of despair because you have tried and tried and failed and failed to love God as you know you should. GOOD! That's exactly the place you need to be to experience God's marvelous grace. Grace is *undeserved* kindness! You've tried hard to *give* God what He requires from you, but now,

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# And Along Came A Spider...



**A**sk the average person in the street if he knows who the Christadelphians are and he probably won't have a clue. Even most Evangelical Christians don't know who the Christadelphians are.

Recently, the 14,000 homes of Glen Ellyn, Illinois were introduced to the Christadelphians when they received a flyer in the mail inviting interested persons to a free seminar series to be held for six weeks at the local Holiday Inn. The seminar, called "How to Study the Bible More Effectively," would attempt, as the seminar name indicated, to help students study the Bible more effectively as well as to give a basic introduction to the Bible. The flyer emphasized the fact that the seminar was "free" and that funds would not be solicited, further stating that the Christadelphians were a group interested in helping others learn the Bible and that they had no prophetic claims, prophets, or intents of proselytizing. I decided to attend the seminars to find out, first hand, what the Christadelphians were all about.

The six-week seminar was held in an informal atmosphere in a comfortable conference room at the Holiday Inn. Generous refreshments were provided at each session, courtesy of the ladies from the local Christadelphian congregation. There were about 20 class attendees of various backgrounds, who all seemed interested in learning more about the Bible. The two Christadelphian instructors, who would periodically alternate teaching during each session, provided interesting commentary and promised they would not get involved in any theological or doctrinal content. They said their goal was to help people become more interested in the Bible and Bible study, and not to gain converts, though they said that if people wanted to investigate or attend their church as a result of the seminar, that was Okay.

The course was, indeed, a basic introduction to the Bible, with an overview of content, origin, and study helps. Each attendee was provided a three-ring workbook free of charge, which contained some of the following subject headings: A Background of the Bible, Why Two Testaments?, the Role of Prophecy, Overview of the Books of the Bible, The Purpose of God, etc. Many of the topics discussed were similar to those taught at many Evangelical churches, colleges, and on Christian radio. Aside from periodic references to the bankruptcy of religious systems and denominations, everything sounded seemingly orthodox. There was even a weekly tribute to great men who helped give us the English translation of the Bible, such as Wycliffe and Tyndale.

Students were given an incentive to attend all the classes: the instructors promised to give a free video series at the end of the six-week series to all those with perfect attendance. At the final session during the sixth week, the instructors concluded the series by again stating that the Christadelphians put on the seminar as a public service at no cost, however, they only asked that we accept their litera-

ture and four videos on end-times events. A couple people from the class indicated interest in the Christadelphian church and said they would seek more information. After "graduating" from the class, I received the literature and videos, which revealed the true nature of just who the Christadelphians really are.

## HISTORY

The Christadelphians originated during the early 19th century the same time period several other religious groups had their origin in America. The Church of Latter Day Saints, Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ

Church,  
Seventh Day  
Adventist  
Church, Watch-

tower, Christian Science, and Christadelphian Church all have origins that can be traced directly to the Campbellite movement in the early 1800s.

The Christadelphians were founded by John Thomas, an English physician. Thomas was born in London, England on April 12, 1805 the son of a Baptist minister. In 1832, Thomas was sailing for America when his ship was in danger of sinking during a violent storm. Afraid for his life, Thomas apparently realized he hadn't been very dedicated to God or interested in religion. Taking stock of his life, he vowed to change his ways if God allowed him to survive the ordeal. He promised to find the truth about God and dedicate himself to studying about Him. Thomas made good on his vow when he survived the voyage and reached America. He became a serious Bible student.

Soon after his arrival in America, Thomas was baptized by an acquaintance when it was pointed out to him that baptism was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. This was Thomas' introduction to the Campbellite movement. The present day Church of Christ is a direct descendant of the Campbellites and their doctrine of baptism being necessary for salvation. In 1833, Thomas was introduced to the leader of the Campbellite movement, Alexander Campbell, and the two became close friends for a time.

In 1834, Thomas moved to Richmond, Virginia and was called to take the pulpit of a Campbellite congregation there, where Thomas also became the editor of a publication called the *Apostolic Advocate*. During this time, Thomas' intense independent Bible study brought him to the "discovery" that the Bible did not teach the immortality of the soul. Thomas wrote:

"As to the immortality of the soul, in the popular sense of that phrase, it is nowhere taught in the Bible. It is dogma of Pagan philosophers, especially of Plato. It was adopted by Origen, and other corrupters of the Christian church, as revealed truth. "

Instead, Thomas believed that the souls of the dead went into an unconscious state rather than a conscious existence in Heaven or Hell. Thomas believed the dead would remain unconscious foreve-

# Who are



unless they were resurrected by God. This belief apparently led Thomas to reconsider other traditional Christian doctrines, such as the existence of Hell, the nature of God, and even salvation itself. It should be pointed out that Thomas, while apparently being an intelligent man and a physician, did not receive any theological, hermeneutical, or other formal religious training except what he gleaned for himself from his own Bible study and from the influence of others.

It was soon after this "discovery" that Thomas "rediscovered" other new "truth" about the Bible and other widely-held doctrines of the church. These "discoveries" led to a break with the Campbellites (as even they did not approve of Thomas' new interpretations) which led Thomas to form an independent following or sect. Thomas called each individual congregation of the sect an "ecclesia" (Greek for "church"), though they all unofficially were known as "Thomasites" by outsiders.

Thomas went overseas and took his teachings home to England, where he also developed a following. At the outbreak of the Civil War in the U.S., Thomas preached pacifism. In 1864, the sect took the official name "Christadelphians" (Brethren in Christ) when the U.S. government required pacifistic religious denominations to register for the draft in order for their followers to be exempt from it. The

tal God. They believe only the Father is God, denying the existence of a Trinity, which they claim has its origin in pagan mythology. They also deny the divinity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit, which they consider God's power or force. The Christadelphian view of God is similar to that of the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Dawn Bible Students. While the Christadelphians rightly claim that a correct knowledge of God is essential for salvation, it is apparent their view of God will lead them and any who believe similarly to eternal damnation.

**JESUS:** Thomas heretically believed that Jesus was only a man, the "Son of God" and not "God the Son," and that Jesus did not have a pre-existence before being born. Thomas believed that Jesus could not be God because he shared the same human nature with the rest of mankind who was born under the law. Thomas reasoned that Jesus could not be part of a triune God because:

1. Jesus was tempted, whereas God cannot be tempted.
2. Jesus died, whereas God, being immortal, cannot die.
3. Jesus wearied, whereas God never "slumbers or sleeps."<sup>2</sup>

Thomas' reasoning here is similar to other groups that deny the

# the Christadelphians??

Christadelphians grew into a church that claimed to have the scriptural truth of the apostles, which had finally been revived after being lost at the close of the first century A.D. While Christadelphians today do not consider Thomas a prophet or apostle, they credit him for finding the "truth" which, according to them, had been lost for many centuries.

Today, the Christadelphians are active around the world, especially in England, Canada, Australia, and the U.S. Actual membership numbers are not available, as there is no central office and, apparently, no attempts are made to compile statistics. Local congregations are not responsible to any district union or general assembly. Nonetheless, local Christadelphian congregations worldwide are consistent in their beliefs and teachings. In addition, the Christadelphians have a strong presence on the World Wide Web, where many Christadelphian congregations have web pages. Bible studies supervised by an experienced leader are mainly the way Christadelphians proselytize others.

## DOCTRINAL DEVIATIONS

Christadelphians claim the scriptures as their ONLY source of authority. They appeal to sources Evangelicals also use, such as concordances and lexicons, yet they fatally deviate from fundamental, orthodox, Biblical teaching in many respects. While they may be Evangelical sounding in their methods, they deny the basic teaching of Scripture by subtle twisting and misinterpretation. The following are some of the important distinctions:

**GOD:** Christadelphians believe there is only one, eternal, immor-

an innocent baby; infant.  
**Christ** (krist), *n.* [ME. & AS. *Crist*; L. *Christus*; Gr. *Christos*, lit., the Anointed < *chrain*, to anoint], 1. the Messiah whose appearance is prophesied in the Old Testament. 2. Jesus of Nazareth, regarded by Christians as the realization of the Messianic prophecy; originally a title (*Jesus the Christ*), later used as part of the name (*Jesus Christ*). Abbreviated *Chr.*  
**Christ** (krist, kris), [see *CHRIST*, *n.*], a masculine name.  
**Chris-ta-bel** (kris'ta-bel'), [*< L. Christus* (see *CHRIST*) + *-bella*, fem. of *bellus*, handsome], a feminine name.  
**Christ-church** (krist'chürch'), *n.* a city on the eastern coast of South Island, New Zealand: pop., 159,000 (est. 1947).  
**christ-cross** (kris'krös', kris'kros'), *n.* [*< Christ's cross*], 1. [Archaic], the figure of a cross (✝) formerly placed before the alphabet in hornbooks, etc.; also, the mark of the cross (X) used as a signature by a person who cannot write. 2. [British Dial.], the alphabet. See *criss-cross*.  
**chris-ten** (kris'ten), *v.t.* [ME. *christenien*; AS. *cristmian*; see *CHRISTIAN*], 1. to take into a Christian church by baptism; baptize. 2. to give a name to at baptism. 3. to give a name to. 4. [Colloq.], to make use of for the first time.  
**Chris-ten-dom** (kris'ten-dəm), *n.* [ME. & AS. *cristendom*, Christianity; see *CHRISTIAN* & -DOM], 1. Christians collectively. 2. those parts of the world where most of the inhabitants profess the Christian faith.

by David Moore

deity of Christ. What they don't consider is the dual nature of Jesus as described in the Bible, a being who is fully God AND man. When Jesus was on earth, he set aside his divine nature. His human nature could be tempted and his human body could be killed or could suffer as a human does. The Apostle Paul describes it this way:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant,

and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of [sic] the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8 KJV).

Christadelphians must necessarily deny and reinterpret any scriptures that indicate Jesus' divinity and pre-existence in order to remain consistent with their heretical teaching about Jesus' nature.

**HOLY SPIRIT:** The Holy Spirit, according to the Christadelphians, is God's force or power, and not a person with traits of personality. To admit to such obviously would contradict the Christadelphian view of God and denial of the Trinity. Again, the Christadelphians demote another person of the Godhead (in this instance into an impersonal force), for which the Christadelphians must deny and reinterpret the Biblical teaching, which clearly indicates the Holy Spirit's personality. They claim that Biblical references to any personality of the Spirit are all merely personifications of an impersonal object, which they say are similar to personifications made of impersonal objects in other

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*"To be or not to be. That is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing, end them. To die. To sleep. No more. And by a sleep to say we end the heart ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To die. To sleep. To sleep, perchance to dream. Aye, there's the rub. For in that sleep of death what dreams may come. When we have shuffled off this mortal coil must give us pause. There's the respect that makes the calamity of so long life. For who would bear the whips and scorns of time. The oppressors wrong. The proud man's contumely. The pains of despised love. The laws delay. The insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes. ... Who would far less bear to grunt and sweat under a weary life but at the dread of something after death. The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns puzzles the will and makes us rather bear the ills we have than to fly to others we know not of. Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all." (Hamlet)*

by L.L. (Don) Veinot



# You Bet Your Life!

moral than anyone else. In fact, many live very moral

lives. They may be good citizens; seeking to advance the good. They want the best for their children and seek to protect them from harm. They seek to "do unto others as they would have them do unto them." What I am pointing out is that they are not living lives consistent with their worldview. Why follow the "Golden Rule" if we deny the ruler? If there is no God, and we are products of time and chance, anything is permissible.

lives. They may be good citizens; seeking to advance the good. They want the best for their children and seek to protect them from harm. They seek to "do unto others as they would have them do unto them." What I am pointing out is that they are not living lives consistent with their worldview. Why follow the "Golden Rule" if we deny the ruler? If there is no God, and we are products of time and chance, anything is permissible.

## Pascal's Wager

In Dr. William Lane Craig's excellent tape series, *Reasonable Faith*, Dr. Craig talks about the 17th century philosopher, Blaise Pascal. He wrote that if the odds were even whether God existed or not, it would be better to believe in God than not to believe in Him. His position was that if we believed in God and He exists, we have won everything. If we believe in God and He doesn't exist, we've lost nothing. On the other hand, if we don't believe God exists and He does not, we've lost nothing. But, if we don't believe God exists and He does, we have lost everything. Therefore, it is better to believe God exists and possibly gain everything vs. to believe He doesn't exist and possibly lose everything. Bet on God's existence, Pascal reasoned, for to lose is to lose nothing and to win is to win everything.

Pascal's wager does seem to be the best description of the possibilities and wisest course of action. There are many, however, who feel that God's existence must be proved absolutely or it is impossible for Him to exist. What they don't realize (or they choose to ignore) is there are many things we cannot prove absolutely and yet believe. For example, I cannot prove absolutely that I exist and neither can you. We can give good evidence that we exist; evidence that will take us beyond a reasonable doubt, and that is enough certainty to place our bets, I'll wager. Can it be proven God exists? I believe it can, "beyond a reasonable doubt," but, as Blaise Pascal pointed out, even if the odds were even, the prudent man would bet on God.

Hamlet, the character in William Shakespeare's play of the same name, was quite depressed when he spoke these words. Suicide was the subject of his soliloquy, for he passionately wanted to die. But his musings were not about the morality of suicide, but on the wisdom of it, given the fact that no one had ever returned from the "undiscovered country" of death to let us know whether death really was the end of it all. Who would bear the injustices, the pains of this life, Hamlet wondered, if not for the greater fear of what might await on the "other side."

Is there life beyond the grave? In the current debate in our culture regarding assisted suicide, this question is rarely asked. It is assumed, taken for granted, that great pain or hopelessness would be reason enough to "shuffle off this mortal coil," and into the peaceful nothingness that most seem certain awaits the weary traveler. From an atheist's humanistic viewpoint, this life is all there is. Logically, then, we came from nothing and are going nowhere. We are a mistake of nature and, since we live but a short time, our lives are ultimately meaningless. We cannot find meaning in legacy, for even the universe will cease to be, and all legacies will burn out with the sun.

Solomon could have identified with the tortured thoughts of Hamlet. He wrote Ecclesiastes while in a similar frame of mind. His recurring phrase, "under the sun," is talking about life if God does not exist. If this life is all there is, we die like a dog and that's it; life is meaningless and futile.

We find that atheists and agnostics do not live lives consistent with their worldview for they proceed to act as though their lives have meaning, as though there are such things as right and wrong, good and bad, when there really can be no such absolutes in a universe without God. A universe without God is a universe without a moral base.

I am not saying that atheists and agnostics are any more im-



## Only God Could Be an Atheist

Atheism is the view that God does not exist. How would an atheist know that for certain? One would have to be in all places in the universe simultaneously to know God does not exist *somewhere* in the universe, which means he (the atheist) must be omnipresent (present everywhere simultaneously). Second, the atheist would have to have all knowledge in the universe; past, present, and future, to know God never has, does not currently, and never will exist. This requires omniscience (all knowledge). Third, the atheist would have to have all power in order to hold all of this together. In other words, he would have to be omnipotent (all powerful). In other words, he'd have to BE God to deny Him. God, being omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, is the ONLY one who can say for sure God does not exist!

There is a difference between atheists and agnostics. An atheist claims to *know* God does not exist. agnostics make the claim they do not know and neither can anyone else. Some have said that agnostics are atheists without guts. It is interesting for me to dialogue with atheists and agnostics because, generally, they (like most people) haven't thought through why they believe what they believe or where their belief naturally leads. While atheists claim to know something only God could know, they offer no evidence for their claim and, as we already have pointed out, most do not live lives consistent with their worldview. Since they cannot make a positive defense for their view, they attempt to undermine the opposing view (God exists) and win by default. Typically, the God they are rejecting is the God of Christianity. But, even if they could show that the God of Christianity doesn't exist, that doesn't mean their view is correct. It is possible both are wrong and another view is the correct one. In some cases, their arguments are actually arguments for the existence of God rather than against it.

### Where Did We Come From?

It commonly is believed in our culture that macro evolution is true: one genus evolved from another genus. There currently is no evidence in the scientific data proving this is true. Other very important questions arise. Where, for example, did the universe come from? What was its cause? We know that anything that "came to be" had a cause. The universe "came to be." The late Carl Sagan (and others) believed the universe is eternal. If the universe is eternal, though, we could not be here today. A brief explanation is in order.

If the universe is infinite and uncaused, there would have to have been an infinite number of events in time past. We cannot actually cross an infinite set. No matter how far you go, there is still an infinite distance to travel. Therefore, we could never travel across an infinite number of events in order to arrive at today, but here we are. If the universe is going to run out of fuel and burn out, this event *already* would have occurred an infinite amount of time ago. In fact, no matter *what* any particular scientist believes *will* happen to the universe in the future, it *already* would have happened if the universe was eternal.

The universe is aging. In fact, scientists talk about the age of the universe being 12- to 18-billion-years old. Age denotes time. Therefore, we can see that the universe had a beginning, or "came to be." What caused it? The very universe itself is an argument for the existence of God.

If evolution is untrue, though, how did it ever gain such credibility and widespread support? How did the Theory of Evolution come about to begin with? Charles Darwin rejected the "creation" view, which was prevalent in his day, as unscientific. It not only was unscientific, it was also unbiblical. The popular creation view of his day was called "The Great Chain of Being." This view had originated with Plato rather than with scripture. The teaching was that God created each organism in its particular place on the "chain," and any variations or changes were

viewed as separate creations and assigned their own places in the "Great Chain." It seems that variations in species were viewed as an indication that God was somehow imperfect. Marvin L. Lubenow in his excellent book, *Bones of Contention, A Creationist Assessment of Human Fossils*, points this out:

"The Great Chain of Being was responsible for even more mischief. It allowed for the endorsement of slavery. When the nations of Africa and the East were opened up and world-trade routes developed, western Europe learned about the many 'savage' tribes that inhabited large portions of the earth. The differences in culture and language of these 'savages' was proof to the chauvinistic western Europeans that these strange peoples were inferior races. The 'savages' were fitted into the Great Chain of Being above apes and below Europeans. There was no evolutionary significance in their placement. Europeans believed that the Almighty had created the 'savages' as true humans but as inferior races. Hence, since the Almighty had created them as inferior races, it was proper for the superior races of western Europe and the United States to keep them in their place; that had been ordained by the Almighty. Some even went so far as to claim that the Almighty created these inferior beings without souls, to be used by the superior races as much as they would use domestic animals.

To justify this outrageous idea, some even appealed to the Bible" (pg.95).

It would almost appear Charles Darwin used many of these concepts of excluding God, in his Theory of Evolution. By eliminating God, the "Great Chain" was now scientific. In fact, in 1925 the famous "Scopes" trial was held in order to allow the teaching of evolution in public schools. The state of Tennessee had outlawed this teaching and the ACLU had advertised to find a teacher who would challenge the constitutionality of the law. Dr. Norman L. Geisler in his talk, "How Secular Humanism Took Over America," quotes from the evolutionary textbook John Scopes was using titled, *Man, A Mammal*. A quote from this work in the court transcript of the Scopes trial is as follows:

### "The Races of Man at Present Time

There exists upon the earth five races or varieties of man, each very different from the other in instinct, social customs and to an extent, in structure. They are the Ethiopian, or Negro type, originating in Africa, the Malay, or Brown race, from the islands of the Pacific, the American Indian, the Mongolian or yellow race, including the natives of China, Japan, and the Eskimos, and finally, the highest type of all, the Caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America."

The ACLU was promoting the teaching of racism in public schools in the name of evolution. But then again, if evolution is true, there really can be no such thing as racism. Racism at its core is "us against them." Evolution is the epitome of "us against them!" Whoever survives, survives! Whoever survives *best*, rules! The survivors are justified in doing everything in their power to promote the success and dominance of their line. The fittest survive and rule; the unfit are moved out of the way. What is, is. There is no wrong. To care for the weak, to promote the welfare of all, to treat others in a civilized way are all concepts borrowed from the Judeo/Christian worldview.

The very universe and everything in it points to a creator. We

*Continued on Page 8*



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## **"Bet Your Life" Continued from Page 7**

all know that nothing comes from nothing. Evolutionists ridicule Creationists because we believe God created everything. They then turn around, however, and teach with a straight face that *nothing* created *everything*!! Which is more rational?

### **The Problem of Evil**

I have known a number of atheists and agnostics who have held the opinion that since there is evil in the world, God cannot exist. What they fail to realize is the concept of good and evil come from God Himself. If there is no God, then there really is no good or evil. In order to determine if something is evil, there must be an objective standard by which to measure. Otherwise, right and wrong are simply personal choices, like choosing between a hamburger or an ice cream cone. If good and evil are simply social constructs decided by majority opinion, then murder, rape, discrimination based on race, molestation of children, etc. are not wrong by any objective standard. The "majority," (those made strong by virtue of numbers) is not always right! In fact, the holocaust was a majority rule decision. Hitler was voted into power. Everything the Nazis did was perfectly "legal." The Jews and others who were "eliminated" were lower on the evolutionary scale and were in the way of the superior race, which made the Nazi's actions morally acceptable and, indeed, "right". But who among us cannot look at that atrocity and cry out that it was terribly evil?

Evil exists because God created us with free choice, and we have chosen to do evil. However, people make the mistake of believing that just because evil is allowed to exist at present, God will never put an end to evil. Not so! Jesus commented on "the problem of evil" in Matthew 13:24-30 in His parable of the wheat and the weeds. Jesus said that "a man" originally sowed "good seed" in his field, but his enemy came in and sowed weeds among the wheat. The weeds sprang up, just like weeds always do! What a terrible situation! The wheat is hindered and choked by the weeds, while the weeds prosper and grow strong. This seems *unfair*. Why doesn't the man who owns the field just go in and root out all those weeds, so the field will be at peace? Doesn't the man *care* about his wheat? Or, has he, perhaps, not the power to root out the weeds? No, neither one of these is true, according to Jesus. The man was asked by his servants if he wanted them to go in and pull those weeds up. "No", he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them." His answer gives us insight into the heart of God. The "weeds" are tolerated for the greater good of the "wheat." Will the man therefore tolerate the weeds forever? No. When the wheat is mature, there will be a harvest. The wheat will be brought into the barn, and the weeds will be burned. The forbearance of God should never be mistaken for weakness or indifference. Right will prevail in the end; evil will be destroyed. Count on it.

We could write volumes on each of these areas and arguments for the existence of God but others already have done this very well. I would highly recommend Dr. Norman Geisler's book, *When Skeptics Ask*, or Dr. William Lane Craig's book and audio book, *Reasonable Faith*, for a deeper exploration of this topic. There are many other books we do not have the space to list. I would ask those who are believers to become familiar with the questions skeptics pose. They are good questions and deserve reasonable answers. I ask skeptics who are reading this really to examine the evidence and to consider where the preponderance of the evidence lies. Remember Pascal's wager: if the odds were even, the prudent man still would believe in God. The betting window is open, and your bet is your life. Ω



# The Two Faces of Alternative Medicine

During the past decade, we have witnessed an enormous surge in health and fitness information. Books, magazines, and television programs have swamped the marketplace - all devoted to revealing that, as Americans, we have not been feeding our tummies properly and have not been exercising adequately. Instead, most of us have preferred the sedentary, "pizza, pop, and TV" lifestyle.

In response to our shortcomings, Alternative Medicine made its debut, offering us some good, medically based options to improve our health status. But at the same time, Alternative Medicine has served as a storefront for dangerous New Age teachings. The following illustrations can help us understand the strategy behind this insidious infiltration.

Diaphragmatic breathing is said to improve the body's immune system. This deep breathing technique, performed in certain ratios, can cause lymph (a substance that removes foreign particles and bacteria from the body) to flow up to 15 times faster. This increased flow can remove cellular waste more quickly and can boost the immune response. The health-conscious person recognizes the need for a good immune system, of course, and so considers diaphragmatic breathing. The New Age teacher then shows the person how to perform this technique and adds that this makes your Hindu "life force" flow faster and makes you more spiritual.

A second example involves the use of medicinals. Prescription drugs are disseminated to *all* tissues in the body via the blood. This means that beside target tissues receiving the drug, other tissues also may be affected, sometimes adversely. These harmful side effects oftentimes are counteracted with more prescription drugs. This can be a deadly web to untangle.

Many herbs and vitamins, however, do not cause harmful side effects on the body, in general, and are eliminated more readily from the body when taken in excess. They are also typically less expensive than prescribed drugs and may achieve a similar effect as a prescription drug. Niacin (vitamin B<sub>3</sub>), for example, has been shown to decrease blood cholesterol levels. Alternative medicine oftentimes incorporates herbs, vitamins, and tonics into daily living, as well as a greater awareness and understanding of how the body works and what it requires. This can be wise.

Since many Americans misuse medicine as a "quick fix," the New Age health guru capitalizes on this admittedly, unhealthy American attitude and establishes the "need to change." After all, who

would knowingly ingest "poison?" The individual is led to believe that current medical practices have set a "trap" (a strategy called building a "straw man" in apologetics) for him.

The health guru imposes a "need," be it real or contrived. He oftentimes destroys the worth of the medical community, leaving people fearful, with, seemingly, only one alternative. And whatdaya know? The health guru just so

happens to know what it is.

His pitch usually begins, "The ancient Hindu sages used these herbs," or "The Shamans practiced this technique." Because a deep need for change has been presented, an individual may be extremely vulnerable to the guru's suggestions. Alongside the herbs, tonics, juice therapy, vitamin therapy, and hydrotherapy (many of which may be good) ... Transcendental Meditation, Inner Light workshops, and Spiritism are integrated, sometimes imperceptibly.

Good health is important to all of us, and New Age groups pique interest with seminars on the topic. Some of what they provide is factual, many times backed up with research. Making healthy choices and taking responsibility for our bodies is good advice:

Do you not know that your body  
is a temple of the Holy Spirit, ... ?

(1 Corinthians 6:19a)

To many people who do not believe in an afterlife, their health is all they have. Alternative Medicine appeals to the spiritual void in them, a void only Christ can fill. But, cleverly, health gurus force another occupant into the vacancy: eastern philosophy.

It is true Americans have destructive lifestyles. We often rely heavily on physicians and other healthcare providers to get us out of the messes we've created. Clearly, every medical discipline has treated patients who have brought harm upon themselves by smoking, overeating, drug misuse, sexual promiscuity, or vanity.

Not all Alternative Medicine is detrimental or New Age. It can help us take responsibility for our healthcare and teach us preventative medicine. It can be of great benefit, when administered without a guru slipping a metaphysical "Mickey." Discerning the good aspects of Alternative Medicine from the bad is a good idea for each of us. This way, we won't throw the baby out with the bath water. Ω

*Charles Archer Plath is a representative of Midwest Christian Outreach and the artist for the Journal. His primary interest is reaching Hindus and New Agers with the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

(references available upon request)

### "Sacrificial Love" Continued From Page 3

Praise God!, you are standing in the *receiving* line. As many as *received* Him, to them gave He the power to become sons of God (John 1:11:12).

Or, maybe you have not tried to love God at all, because you feel that all you've gotten from Him is an unfair shake. I'm a pretty good person; why has God dealt with me so shabbily? Why am I alone, when everybody else has someone to care about? Or, why am I trapped in a marriage with a creep like Harry, when I could be free to meet someone who would treat me as I deserve? Where do those self-pitying thoughts come from? In part, they originate in our own fallen nature, but they are helped along by mankind's oldest adversary.

Since loving God is so important—Jesus listing it as his number one priority or desire—it makes sense that it is the one truth most assailed by the evil one. "God doesn't love you," he whispers in your ear. "If God loves you, why does He allow adverse circumstances in your life? Why did your husband die, why are you stricken with cancer, why are your kids in trouble?

Why, why, why?" The evil one and his friends are shooting at God, and they do their best to get all of us to join them! Even Christians can be persuaded to "shoot at God," when we are assailed by doubts and fears. Yet, He is our dear friend. Do not allow adverse circumstances to turn you away from God's love. Hold on to what you KNOW to be true, that God loved you enough to send his only Son to suffer and die on your behalf.

"What then, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, yes rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:31-35). God is not out to hurt or bully you. He wants to be your friend. Please accept his offer of forgiveness and friendship, and make a new start with Him today. Ω

Love to all,

*Joey*

### "Christadelphians" Continued From Page 5

parts of Scripture. Their view of the Holy Spirit is similar to that of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

**SALVATION:** Salvation, according to the Christadelphians, is being able to enter the Kingdom of God by faith. For them, this means belief in the Bible and obedience to its requirements that men and women confess their sins, repent, be baptized, and follow Jesus faithfully.<sup>3</sup> Another way to describe their view would be this:

#### **Belief + Baptism + Obedience = Salvation**

Baptism is central to salvation for the Christadelphians. Their view is similar to that of the International Church of Christ (or Boston Church) and other churches that also believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. So important is this belief to the Christadelphians, that they even believe that the thief on the cross had to have been baptized at some point prior to his crucifixion. Baptism, however, doesn't guarantee salvation afterwards for Christadelphians, it is only the first step. They must also remain faithful to God and live in obedience to him for the rest of their lives. Part of being faithful to God, for Christadelphians, is the regular study of His word, the Bible. Thus, it becomes apparent that Bible study is a necessary part of salvation for Christadelphians, just as door-to-door work is for Jehovah's Witnesses. The Christadelphians deny and redefine the clear Biblical teaching that salvation is by grace through faith **ALONE**. Fortunately for us, the Apostle Paul describes true salvation this way:

"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith." Romans 3:27-30

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**ETERNAL PUNISHMENT:** As described previously, Thomas believed that the soul was not immortal and ceased to exist at death. Christadelphians deny a conscious, eternal suffering and existence for the wicked after death. The eternal punishment is, to

them, the ending of conscious existence for eternity. This view is similar to that of Jehovah's Witnesses, who describe this concept as "annihilation," and Seventh Day Adventists, who call it "soul sleep." Believers, according to the Christadelphians, will be resurrected and, thus, apparently "regain consciousness."

**THE KINGDOM:** God's Kingdom, according to the Christadelphians, is a vital part of the gospel which they say is ignored or demoted by traditional Christianity. Christadelphians believe that all believers will be bodily resurrected when Christ returns to earth, and will reign together with him in the Kingdom, with Christ as the King. The emphasis on the importance of the Kingdom for Christadelphians means they are also heavily concerned with end-times prophecy pointing toward the imminent return of Christ. Christadelphians use secular and traditional religious interest in end-times events to present their unique views to others. The content of their video series I received is almost entirely their view of end-time events.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Christadelphians, while not as well known as other groups, are making a "comeback," similar to other formerly dormant groups, such as Swedenborgs. With their Evangelical approach, appeal to and high regard for the scriptures, and their lack of controlling hierarchy and sociological cultic traits, Christadelphians appear very Orthodox. These facts, along with their distorted, heretical theology, make them a formidable and spiritually-dangerous group. Much serious prayer, careful Bible study, and good exegesis and reasoning especially are needed in contending with this group. Ω

*The Journal* would like to thank our newest researcher, Dave Moore, for untangling this issue's "Spider's Web." Dave has been a friend of Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. for several years and is a regular member of the Monday night "Defend the Faith" group meetings. Dave is a manager with the U.S. Postal Service, and has had a longtime interest in apologetics and cults. Dave lives in Carol Stream, Illinois with his wife and two daughters.

#### **EndNotes**

<sup>1</sup>John Thomas, quoted by Norman Fadelle in *John Thomas and His Rediscovery of Bible Truth*, Appendix 3, 1982.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., pp. 27.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., Appendix 6.



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## Conference Schedule

### Thursday - May 1, 1997

- 6:00 p.m. - Registration
- 7:00 p.m. - Music - **Sandy Rios**
- 7:30 p.m. - Welcome - **Don Veinot**
- 8:00 p.m. - **Plenary Session #1**  
**Dr. Ron Rhodes** - "Is Jesus Really the Only Way?"

### Friday - May 2, 1997

- 9:00 a.m. - **Plenary Session #2**  
**Duane Magnani** - "The End of Jehovah's Witnesses"
- 10:15 a.m. - Break
- 10:30 a.m. - **Workshop Session #1**
- 11:45 a.m. - Lunch Break
- 1:30 p.m. - **Plenary Session #3**  
**Don Veinot** - "Designer Faith"
- 2:45 p.m. - Break
- 3:00 p.m. - **Workshop Session #2**
- 5:00 p.m. - Dinner Break
- 7:00 p.m. - Music - **Grace & Glory**
- 7:30 p.m. - **Plenary Session #4**  
**Jim Leffel** - "The Death Of Truth"

### Saturday - May 3, 1997

- 9:00 a.m. - **Plenary Session #5**  
**James Walker** - "Unmasking Modern Cults"
- 10:15 a.m. - Break
- 10:30 a.m. - **Workshops Session #3**
- 11:45 a.m. - Lunch Break
- 1:30 p.m. - **Plenary Session #6**  
**Bill Honsberger** - "The Rise of the Mystery Religions:  
The Return of Eros and Ecstasy"
- 2:45 p.m. - Break
- 3:00 p.m. - **Workshop Session #4**
- 4:15 p.m. - Break
- 4:30 p.m. - **Workshop Session #5**
- 5:45 p.m. - Break
- 6:00 p.m. - **Plenary Session #7 - Panel discussion**
- 7:00 p.m. - Conference Ends

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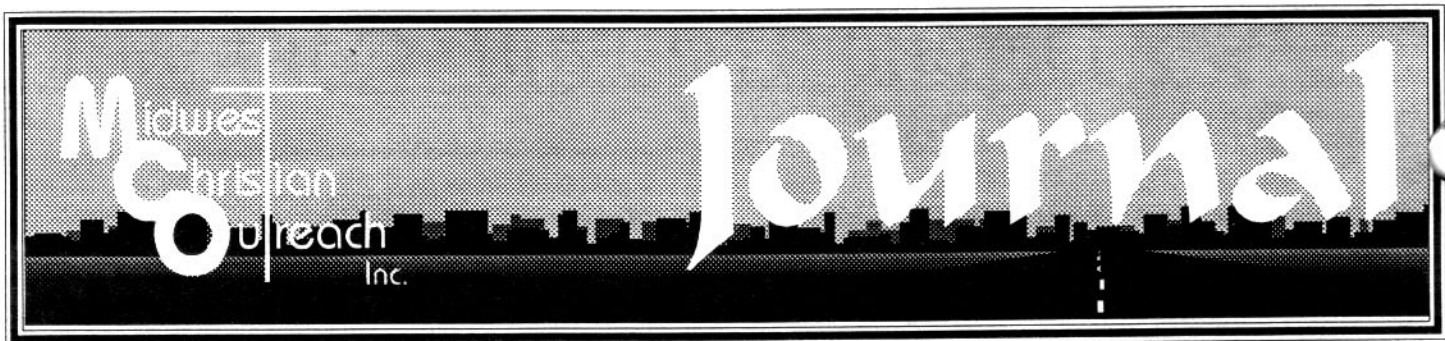
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