

DALE BROWN

THE FIRST FAIRY TALE



TPT
THE PAINFUL TRUTH

Six thousand years ago, 9:00 a.m. Middle Eastern time, on or about October 26, 4004 B.C., God created the universe with the earth in the middle of it, flat.



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CREATION

Six thousand years ago, 9:00 a.m. Middle Eastern time, on or about October 26, 4004 B.C., God created the universe with the earth in the middle of it, flat.

In the midst of this waffle he placed two naked human beings he'd created and told them they could eat anything in the world except apples. Naturally, they developed an immediate, all consuming hunger for Granny Smiths. One can only speculate, but the mess humanity finds itself in today might well have been averted if only rutabagas and spinach had been the items placed off menu.

For their impetuosity, this tarnished pair was ejected from the garden. With little to do for a living but jerk weeds they were forced to resort to sordid, disgusting sex for both pleasure and recreation. It might have made up for a lot (the sex that is) until they found themselves with the first of many squalling mouths to feed and realized that, from then on, they would have grub in the dirt for a living, forever.

Their offspring quickly grew up but, due to a lack of eligible marriage partners, brother married sister and vice versa. Because of the high mutation rate inherent in such unions, kings, priests, and assorted politicians quickly evolved.

Soon the locale of Mesopotamia became sparsely populated by Homo Sapiens the life form whose name implies, but does not guarantee, intelligence. As the years slid by knowledge of their divine origins became garbled and, eventually, lost in verbal transmission. Not knowing whence they came, or whither they went (barring the obvious), or even what they were supposed to be doing while they were here, seriously impeded the establishment of social order. Still, for awhile, life was tolerable.

It wasn't long, however, till total rot set in. Mutations continued to occur in mutations and pariahs arose; bigger, meaner, and uglier than their predecessors. They quickly became jealous of those who were

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smaller, nicer, and better looking, so they exerted their bestial superiority, formed what was, in their view, a more perfect union, dedicated themselves to the hallowed principals of enlightened self interest, and attempted to take over the world.

The reach of expanding populations soon exceeded the grasp of these self appointed rulers, however, so they created invisible friends with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men and, thus, primitive religions were thrust upon a disorganized populace who already had problems to spare. To make matters worse, each freshly frocked deity seemed born with a permanent case of the ass. They were pissed at everything, so it wasn't long before hellfire and damnation made their way into the public lexicon.

If one tribe had gods, all tribes had to have them, because it didn't take any of them long to figure out that, for their group to survive, they needed either a perpetual supply of ice water and Preparation H or a newly minted "god" a lot more powerful and awe inspiring than their neighbor's. Thus, every incarnation necessitated the addition of divine character attributes.

If those ancient and legendary gods of old had one thing in common it was impotence. They couldn't reproduce naturally and they couldn't do their own killing. They had to hire it done. This was a job description tailor made for true believers, and what an excuse! "I didn't want to rape, plunder, and burn; God told me to do it! I was minding my own business and a voice from heaven said, 'Kill 'em all; it'll teach 'em a lesson!'"

Inhumanity became a sacred obligation with divine instructions from above. Still, there were drawbacks; a shortage of 747's and plastic explosives, to name but two. So for several centuries, the up close and personal approach was required; a sword through the guts, excruciating torture, and/or perfunctory decapitation. These were, at the time, the only means available for displaying one's utter devotion to the holy cause.

Admittedly, these crude methods may not have engendered the closeness with God one experiences by blowing up airliners and watching eternal re-runs of the blessed events on CNN, nevertheless, after a hard day at one's priestly office, hacking, slashing, and bludgeoning mounds of unrepentant sinners, one was left with the feeling that God was alive and well and all was right with the world.

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Eventually, war itself became holy and there were definite advantages to this. For one thing, the inconvenient rules of the Geneva Convention, which so burdened down secular troops were suspended for holy warriors. Indulgences were granted, exemptions extended. Such homilies as "thou shalt not kill" and "turn the other cheek" were summarily overlooked, while such minor infractions of the code of the west as the wholesale slaughter or extermination of entire civilizations not only were permitted, but gloriously rewarded with promises of eternal paradise in the heavenly realms.

As time went on, what with each new god having to be just a little bit tougher and smarter than the god next door, their job description began to incorporate the fantastic. It didn't take long for any deity worth his salt to be required to predict specifics. After all, how could disciples have faith in the hereafter of a God who couldn't handle the here and now? None of them seemed to be particularly good at it though. Initially, priests were blamed for malfeasance and, depending upon the level of offense taken by aggrieved potentates, either censured or boiled in oil.

Being a priest began to carry with it a certain amount of undesirable baggage. Perfection in prediction was unattainable, that much they knew. So a new device was fielded; the shotgun approach to prophecy. It worked like this: Disasters were bound to strike somewhere, sometime, so predict them all! The only hitch was they had to be vague enough on their time line so that when volcanoes belched, the earth shook, or the sky rumbled they had a sufficient quantity of previously released prophecies to fall back on.

There were, admittedly, a few drawbacks to this system; the age old problem of totally unpredictable enemies and disasters or a king who got drunk and demanded specificity. "I don't give a fuck about the end of the world! What's going to happen tomorrow, you bastards?" These refused to go away. But with a little subterfuge, the latter could be dealt with. A bit of double talk, a few bows and scrapes, that was all that was necessary. As for the former, when in doubt, predict victory. As time wore on, most problems were dealt with in this manner. As for the rest? Hell, something had to be left to the gods' discretion!

Priests had led lives of comparative ease and pleasure in those earlier days, but they were beginning to have their hands full trying to please impossible monarchs while maintaining control of the growing populations. As time went on, more and more specialized knowledge was re-

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quested and required both by kings and the peasantry. But the more knowledge priests discovered, the more advantageous it seemed to keep those discoveries to themselves. On the one hand, knowledge was power and, as far as priests were concerned, ignorant monarchs already had more than enough for their own good. On the other, they had to say something profound every now and then, or else.

So, priests were left with the sticky problem of how to disseminate enough information to keep their heads while reserving sufficient data to retain their office. Darwin's process of natural selection weeded out those who were unsuccessful in these endeavors, leaving only survivors to pass on their ever evolving skills and knowledge. (Although Darwin had not evolved yet, the process he was to discover had!)

Having solved these problems to the best of their abilities they were, they thought, once again free to turn their attentions to wine, women, and the sackbutt. But like everything else in life, success brought only more problems.

Since heaven was the abode of choice for the gods, it followed that the ministry, being on at least a "How ya doin' good buddy?" basis with its denizens, should know more than most about what went on up there. This was a belief nurtured and encouraged by soothsayers everywhere. The rub came when the gods who, as a breed, were a mischievous, unpredictable lot, set fire to heavenly objects and sent them careening through supposedly immutable night skies and did so with no prior warning to the hapless priests!

Many a head rolled in those days when comets and other debris left over from creation lit up the night skies for miles about. The problem was this; the gods lived in heaven, they were perfect, ergo their habitations must be as well. Otherwise they'd live down here on the cesspool called earth with the rest of creation's afterthoughts.

It was the priests' job to keep these gods mollified, thus preventing divine manifestations of holy wrath while keeping ignorant subjects appraised of their duties in order to avert those displays. And if priests weren't up to the job, they got the ax.

In their quest for enlightenment priests were finding out by default how natural systems really worked. It wasn't comfortable lore and often times conflicted with both faith and common sense, so such science as there was usually had to take a back seat to mysticism for the good of hearth and home. Still, knowledge, battered and bruised as it was by these conflicts, emerged. Some of the greatest advances in science and

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the humanities were actually discovered early on only to be lost again as the generating civilization either declined in power or began attending revival meetings.

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SCIENCE AND OTHER HERESIES

In the third century B.C., Eratosthenes of the city of Alexandria in Egypt, using a couple of sticks, a sunny day, and a knowledge of the distance between Alexandria and an outpost called Syene, calculated the difference between the length of the shadows those two sticks cast at noon on the same day and concluded the world was round. This experiment also told him how round it had to be; approximately 25,000 miles. Up until that time the earth was flat and got treated as such. Since Eratosthenes was fortunate enough to live in one of those rare epochs when new ideas were welcomed in the human arena. His discovery was accepted with polite interest instead of a date with the stake.

At the time a great library existed at Alexandria dedicated to the acquisition and contemplation of all that was known. At its zenith, it housed over 500,000 scrolls on every subject imaginable. There were scrolls on astronomy, physics, medicine, mathematics, and biology. There were operating theaters, classrooms, laboratories, and observatories; an imposing repository for all that was then known about the earth, the universe, and a human's place in it. This institution persisted for hundreds of years before it was trashed and burned by devout Christians at the behest of St. Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, and the earth once more became small and flat.

There were many reasons for welcoming back a flat earth and the benevolent rule of state religion. It was in the best interest of the political leaders, definitely in the interest of the clergy, and, strangely enough, in that of most of the population as well. This may be because, as a religion, science leaves much to be desired. After all, to properly understand it requires an open mind and a bit of thought, not a comfortable, blind faith. On top of that, science holds out no carrot of heaven or stick of hell. Add to that such agnostic heresies as "no privileged frames of reference", no beneficent (at least to believers) being overlooking the hopeless and sordid affairs of humankind, thus leaving one and all adrift in

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an anarchistic universe, throw in the fact that everybody was created by accident (as most parents readily admit) and it hardly adds up to much of a future!

The world of faith was simply a cozier place before satanic empiricism, far more knowable religiously than scientifically. To begin with the earth was, as any fool could plainly see and many did, flat. The sun, moon, and everything else, including the gods, revolved around it. Being flat, it went without saying one could walk to the edge and fall off. But that was all right; just knowing it all ended somewhere was a supreme comfort. Furthermore, the entire creation was, if one cared to ignore unsightly evidence and study existing dogma, carefully calculated to be only a few thousand years old, give or take the odd century. These were understandable numbers; they kept the race cosmetically young while, at the same time, reserving eternity to the discretion of the gods.

After the eradication of the pests of Alexandria, the world went back to religious standard time and gods reined supreme in the heavens once more. But a handful of malcontents (and there are always a few,) had been asking inconvenient questions in a land far away; dangerous questions like "Why?", "What if?", and "How about?", and cracks once more began to appear in the firmament.

It was the Greeks of course (who else?) who were doing the asking and those whose power depended upon a static, unchanging universe, uncomplicated by facts were not amused for they knew once peasants began asking, "What are we doing here,?" and, more importantly, "Where exactly is here?" more obvious questions would follow; questions priests are historically loathe to answer, like "Who in the hell are you?" or "Who elected you god?" And such blasphemies, left unchecked, had added more clergy to the unemployment rolls than any single factor in the history of the breed.

Greece, for many centuries, had held unbiased views about gods and goddesses, which is to say they worshiped everyone they could find. They were extremely diligent on this point, none must be left out, that was the idea and, just in case some reluctant deity or deities was lurking in the shadows, too shy to show him or herself, they erected a simple monument bearing the following inscription: To the Unknown God. Their bases were covered along with unmentionable parts of their anatomy.

With this smorgasbord of gods and goddesses, they could take their

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pick. There was no standing in line with the Greeks; religion was almost a home handicraft industry. If they couldn't find one to suit their needs they rolled their own.

That being the case, there were very few gods who were general practitioners in those days. Most were specialists; experts in their chosen fields. There were gods of agriculture; goddesses of love; weather gods; war gods; wind, hail, and fire insurance gods. The list was extensive and kept growing all the time, but they had begun to encounter serious competition from agnostics, better known as free thinkers; people who saw what had been and what was and asked, "But what if it isn't?"

In 450 B.C. Democritus had postulated that all matter is composed of atoms, a word he invented which in Greek means "unable to be cut" While Anaxagoras maintained that the moon shone by reflected light and was made of rather ordinary stuff. These were blasphemous notions at a time when the sun and moon were thought to be gods. Then there was Pythagoras. He'd lived in the sixth century B.C., long before Eratosthenes, and had deduced that the earth was a sphere rather than a rectangle. But an intellectual tug of war ensued between the factual and the incredible.

Eventually, the incredible won. The gods of Greece were granted a reprieve. A half-hearted attempt to blend the two ideologies was conceived but emerged stillborn and the views of Plato and Aristotle, that gods were lurking everywhere, that the heavens were their pure and undefiled abode, while the earth and all that in them is was sticky, icky, and thoroughly nasty, held sway for many a dismal century there after.

Enter the Romans. They had multiple gods, to be sure, but these were totally pagan and idolatrous deities. That is, they were far more interesting, functional, and fun than any heretofore. That they were a capricious lot cannot be doubted; they were. Nevertheless, they represented the loftiest ideals mankind had yet aspired to; war, sex, and total debauchery.

In the early days of the empire, Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus had comprised an original trinity which served the people well. But as time went on and the population grew, more specialized gods were demanded. Rather than go to all the trouble of inventing new ones, the practical Romans adopted them. This was a wise move on their part and served the empire well in several ways. First, it infused the tired ranks of their own supernatural with much needed new blood. After all, one could only slaughter so many pigs for so many years in honor of Jupiter be-

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fore it got a trifle old. Second, by adopting foreign gods from nations they'd conquered and granting them legitimacy, they welded the diverse factions of the empire together in a way their legions never could. And, in the end, their beliefs held something for everyone.

Of course, these gods had to be Latinized, but that was a simple procedure usually accomplished by merging the foreign with the native. In 217 B.C., the twelve Greek gods of Olympus were officially merged with their Roman equivalents: Zeus-Jupiter, Hera-Juno, Poseidon-Neptune, Athena-Diana, Hephaestus-Vulcan, Hesta-Vesta, Hermes-Mercury, and Demeter-Ceres. A quick personality transplant was done and the change-over was complete. The Romans were a tolerant lot, as barbarians go, and they continued the practice of adopting pitiful gods, orphaned by conquest, for many years.

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3 JESUS

Trouble of a subtle sort was brewing at this time in their back water colony of Judea. The Jewish clergy had been waiting forever for the coming of the Messiah. As they read the ancient prophecies, a full sized God was suppose to appear, kick the Romans' butts, establish truth, justice, and the Jewish way of life, and everybody but heretics and Gentiles would live happily ever after. One can imagine their surprise and shocked disbelief when fishermen, tax collectors, and ladies of the evening started claiming, not only to have met him, but actually to have been recruited by him to preach a message of love.

This made little sense to Pharisees; what could he possibly want with fishermen and whores? Besides, they knew what the Son of God was supposed to be like and this friend of solicitors and net tossers just didn't fit the bill. Their God was supposed to be all wise, omnipotent and all powerful, not the humble son of a carpenter.

To start with, his earthly place of origin was against him. Joseph and Mary, his stepfather and mother, lived in Nazareth, and nothing good could possibly come from there! The priests were certain of that. Nazareth was Poland, Middle East in those days. He'd lived a rather unremarkable life until his thirties. There was nothing in his looks or demeanor to set him apart from any other Jewish lad of the day. His troubles began when he started doing good. He was at a wedding feast when the host ran out of wine. Fermented grape juice was a staple of the era and most people preferred it to water which, in those pre-Kaopectate days, was likely to cause a roaring case of Pharisee's Revenge.

His first reported miracle involved the transmutation of wash water into wine. Jewish law required that all personnel, prior to eating, purify themselves by repetitiously washing all exposed areas of the body. To this end, they had six stone basins with a capacity of between twenty to thirty gallons each. Some of the water had already been used for its designated purpose, but the servants were instructed to top up the basins

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and the miracle was performed. Presumably, all prohibitionists got up at this point and bid their host a rather icy farewell, not because the wine had once been bath water (that they would drink!), but because it was now wine and that was a sin.

For this and other misdemeanors, the Lord of all the earth developed a rather sordid reputation for being a glutton and a wine bibber. Matters were not helped by his habit of speaking in riddles, his strange ideas about love for all people, (regardless of religious or political persuasion) respect for governmental authority, and the low priority he seemed to place on material acquisition. Moreover, he took to visiting the poor, the destitute, and the downtrodden. He went so far as to sit down and eat with these vermin. The righteous were aghast! What kind of savior was this who would come all the way down from heaven, ignore priests, yet have plenty of time to spend eating and drinking with scum?

But ordinary people began flocking to him by the thousands; there was even talk of making him king. Sensing this could cause problems with the Roman hierarchy and, coincidentally, to their own career opportunities, the prelates launched a sting operation against the Lord. They began by asking him questions deep and full of guile in hope of trapping him with his own words. No go. They tried pitting him against the Roman I.R.S. by asking if it was okay with God if you paid income tax. No good. Finally, they dragged in a woman caught, they said, in the very act of adultery and requested permission to show her the error of her ways by throwing rocks at her. They were told to holster their rocks and forced to beat a rather hasty retreat when gently reminded that their own white robes sported more than a few unsightly blemishes.

It is interesting to note that the woman's partner was not summarily hailed before this impromptu inquisition. One presumes she had a partner. If not, the crime of record would, whatever else its label, not have been adultery.

During his brief tenure here at the hind end of the galaxy, Jesus healed the sick, fed the multitudes, and preached the good news; he raised the dead, restored sight to the blind, and walked on water. Those less skeptical might consider these modest exercises proof of his bona fides, but every where he went the clergy kept asking him to perform ...miracles! In retrospect, One may wonder what the ancient criteria for a miracle entailed but, whatever he did, it was never enough.

He continued these subversive activities until the forbearance of the priesthood was taxed beyond all endurance. His good deeds and gentle

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riddles were judged to be proof of blasphemy, a capital offense in those enlightened times. As God fearing ministers, their duty was clear. They nailed him to a tree and let him hang there till he was dead.

This proved to be a tactical, if not strategic, mistake. "Jesus Lives" signs started going up everywhere, meetings were held, and believers began organizing in earnest. The church was on. Those who had spent the most time with him began to share their experiences with others and soon a new religious hierarchy was established, its leaders anointed.

At first, these neophytes encountered scant opposition and things went well. But as the movement progressed, it came to be viewed by members of the conventional clergy as a threat to the peace and stability of the realm. Something had to be done and fast. They started with the obvious by making it a crime to worship in any manner unapproved by the synagogue, a practice which had stood them in good stead in the past and one which they felt sure would do so far into the future.

But the faithful were not to be dissuaded by such home grown arguments. They politely ignored these hasty edicts, and the clergy was angered. Rebellion against what was, in their view, the duly constituted authority of priests could not be tolerated, so they confiscated the lands and personal possessions of anyone who so much as smiled at the name of Jesus. Still, the "way" grew. Pharisees resorted to flogging and imprisoning the most intractable of the zealots, but such draconian measures met with the limited success one might hope to achieve by attempting to extinguish a bonfire with kerosene. Whatever they did, it just made matters worse.

New converts were cropping up everywhere. Self styled "teachers of the way" were subverting hundreds of people daily, including many Pharisees; priests who were suppose to know better. And once converted, they couldn't be talked to, reasoned with, or threatened into silence. So the Pharisees tried another tack; extreme sanction.

Stephen, anointed a deacon by the original twelve apostles, was the first to go. Accused of the catch-all crime of blasphemy, he was dragged outside the city of Jerusalem and stoned to death by a mob of enraged priests. The first stage of persecution had begun. Emboldened by their actions and perhaps because Stephen, unlike Jesus, stayed dead, they went after everybody who so much as breathed the name of the Lord.

One of the most vociferous and dangerous of these inquisitors was Saul, later known as Paul the apostle. He was a wealthy, respected Pharisee and persecution was not a nine to five job with him. It was a way

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of life. But, due to circumstances beyond his belief, he too experienced conversion, joined the opposition and what had been, for the ruling elite, merely an ongoing battle against a strange and untenable belief, turned into all out war against heresy in the highest.

At least up to this time, the Jews had been regarded, even by their detractors, as being somehow special in God's eyes; his called and chosen people. But Paul the Pharisee, in cohorts with Peter the Zealot, began preaching that all humans, regardless of race, sex, or national origin, were God's children and heirs according to the promises. This was the last straw! It was bad enough to challenge sacrificial Mosaic law or to question the continued need to slaughter sheep and goats, but to query the sacred premise that all Jews were created special or to openly infer that God the Father was some kind of equal opportunity creator, this didn't track. Followers of Jesus were declared to have forfeited their rights to all due process and religiously tortured to death by the thousands.

Eventually, even the Romans got into the act and, by ninety-nine A.D., none of the original twelve apostles remained alive. Of those twelve, only John escaped martyrdom, dying in exile on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. After John's death, the persecutions continued uninterrupted for a good nine hundred years during which time birth control for Christians was practiced by attrition.

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4

THE CATHOLICS

By this time, Catholicism had become the state religion of what was now the Holy Roman Empire. They, too, had been targets of Roman persecution in the early days. Now that they were in charge, things would be different...and they were.

Freedom to be a Catholic was guaranteed by state decree. Not only that, it was required. Catholicism started out as a skeleton belief and had to be fleshed out as it grew. Like the Romans, they developed a habit of adopting foreign gods and the questionable, but gratifying, festivities that went with them. But, as they had no existing gods to merge them with and since the Almighty wasn't amenable to cross breeding, a new device had to be invented. They Christianized the festivals and jettisoned the gods.

By the year 861 A.D., Catholicism had evolved into a complicated system of belief and spread far beyond its point of origin. Not everybody was happy with this phenomenon. Greeks, Turks, and Moslems, in particular, had honest differences of opinion with Rome over such minor doctrinal issues as, "Who is God, really?" and "Who do you think you are?"

In an attempt to clarify papal thinking on the matter, Pope Nicholas I issued an edict humbly assuming control of the entire world. Greeks, Turks, and Moslems were not amused and diplomatic relations with the Holy See, already badly strained, deteriorated even further.

A succession of popes from Silvester II, who was murdered May 17, 1003, to Damasus II, who died of poison August 9, 1048, continued to try to assert their authority over religion in general and everybody in particular. Things might have continued in this vein indefinitely were it not for the crusades.

The crusades were an early attempt to preach the gospel to all men. Crusaders, displaying the red cross of Christ on their body armor, went door to door in Moslem lands, raping, massacring, and looting as they

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went. No records were kept on the number of souls thus saved for Christ, but much heathen loot was converted to Christian wealth in this manner. This method of proselytizing went on for several hundred years as uncounted thousands were forcibly induced to "give their lives to the Lord". Militarily, the crusades were a Christian defeat; economically, they were a financial disaster. The defeat they could live with, but the bills had to be paid.

Indulgences offered a way out of this dilemma. These sacred writs of Habeas Corpus had been around for years so there was precedence for their usage. The theory went like this: Up in heaven, God the Father kept a running tally on everyone's deeds, good or bad. Heavenly merits were posted daily to the accounts of those whose good deeds outweighed their bad and, though it was widely preached that the human race as a whole was a decadent, disgusting, lust filled lot which had not improved one damned iota over the eons, curiously enough, more merits than demerits had been posted. This proved extremely beneficial for the papacy since it was thought that the church had the authority to post excess merits to the accounts of those who had led less than exemplary lives.

At first, indulgences pardoned only the buyer and only for sins past, but the program soon became such a financial success that it was hastily expanded. In 1476, Pope Sixtus IV concluded that those whose souls were roasting uncomfortably in purgatory, who had never had a chance to buy their way out, should also be eligible for post-mortem relief; as long as relatives were willing to pay retroactive insurance premiums. Rates of exchange were, to be sure, proportional to the seriousness of one's indiscretions but, as a matter of practicality, nearly any offense could be laundered, up to and including murder, rape, or theft, as long as no serious breaches of etiquette occurred, such as questioning the infallibility of the pope or suggesting the world might be round. These were crimes for which there was no propitiation. Not now! Not ever!

Forgiveness, then, became a commodity to be sold or traded as commerce allowed. Representatives of the church traveled far and wide hawking these guilt edged certificates of pardon like raffle tickets. It wasn't long till they could be purchased on the installment plan and saved up for sins one planned to commit but hadn't yet gotten around to!

This was the plan all humanity had been waiting for, a practical program designed by saints with sinners in mind. One now had access to

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the divine balance sheets with their sins forgiven to sins outstanding ratio. At last! Someone had taken all the infuriating guess work out of heaven and hell. That this could be accomplished while straightening out some growing kinks in the holy cash flow of Pope Leo X didn't hurt matters any.

Pope Leo lived, by a simple monastic axiom: "Begin gloriously, live gloriously, die gloriously!" In pursuit of these lofty ideals, he had racked up appalling debts of over 840,000 ducats. He owed 240,000 to various banks in Florence, each of which charged a modest 40% in usury fees, compounded at the banker's earliest convenience. The rest was in unsecured personal loans from friends and cardinals. And, still, he hadn't a spare pair of ducats to rub together.

It wasn't for lack of trying, though. He'd raised the price of a cardinalate from 25,000 to 70,000 ducats, increased papal taxes on wine, vinegar, and alum; but nothing seemed to work. He'd even tried his hand at cards and the Roman lottery called *Primiera*. Try as he might, there was still a problem so, from his point of view, Martin Luther and the newly invented printing press could take a hike.

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5

THE PROTESTANTS

Martin Luther was the brilliant, but inwardly tortured, son of middle class parents. Born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483, he was an introspective child and opted for clerical studies. Ordained a priest in April of 1507, he taught for several years before receiving a doctorate in theology on October 12, 1512.

But years of diligent study were insufficient to drive spiritual demons of doubt from his soul. No matter how hard he prayed or how long he fasted, no matter how many hail Mary's he said or how much penance he did, he always felt inwardly unforgiven and totally unclean in the sight of God. Poring over the scriptures one dark and gloomy day, he was on the verge of wishing he'd never been born, when a passage he'd read a hundred times leapt out at him: "The just shall live by faith."

Suddenly, it all made sense! He felt reborn; renewed; relieved. Those horrible fasts, endless prayers, and costly indulgences, they all meant nothing. If he just had faith, he would be forgiven, it was that simple. For Luther, the Pearly Gates were flung wide open. Religious Relativity had come of age. There were no privileged frames of reference.

This didn't go over too well with John Tetzel, the Dominican Commissar who happened to be in town that month. He'd been selling indulgences as if souls depended on them and raking in a tidy profit on the side. Since, as Commissar, he outranked Luther in the Catholic hierarchy, he couldn't very well be told to haul ass, just like that. Nevertheless, Luther's troublesome conscience informed him that something had to be done.

Over the years, other practices of the Great Mother Church had stuck in his craw just as badly. In days past, he'd always managed to look the other way; not so this time. Luther, perhaps emboldened by his new found righteousness, wrote them down, all ninety five of them, and in what may have been the greatest trick or treat ever played, nailed them to the great church door at Wittenberg on October 31, Halloween night,

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1517. Despite the prominence of their posting they weren't meant to be read by the masses. His was a priestly protest, an internal bargain Luther struck between his conscience and his respect for authority, no matter how unrespectable that authority might be. So he wrote them in Latin, the language of priests, which common folk could not read and did not understand. But there were other merry pranksters out that fateful Halloween night besides Brother Luther. Thanks to them and the recent invention of the printing press, Luther's Latin protests were quickly translated into German and spread throughout the country for inquiring minds everywhere.

One of those inquiring minds belonged to the local archbishop, who swiftly forwarded the heretical documents to Rome. The papacy hit the fan. After the dust had settled at St. Peter's and the initial shock had worn off, Pope Leo, who disliked confrontations of any sort, decided to apply some diplomatic balm first. This got him nowhere with the unruly priest. Next, he tried threats, the results of which were similarly disappointing. Nothing seemed to work so, finally, an impartial delegation of cardinals was convened in Augsburg the following October. Luther was invited to appear before them and was swiftly presented with non-negotiable demands for immediate recantation of, and perpetual silence on, his thesis. He said he'd think about it. He did, but kept on complaining anyway.

On January 3, 1521, long suffering Pope Leo had enough and the Vatican Press began cranking out "Exsurge Dominae", the Papal Bull of Excommunication, which began: "Arise O Lord, a wild bull hath invaded Thy vineyard". But he was too late. The bull had already left the vineyard and was busy in other parts of the realm. The Reformation had begun.

Pope Leo kept hoping the whole thing would shrivel up and blow away, but it didn't. The German press had seen to that. Increasing the virulency of papal attacks on Luther's character and thesis had only prompted that Mad Monk to flood the German countryside with a veritable deluge of tracts and heretical pamphlets, this time written in German, to the undisguised glee of the populace and the joy of anti-Roman intellectuals everywhere.

Next, Luther began to address questions they all felt were long overdue in the asking. What was even more damning, as far as Rome was concerned, were his answers. Luther started by maintaining that forgiveness was a gift from God, not a pastoral commodity. He discounted

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the need for indulgences or priestly go between's between man and God. He decried the use of Latin in mass, which ordinary people could neither read nor understand and, as for celibacy, well, if God had wanted people to remain celibate, he wouldn't have invented sex.

With Luther was Firebrick the Wise, protector of Saxony and the German people. With Pope Leo were the cardinals, archbishops, and indulgence peddlers and, in between, a rift in Christendom which opened wide and only grew larger with the passage of years.

Luther died in bed, February 18, 1546, in the city of his birth, the founding father of Protestantism. With a new player now upon the world's religious stage, the possibilities for conflict, passion, and intrigue increased immensely. Its inclusion meant fresh and subtle nuances to live, kill, and die for, more kingdoms to be overthrown, new and better heresies to maim and torture for, and a multitude of kings, queens, and knights who would desperately need beheading! The situation wasn't so bad. The future was bright with promise.

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6

HENRY THE VIII

Though Martin Luther had died, the movement he engineered refused to. England in particular became a prickly thorn in the Papal Rump; not because the English were zealously drawn to Protestantism out of some religious fervor. They weren't. It was a matter of economical, political, and sexual practicality.

Economical, because the Catholic Church had, over the years, laid claim to real estate holdings amounting to roughly one third of the English realm. The Abbot of St. Albans and Bishop of Winchester, for example, controlled more real-estate and revenue than all the nobility put together. That being the case, the king saw no harm in challenging the church's claims to these holdings.

Politically, because the abuses of the church, such as corruption, worldliness, and the power to exercise the rule of absolute law over kings, noblemen, and the peasantry alike, did little to endear Church and State to one another.

And sexually; well, there was this little matter of Henry the VIII, who maintained quite verbally that "Kings of England had no superiors" in England, or anywhere else for that matter. King Henry, however, did have a problem; his wife. She was, in the good king's view, old and ugly. Moreover, she was getting older and uglier every day and she was still alive, that was the problem. Because as long as she was, and as long as they were Catholic, he was stuck with her.

He'd asked for a divorce but got turned down by the pope. Ordinarily, the new pope, Clement VII, would have granted the king a divorce on general principals. The rich and famous usually had no trouble from religious quarters in these matters. But this case was far from ordinary. King Henry was married to his own sister-in-law, her royal highness, Queen Catherine, and she had every intention of remaining Queen Catherine, Henry's over-active libido notwithstanding.

Because of their former close relationship, he'd had to get a special

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papal dispensation to marry her in the first place. So for Pope Clement to now grant Henry a dissolution based on the king's sudden realization that marrying his brother's wife was an affront to man and God, well, first he'd have to admit the papacy had erred in its original findings which, in and of itself, was a theological impossibility. Moreover, Catherine was the aunt of Charles V, Emperor of Spain, who, at this time, was acting as Lord Protectorate of the pope and much of Christendom besides. Pope Clement was not about to risk incurring the wrath of his defender and benefactor and Charles V was adamantly determined that Aunt Catherine remain Queen of England.

Not wishing to offend either of these special interest groups, Pope Clement did the politically correct thing; when in doubt, stall! He appointed a commission to study the matter. No doubt they'd be studying still were it not for shrill protests from an enraged King Henry.

After two years further study, a cardinal named Campeggio was dispatched to England with secret instructions to inquire diligently but resolve nothing, which he did to the satisfaction of the pope, the appeasement of Charles, and the mounting wrath of the King. Several more years of ecumenical wrangling did little to mollify that wrath. Finally, the English Parliament was called in to session and asked to determine just who, Pope or King, was the supreme law of the land. It didn't take the House of Lords long to realize that, if they declared the pope "persona non grata," they could then declare vast papal holdings "ours free and clear." So, before the pontiff could say, "Ave Moreia" Parliament, in 1534, declared the Crown to be the legitimate head of the English Church.

Henry could write his own ticket; which he promptly did. He wrote a one way ticket for the old "ball and chain." And the ink was scarcely dry on the royal divorce decree before Henry married an obviously pregnant, but radiantly happy, Anne Boleyn. The Queen wasn't the only thing new in Henry's life, though. He had a fresh perspective on religion.

He'd come to realize that, as king, he derived his powers from none other than God Almighty. This insight was not a unique one. Kings all the way back to Constantine had wondered just what it was that set them apart from, and above other men. The answer, obviously, was God! And this was a comforting revelation; to know that among the called and chosen, you were a bit more called and a lot more chosen! It was a handy tool in ending arguments, too. "God told me I could" silenced the

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most vociferous critics; after all, there was no sense arguing with God, even by proxy.

The divine right of kings to rule was but one facet of Henry's new found faith. Other intuitions would follow.

If he ruled at the express pleasure of the Lord, then it only stood to reason that he was as much a Vicar of Christ as the pope. Even more so actually, because he was the legitimate King of England to boot...and the pontiff? Why hell, he was just the pope...of nowhere in particular at the moment. Certainly not of England; Henry and his counselors were seeing to that.

They began by granting his holiness prompt relief from many of his weightier burdens, such as ownership and administration of English papal lands. They graciously allowed him to retire from the tedious practice of English law and, rather overtly, removed him as supreme head of religious affairs in the realm. The once dominant force in Christian life was left with three, and only three, sacraments to administer: Baptism, Holy Communion, and Penance.

As far as the fun loving Henry was concerned, they could go damned easy on the penance! Sackcloth and ashes were not his cup of tea. It one could pay penance while making out with a new queen every few years or so, fine; if not, snatch your shadow and don't let the drawbridge whack you on the fanny! By the time he died on January 27, 1547, he'd done as much as anyone, even Luther whom he despised and once called a raving heretic, to further the cause of Protestantism.

Throughout the next few centuries, a continuing tug-of-war ensued for the hearts, minds, total devotion, not to mention the loot of, everybody. Defenders of the faith on both sides dispossessed, tortured, and slaughtered each other by the thousands for the love of God and in furtherance of his great name. But there were other forces at work, some as dark and equally sinister as the competing faiths themselves, while others were a natural result of a human's need to know just what it was that made things work.

With the invention of new technologies, exploration of the unknown became semi-respectable. Since God no longer required the earth to remain flat, it became round and pirates of many nations and diverse faiths set off to discover just how round it was. They didn't expect to find what they did and when they found America, they weren't sure what they had!

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7

AMERICA

This mysterious continent had been discovered years before. Aside from a few zealous conquistadors who, under the sign cross, were anxious to enslave the general population, rape the native women, and steal all the gold they could lay their hands on, no one had paid much attention to the place. But things had changed. Now it was being claimed by everyone who could row a boat. This had to be stopped.

The papacy still claimed divine rights to the entire planet, discovered or not. So, in the interest of fair play, it generously divided up the entire continent between Spain and Portugal. Counter claims were immediately filed by France, Holland, Sweden, and England. But there was another very real problem confronting these urban developers; somebody was already living here. The lights were on and, though the indigenous citizenry were, in most cases, predisposed to invite polite travelers into their tepees for crumpets and tea, they became understandably upset when scruffy seafaring vagabonds attempted to evict them from the premises.

The Pilgrims left England for America in search of religious freedom, to settle a new land where they could worship their god as they pleased, and make everyone else worship their god as they pleased too, or else! When they first set foot on these shores, their god was fairly well defined. He functioned best in well ordered patriarchies, demanded total, unconditional obedience, punished the slightest of infractions with death everlasting and, other than that, was an all around nice guy. But this new place was not at all well ordered. Other than the ocean, it had no borders and the only law was what people had brought with them. Because of this and the almost total isolation imposed from without, their god slowly evolved to fit his disparate environment. There is little doubt he started out normally enough, as gods go; a prohibitionist to the core. Anything that tasted, felt, or looked good was automatically fast tracked to his "Thou Shalt Not" list.

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There were no frills in the promised land and he didn't go in for pomp and circumstance anyway, which was just as well, for there was a severe shortage of pomp in the area and an over abundance of circumstance, usually beyond anyone's control.

The changes came slowly to be sure, their speed and direction contingent upon the faith of believers for, although the Pilgrims, and Puritans who came later, espoused one God, their religious motivations for coming to the new world were quite different.

The Pilgrims came here to be left alone and worship in peace. They landed at Plymouth Rock in the fall of 1620. Of the hundred or so souls who stepped ashore that cold November day, only about a third were hopeless fundamentalists. The rest were employees, servants, and worst of all, artisans; and many of these had been overheard by brethren on the Mayflower to remark that once they set foot in the new world they could do as they pleased.

This was not a pleasant prospect in the estimation of the called and chosen. They'd come here to worship God as they saw fit, not live in some anarchistic commune where everybody did as they saw fit, so they bought and cajoled enough votes to give themselves a majority, crafted a document which gave them the authority to pass laws and impede progress, and called it the Mayflower Compact.

The Mayflower Compact, in its final form, represented some of the first legislation ever introduced in this country by a special interest group. Like all special interest groups, their unstated purpose in introducing it was to subvert the democratic process by imposing the will of the minority on the majority, a ruse which has served politicians well ever since. This instrument, they felt, would guarantee them what they'd come here for in the first place; to be left alone and worship in peace.

The Puritans, who arrived about ten years after the Pilgrims, were not only seeking freedom of religion; they were on a mission from God. England was, as anyone could see, on her last legs. She was suffering from moral rot and spiritual decay. They were the spiritual cavalry, summoned to usher in a new era of godliness and selected to restore the Edenic covenant with their Creator. Pilgrims and Puritans were in full agreement that the Bible was the Holy Word of God, that every pen stroke was divinely inspired and meant what it said. What they disagreed on, along with every other Christian faith, was what was meant by what was said.

Popular scriptural quotations, from the Puritan point of view, dealt

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with the spiritual renewal and physical resettlement of a people restored in the eyes of God to a nearly pristine state of being, all to take place in the wilderness of the North American promised land. The Lord himself was Biblically quoted as having said that his people would inherit "a wilderness unto the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, this shall be your coast" and "I will plant my people Israel in a place of their own, and they shall move no more, neither will they be troubled by the wicked."

The definition of what was or was not wicked or what kind of trouble they might cause was highly subjective, however. No one knew what it meant so the rule of thumb, rather than the rule of reason, prevailed. Which is to say, those who had the most thumbs, or as in the case of many religious leaders, those who were all thumbs, ruled. And anyone or anything which caused them personal discomfort or challenged them on any level was automatically labeled wicked.

This was a handy dodge for communities based on righteousness. Declaring a group or a person wicked relieved the pure at heart of any responsibility under the law to act...responsibly. There were no checks and balances with the rule of righteousness. Authority under these conditions derived not from the consent of the governed, but was envisioned to emanate downward from God through whatever human being happened to be in power at the time. And there were some strange human beings floating around those days.

As usual, no two leaders could agree precisely on just what God was about, so dust storms soon raged in humanity's newest sand box. The debates grew so acrimonious between the years 1635 to 1640 that mass defections reached epidemic proportions and new villages of the discontented took root all over New England. On top of this, more immigrants were arriving each month bringing with them their own belief systems. Soon there were so many versions of God on the loose no one could keep track of them all. They did have one thing in common, however. They were overwhelmingly Protestant.

Protestants in the new world came in all flavors and they lived up to their heritage. They were highly individualistic. Denominationally they didn't agree among themselves on much of anything. And they were not by nature inclined to blindly play follow the leader, desirable characteristics in a country about to be conceived in protest. By the outset of hostilities with England, almost every Christian faith known to humans had been established in the new world and there were several which

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were evolving which were unique to the continent. There were Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Mennonites, Lutherans, Dunkers, German Reformed, Moravians, Quakers, and Shakers.

Because of the diversity of early American religions, religious freedom of choice was tolerated out of self defense. No one belief was ever sufficiently powerful to impose its values on others. This was just as well because a great many newcomers to the promised land attended no church at all. They came to hunt and fish and that was about as close to paradise as they hoped to get. Others could go to heaven if they chose or go to hell if they got in the way.

These and other intellectual anomalies were encoded into the very D.N.A. of the embryonic nation; D.N.A., in the view of fervent fundamentalists as standing for "Damn Nearly Atheist."

The idea that such a conglomerate of nationalities or religions could ever get together and agree about anything, much less form a new nation based on the simplistic implausibility of individual freedom, required a martyr's faith in the intrinsic good of human nature, a common enemy, or, better yet, a miracle. The miracle came in the form of a common enemy, good old human nature.

In 1763, Mother England, continued to finance her royal Empire and standard of living through time honored tax and spend policies. But like all previous proponents of legalized larceny they always spent twice as much as they took in. They desperately needed new revenues, and since they had no Social Security System to loot, and hadn't yet invented off budget financing. they decided to try a limited form of taxation upon their colonies.

Emboldened by an initial lack of outright revolt, taxes and tariffs were soon increased and broadened to cover a wide range of goods and services. A Stamp Act was initiated requiring a special stamp to be affixed to all documents and even newspapers, soldiers were quartered in private residences, and taxes were increased further. The situation became intolerable and the people revolted.

The first Colonial Congress, represented by North and South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, was called into session. A bill of states' rights was swiftly drafted and, by April 9, 1775, the Revolutionary War had begun.

On June 11, 1776, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Rodger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston were given the un-

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enviable task of crafting a document which stated with unequivocal succinctness that the doctrine of the divine right of kings to rule was not unconditional, that it was possible for even a king to overstep the bounds of propriety after which all bets were off, and any legitimate obligations previously owed by the populace to the dictatorial swine in question were regarded as having been paid in full. Thus, the Declaration of Independence was not created for consumption at home, but rather for foreigners abroad who, like as not, were subject to heads of state still laboring under the misconception that, as rulers, they governed under divine auspices.

Several rough drafts of this declaration were made and a semi-final version was submitted to the committee. Amendments, additions, and deletions were incorporated and, by June 28, 1776, the declaration was presented to Congress. Four days later, on July 2, the representatives met to consider and debate the contents of the document. Late in the afternoon of July 4, 1776, the declaration was adopted but, contrary to American mythology, it was not signed on that date. It remained unsigned until August 2 and, even then, only a few actually penned their names. Many more months would pass before it bore the signatures of the men now revered for its conception.

In spite of the righteousness of their cause, the belief of the divine right of kings was so inbred that even the most dedicated of patriots were secretly troubled by what they were about to do. It is no accident, therefore, that of the 1,335 words of which the Declaration of Independence consists, 1,177 of those words were a political "Bull of Excommunication" designed to divest their English king of his God given rights to rule with impunity. With this goal now accomplished and the colonists at last in agreement that God was on their side, a successful war was waged, resulting in overwhelming victory for the heretics on April 19, 1783.

Some of the greatest political and philosophical minds of that era cobbled together the modest makings of a democratic republic. Their words of wit, wisdom, naivete, and elitism were soon enshrined forever on a series of now nearly sacred documents.

The Constitution of the United States went into effect June 21, 1788. Like much contemporary legislation, it guaranteed the rights of the government to govern. It guaranteed no individual rights whatsoever and since individual liberty was what many had risked all to attain, this seemed, at best, unacceptable, so due to public sentiment and not gov-

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ernmental largess, a bill of rights specifying personal liberties was ratified. It became the law of the land on December 15, 1791, a full fifteen years after the fact.

The amendments to the constitution were soon being quoted, unquoted, and misquoted to such an extent that the original meanings were blurred and distorted by constant retelling over the years. Soon, there were so many versions of what was meant by what was said that only the newly christened priesthood of lawyers and judges were entrusted with definitive interpretation.

Neither freedom of religion nor separation of church and state were ever mentioned in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution of the United States. The Bill of Rights makes no mention of them, either, other than to state in Article One that "the Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise." It was only thus that freedom to believe what you chose was interpreted to be an individual's implied constitutional prerogative.

It was just as well no collusion of Church and State was ever attempted because, with such a diverse group as the founding fathers, none was possible. Their personal beliefs encompassed the entire spectrum from George Washington, the devout Anglican, to Thomas Jefferson, the devout skeptic.

Not all the architects of freedom were so reluctant to enmesh the federal government in the affairs of the church, though. Patrick Henry, of "Give me liberty or give me death!" fame, publically advocated a national tax assessment, the proceeds of which were to be divided up between all Christian churches. George Washington initially favored this plan, but a heartless group of heretical constituents, unmoved by a pitiful vision of orphaned churches dotting the rural countryside adopted Benjamin Franklin's views on the subject. The good doctor had stated on more than one occasion that "Any religion which is good can and should support itself and any that aren't deserve no support." In the end, his sentiments carried the day.

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8

THE SHAKERS

Bishops, priests, and ministers of all faiths were now stuck with having to establish the credibility of their doctrines based on the acceptance of those doctrines by parishioners. Belief could no longer be enforced by decree. To the clergy this was a nightmare, if people can't be forced people to worship God, how could religion survive? For these and several other reasons, many bedraggled shepherds of the flock had only two words to say about liberty: "Freedom sucks!"

There was a silver lining to their dark cloud, though, because if the church was no longer allowed to overtly meddle in affairs of state, the trade off was the state would not meddle in affairs of the church. Minister's could preach whatever the public was willing to believe. Inventiveness counted here to, because no preacher ever went broke over estimating the critical reasoning of people determined to believe.

Several faiths, truly unique to North America, were conceived about this time and utopian experimentation soon began. It came in two basic flavors, past and future. For those who looked to the past for spiritual sustenance, paradise was to be found in a regression to purer, simpler times, a return to the garden as it were; this time with an eye towards doing it right. The Shakers were of this sort. For those who looked to the future, perfection of the saints was attainable by a sure and steady progression into that future, further improvements in the breed to accrue as a natural result of progressive enlightenment. This school of thought was championed by Mormons and Christian Scientists. The eighteenth century was as fertile soil for these new beliefs. Gods still reigned supreme in the heavens. They were the source of all prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge (so it was curious that they were still appalled by the way their creations had turned out). Nevertheless, they were at least attempting to make contact with their offspring via visions and revelations. But even these divine overtures did little to eradicate the deep seated spiritual psychosis and extreme social maladaptation which

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seemed to characterize the human race.

Perhaps this is not to be wondered at, though. After all, in the infancy of the breed, they had been kicked out of the house for eating apples, and left to wander the earth, rejected and homeless over a single mistake. If this wasn't punishment enough, Mother, in the guise of the church, had been telling the kids for years that Dad, in the guise of God, was coming home soon, at which time all bad little boys and girls (which presumably included damn near everybody, except Mother Theresa) were going to catch holy hell.

But the Lord chose not to grace the earth with his presence during those days. So sinners remained unrepentant, while the righteous continued to pray. Among the righteous was Mother Ann Lee. A remarkable woman, which is to say that many made remarks about her, some of which did not bear repeating. Her husband undoubtedly made a few, because after she had given birth to four children, all of whom died in infancy, she came to the quite natural conclusion that sex was the problem. If she hadn't had sex, she wouldn't have had them. If she hadn't had them, they wouldn't have died. In the cold light of this frigid logic, she promptly cut her husband off. Forever!

She was originally a Quaker, a name derived from their habit of "quaking" while in the presence of the Lord. For Mother Ann and several others, however, this pastime soon became blase so they joined a more fervent offshoot called the 'Shaking Quakers'. Their meetings started off quietly enough with a few obligatory bumps and grinds and the odd howl or two, but things soon deteriorated as "the powers on high overshadowed them" and "a mighty trembling infused the holy congregation" as they were afflicted by the very power of God Almighty!

The palsied shrieking and speaking in tongues went on all night and far into the wee hours of the morning, after which they retired to their respective homes to regroup for another night of devotion.

None of these activities endeared them to those who lived nearby, though. Complaints and other more tangible tokens of their neighbor's displeasure soon surfaced. In light of what was obvious religious persecution, Mother Ann and her flock bought land near Albany, New York on which to live, worship, and farm independently. They intended to create the perfect Christian society on earth, ruled not by man but by god, which is fortunate because Mother Ann, not being a man, was now regarded by her flock as the living embodiment of the second coming.

The Shaker communities at first had no real difficulty attracting new

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converts. They settled in cloistered communes in New York, New England, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky. In the end, it was not their preoccupation with shaking but, rather, their aversion to sex which did them in.

Ann Lee's death on September 8, 1784 further shattered the communities and, over the years, this experiment in utopia died out altogether. This was not the end of imaginative doctrine in America, however. Other inventive beliefs, were in the making. Where one failed, another might succeed. And although filthy, vile sex was once again to rear its lascivious head in new congregations of the called and chosen, it would never again be a lack of it which would cause all the problems.

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9

THE MORMONS

One bright spring day in 1820, fourteen year old Joseph Smith had a vision, the first of many. He lived with his parents in rural New York State in an area known as "the burned over district." It was named that because it was home to Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists who, unwilling to wait for the Lord and his holy fires of hell to settle religious disputes, torched each other's homes, barns, and fields, with such zeal that the whole area truly had been burned over!

The young man reflected upon these happenings and began to wonder if divine arson really was the answer to interdenominational disputes and which, if any, of the competing faiths was the correct one. This was the first question he asked God the Father and Jesus Christ when they appeared to him in a vision. The Lord Jesus replied that all organized religions were an abomination in his sight. Joseph Smith would have to start one that was disorganized. But the lad was given no clear directions on how to go about his task and no advice was forthcoming.

The Show ended and it was three years later on September 21, 1823 before he had another vision. This time it was just a messenger from God however, and not the genuine article, He identified himself as the angel Moroni and told the teenager God had work for him to do. He was to journey to Mount Cumorah and dig up some golden plates which had been hidden there many years before by Mormon, the hitherto unknown prophet, of a hitherto unknown race called the Nephites.

It seems that 7,000 years before the birth of Christ, the Nephites had been, in the best of Christian traditions, engaged in perpetual warfare with a neighboring tribe called the Lamanites. Now while the reasons for their disputes remain as obscure as the tribes themselves, the upshot was that the Nephite prophet, Mormon, dismayed by the lack of brotherhood displayed by both sides, resigned his post as official seer and sought career opportunities elsewhere.

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He buried the sacred plates in accordance with divine instructions and was about to embark as a freelance when he was ambushed and killed by the treacherous Lamanites. And these were the very plates Smitty was commanded to dig up.

He followed the angels instructions dutifully, uncovered the golden discs and was about to take possession of them when, at the last moment, Moroni appeared and told him he couldn't remove them for four years. He was instructed, however, to visit them once a year.

This he proceeded to do and finally, in the year 1827, he was given permission to remove the tablets from their cubby hole on Mount Cumorah and commanded to decipher them. But the plates were inscribed in the language of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians and were, therefore, indecipherable to the illiterate farm hand. Thankfully, the box containing the plates also contained the "Urim" and the "Thummim."

What the Urim and the Thummim were, or how they did what they did, is murky at best. They were alleged to be mystical objects of great antiquity which had once been attached to the vestments of the Israelite's high priest in ancient Jerusalem. How they ended up in Mount Cumorah remains a mystery but, with their help, Joseph Smith was able to begin the laborious process of translating the golden plates.

Even with their help, the enterprise was a rocky one, and more visions were required to help the process along. Moroni appeared several more times to assist in ironing out some of the more stubborn doctrinal wrinkles. Toward the end of it all, John the Baptist appeared from his heavenly abode, offered a few words of advice and comfort, and conferred upon the no doubt bashful prophet the order of the "Aaronic Priesthood." The Book of Mormon was completed in June 1879, and soon made available in devotional bookstores everywhere.

With the laborious process of translation completed, Joseph Smith called together the select group of individuals who, over the course of time, had been made privy to the secrets of his book. As the party progressed, a show of hands from all present was called for to determine the advisability of forming their own church. The vote was unanimous; the "Yea's" had it, so Mr. Smith and his trusty sidekick, Oliver Cowdery, promptly anointed each other elders, first and second class of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. An impromptu reception was immediately held for the newly christened pair, at which time holy bread and, quite out of keeping with sacred revelation, alcoholic spirits were served.

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The fundamentalist message which was delivered to Mr. Smith of work, hope, and the possibility of at least a smidgen of earthly happiness for all God's creatures was a welcome change to many from the seemingly limitless expanse of hellfire and brimstone awaiting all but the select few in Protestant mythology. At least, with the Mormons you had a fighting chance. New converts were swiftly added and the church grew and prospered.

They soon began to experience growing pains, however. One of the problems was this business of divine revelation. It got totally out of hand. An apparently highly contagious condition, it had begun to afflict not only old hands, like prophet number one, but newly baptized babes in Christ, as well. Little documentation exists to confirm who was seeing and hearing what, but all involved at the time agreed; something had to be done.

As luck would have it, Moroni presented himself once more to the confused prophet and told him that, henceforth, only his visions were to be regarded as authentic. This simplified matters greatly and the torrent of contraband revelations slowed to a trickle. Other problems soon surfaced, however, because even though much of what the saints believed was in perfect accordance with the varying faiths of their protestant neighbors, some of it wasn't. Moreover, they were still undeniably newcomers to the Christian block and as such were viewed as upstarts.

Inter-denominational displeasure was not alleviated by the fact that many conventional parishioners, drawn in no small part by the sense of purpose and dedication evidenced by the saints, were defecting to their ranks in record numbers.

Because of this, various denominations who heretofore were not even on speaking terms with one another, banded together to combat the "Mormon enemy." Taking a page from their own history, the good Christians figuratively threw the saints to the lions. They did so, in many cases, with official sanction.

The "Mormons", as they were called, were presented as a sinister threat to the moral decency of the nation as a whole; and to the chastity of women in particular. Joseph Smith hadn't helped matters any by permitting the biblical practice of polygamy and God fearing Christians everywhere were soon made aware of this facet of the saints theology. Lurid descriptions of a pure American womanhood, violated and defiled by hordes of insatiable, lust filled Mormons were soon being preached via newspaper and pulpit to the shock and revulsion of de-

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cent Christians everywhere. An enraged citizenry, horrified by this nefarious threat to the national virtue, rose up against the saints in righteous wrath and began ejecting them from their communities.

They were driven from settlement to settlement, always heading west toward the frontier. They sojourned briefly in Missouri but, Southern Hospitality not being then what it allegedly is now, they were cordially invited to leave. After some intense misunderstandings, the governor of Missouri, the Right Honorable Lilburn W. Boggs, ordered the state militia to "exterminate" the sect or, failing that, to "drive them from the state for the public good." Not being ones to shrink from their civic duty, 3,000 or so heavily armed militiamen and federal troops attempted to carry out his honor's final solution. They attacked Mormon communities and shot inhabitants on sight. Finally, an elder, George M. Hinkle, affectionately known in Mormon lore as "Judas", arranged for the capture of Joseph Smith, his brother, and several others.

In those happier days, the American criminal justice system was largely unburdened by legal technicalities. Such niceties such as probable cause or unlawful search and seizure were unheard of. In spite of these deficiencies, however, one's right to a speedy trial was never questioned. It was just that, for many, the trial was a bit too speedy, and in this case the legalities were dispensed with altogether. The accused were considered convicted and General Samuel Lucas ordered their immediate execution by firing squad.

Fortunately for the condemned, the officer who received the order, Colonel Alexander Doniphan, had serious reservations about the propriety of the whole affair and refused to carry out the order. The prisoners were eventually released but the stories, exaggerations, and gossip with which the unbiased American press seems to delight, continued to fly thick and fast.

The prophet and his brother finally turned themselves in to answer a morass of charges which were now being leveled against them from all quarters. They were immediately incarcerated in the county jail in Carthage, Missouri on June 26, 1844. About 5:00 p.m. the following day, they were shot to death in their cell by members of the Carthage Militia. In death, Joseph Smith achieved what no human can in life; the status of a martyr.

The absence of the prophet created a short term power vacuum in the Mormon hierarchy but, within a month, the dust had settled and Brigham Young was recognized as Joseph Smith's successor. After many

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more trials and many dusty miles, a faithful core of believers encamped near the shores of the Great Salt Lake in present day Utah and set about building a well ordered town designed by design, rather than urban sprawl.

Hard work and self reliance allowed them to prosper surprisingly well in this "land no one wanted." To be sure, they eventually had to abide by incomprehensible governmental regulations as future waves of immigrants overtook and swept past them but, by that time, most men had come to the undeniable conclusion that the cons far outweighed the pros when dealing with multiple wives. Unlike the Shakers, they adapted to changing realities. Unlike them, they are here today.

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10

THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS

Ellen Gould Harmon born on November 26, 1827 in Gorham, Maine, was the last of eight children. Her parents were strict Methodists. In 1840, the whole family attended a revival meeting presided over by William Miller, a Baptist who, through intense scriptural study, had come to the more or less humdrum conclusion that the world was coming to an end. In and of itself, this was news to no one; Christians the world over had long suspected as much. What was truly astonishing was Miller had figured out when.

He'd been carefully perusing the more prophetic books of the Bible. Like many a hard riding prophet before him, he found the eighth and ninth chapters of Daniel particularly intriguing. Verse fourteen of chapter eight seemed to offer intriguing possibilities. The 2,300 days mentioned in this passage had fascinated many scholars over the years, the more inventive of which had decided that prophetic days were not the same as real days. Each prophetic day, from their point of view, was equal to one year, for those of a conservative frame of mind, or one thousand years for the slightly more liberal.

Mr. Miller opted for the conservative interpretation, added 2,300 years to the date 457 B.C., the year those particular verses in Daniel were thought to have been written, and discovered, if not to his amazement then certainly to that of many others, that Jesus Christ was slated to make planetfall on or about March 21, 1843.

Elated by this glorious prospect, he wasted no time in sharing the glad news with his friends and neighbors. He began to write books and hold meetings so that humanity might properly prepare itself to meet its maker. It was one of these meetings which thirteen year old Ellen Harmon attended with her parents in 1840.

Mom and Dad were converted on the spot, joined a happy throng of joyous neophytes, and began making hurried preparations for their Savior's second coming. As the appointed day approached there was, no

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doubt, a breathless air of anticipation in the households of the faithful everywhere.

To this day, no one knows what prompted their Lord to change his itinerary, inclement weather, perhaps, or a hard day at the Pearly Gates; it could have been anything. Suffice it to say, he never showed up and the disappointed faithful crept down off the mountain tops where they had been waiting on what they presumed would be front row seats. Under the cover of darkness, they snuck back to their homes, hoping against hope that their neighbors wouldn't notice.

This fiasco ended William Miller's brief career in the heavenly pony express. Scorned and unforgiven by those he sought to save, he was unceremoniously excommunicated from his church and died a lonely man in 1849.

Young Ellen Harmon remained convinced the Lord would return however, it was only a matter of time. And, for her, the Lord did come. She started having visions shortly after her seventeenth birthday in December of 1844. She wasn't required to go and look for lost plates or anything like that but, in form and content, the visions were remarkably similar to those of others afflicted with this condition.

Jesus appeared to her on many of these occasions and, among other things, gave her a sneak preview of the many trials and tribulations she was to endure. Being at best, a reluctant prophetess, she begged to be released from these horrid responsibilities, but the Lord was adamant. She was it and that was that!

Unaccountably, she never asked the Lord why he was tardy or just what time to expect him in the future, even though a recently revised estimate had fixed the date as October 22, 1844. Since it was already December, there was obviously a hitch somewhere, but where? Jesus was perfect; that much was known. The trouble couldn't possibly originate with him. The problem, whatever it was, had to lie with his obstinate children or their sloppy method of time keeping. A diligent search of the scriptures finally provided the missing equation.

Jesus had not returned because Christians had not been keeping the Sabbath on the appropriate day. The Sabbath, it turned out, was to be kept on Saturday, not Sunday. This seemingly trivial inconsistency on the part of Christendom had, somehow, so fouled up the holy space-time continuum that there was now no telling when the Lord would return. And if things didn't shape up fast down here, there was no reason to suspect that he might want to.

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Since Saturday was the true day of rest and no established religions seemed to be keeping it, a new church was obviously required. And the seeds that were planted in the mind of a shy thirteen year old at a long forgotten revival meeting became, in time, the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

In the process of its inception, Ellen Gould Harmon met and married fellow believer, James White, thus becoming Mrs. Ellen Gould White in 1846.

Their fledgling church faced the usual financial hardships endemic to such creations, plus the traditional hazings, ritually imposed by the older established religions on young upstarts. Nevertheless, the church grew and prospered. Ellen's visions and revelations continued unabated and, by the time she died in 1915 at age eighty-eight, she had had over 2,000 of them. She passed most of them on to the faithful in the form of divine admonitions and teachings. But in spite of her close, personal contact with the Lord, he apparently never confided to her the true date of his second coming or, if he did, it remained their secret.

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11

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

The 1820's saw more charter members of the F.P.A. (Future Prophets of America) born than at any other time in its history. Among the chosen born that auspicious decade was Mary M. Baker. Like Ellen Harmon, she was the last child born in her family. Her parents, Mark and Abigail Baker, were devout Congregationalists, a stern, strait-laced church originally established in New England by the Puritans. They believed in the doctrine of predestination, which was almost astrological in its consequences. In their view, you were either born saved or you weren't and there was nothing you could do to alter your post-partum situation.

Known as the doctrine of "Unconditional Election", it was like being elected president for life without the bother of having to run for the office. This was highly uncomfortable dogma for wretches who, whatever the reason, had cause to doubt the validity of their own spiritual election; because the downside to this belief was drastic. For those who were born damned, there wasn't a damn thing they could do about it. And it didn't matter how good they tried to be in this life, either. The un-called and unchosen, were fucked. Pure and simple!

For those lucky few who just knew they had been born saved, however, life couldn't have been sweeter; for it didn't seem to matter how big an asshole they made of themselves in this life, the eternally saved went to heaven no matter what!

This was the environment into which little Mary Baker was born. She was a fragile child, afflicted with nervous ailments and extremely introverted. By age twelve, her favorite pastimes were sitting in her rocking chair and reading the Bible. She began hearing voices and acting so strangely, though, that her father finally confiscated the Holy Scriptures and forced her to go outdoors and play with children her own age.

But one of her problems was the Bible. She was having trouble reconciling an arbitrary God of predestination, who apparently punched

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each ticket at the moment of conception, with the God of love portrayed in the Bible.

By age seventeen, Mary had reached a compromise with the impetuous God of the Congregationalists. And she was soon joined in the bonds of holy matrimony with a well to do gentleman who happened to be a slave owner. Mary held definite abolitionist views on the subject, however, so their marriage was a rocky one.

In June 1844, her husband died. She had no wish to own slaves, but it was against the law to set them free, so she left them all behind and returned to her parents' home in New Hampshire.

Afflicted with spinal weakness and spasmodic seizures, she was unable to live a normal life but, as her health allowed, she rendered what assistance she could to the abolitionist movement. As the years went past, she began to search out the mysteries of God and the path to true health.

One winter's day when she was out for one of her rare walks, she slipped and fell on an ice covered street near her home. It was a nasty fall and a hastily summoned doctor diagnosed severe concussion, spinal dislocation, and possible internal injuries. In her already weakened condition, she was not expected to live. Family, friends, and a Protestant minister gathered around her bedside so she would not be alone when the awful moment came.

It was at this juncture that she asked them all to leave her bedroom that she might be alone with her God and her Bible. When the guests had graciously complied, Mary opened the Good Book to Matthew chapter nine, verse two, which related Jesus' miraculous healing of a man afflicted with palsy. As she read, she experienced a mystical euphoria quite outside the realm of human experience. She met God face to face and could "touch and handle the unseen." Instantaneously, her body was healed, all earthly sadness turned to unspeakable joy! And she heard the voice of God speaking to her and saying, "Arise daughter and walk," which she promptly did, to the confusion and astonishment of those in the next room who had come to comfort her in her final hours.

Mary Baker determined from that moment on to search out the true principals of God, life, and health. It was a long and sometimes lonely path she had set out upon, but she finally discovered that reality, as experienced by human beings, is the problem. The world, as perceived by the senses, does not in fact exist; it's all in your head. That was the message.

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The only reality is the divine mind of God. Everything else is illusion, including mental and physical illnesses. If a person were solidly in touch with the divine mind, illusions would disappear along with the phantoms of disease. This knowledge, she reasoned, could be taught to others and, if correct, should result in miraculous healings. It worked. At least, that's what the true believers who began flocking around her said. In one short period of time, she resurrected a dead four year old who apparently really believed he was dead, healed an old man suffering from intestinal blockage and, to the utter disbelief of crisis intervention personnel everywhere, healed the mind of a madman who had broken into her house and was about to brain her with a wooden chair.

And the healing frenzy went on. No disease presented too great a challenge to those who saw clearly. T. B. fled at the sound of her footsteps, arthritis made for the nearest exit, while social diseases hauled ass at the merest mention of her name. No malady could stand before the logic of the Lord, as embodied by this woman.

She started a school for those who wished to emulate her and married one of her graduate students, Asa Eddy, and, as Mary Baker Eddy, began to publish the first of many pamphlets and articles dealing with the Christian Science of Health.

In the beginning, she vainly imagined that her discoveries would be eagerly accepted by traditional churches of the day, but it was not to be. Quite uncharitably, her works were viewed by the conventional clergy as misguided at best and heresy at worst, so she started her own church.

The Christian Science Association was established in 1876 and finally incorporated as a church in 1890. Their beliefs in many areas of doctrine bear witness to their Protestant roots, but they depart from the norm in significant areas of their theology. They hypothesize that all matter is illusion, that physical illness is a misperception of reality which can be corrected by spiritual enlightenment. They have no professional priesthood as such and they enjoin one to prove these precepts beyond all doubt rather than merely accepting them, for they maintain that a blind belief, masquerading as faith, will be destroyed by the potent illusion of existence.

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But many of those other faiths had little to snicker about. Some of their "gods" truly were nonexistent and were destined to always remain so, because nonexistent gods are really the only known way to solve some of the more notable divine character defects, such as jealousy, rage, greed, and intolerance.

One of the problems inherent in the propagation of gods as ruthless and arbitrary as those of even conventional Christianity is in teaching that concept to growing children. For one thing, children need a good night's sleep. They aren't likely to get one left all alone in the dark, waiting for the vicious, bloodthirsty god of the adult world to pounce on them for that cookie they snitched a few hours earlier when Mother wasn't looking. These beings are just too scary, definitely "R" rated gods, and, totally unsuitable for those below the age of seventeen. A surrogate was desperately required. The inexorable law of capitalism, demand determines supply, eventually provided one.

A largely Germanic invention, this interim deity achieved social respectability in the late 1800's. The business of America at this time was rapidly becoming business and, aside from being a bland enough entree for small children's religious digestive tracts, this new tidbit was definitely good for commerce. He even appeared, from a merchant's point of view at least, at a fortuitous time of year and it was, thus, that on the evening of December twenty-fourth, between the hours of sundown to sunup, an obese elf of retarded vocabulary began visiting the homes of all children, good or otherwise, in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, almost everywhere kinder, gentler gods are sold, leaving behind a trail of toys, candy, and other bribes to insure the recipient's future good conduct, while rewarding that of the year past. For those who had led less than exemplary lives, the worst they could expect was a lump of coal in their stockings, presumably an omen from the nether regions. But, at least, this could be lived with and little helions who perhaps needed it most could at last get a good night's sleep.

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13

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Charles Russell was a haberdasher in Allegheny, New York; one of those demented individuals who felt their calling in life was to find the most uncomfortable attire possible for fashion conscientious males and convince them that they just couldn't live without cummerbunds and neckties. Like little Mary Baker, he was originally a devout Congregationalist, but after thoroughly ingesting their theology he had, to the amazement of agnostics nowhere, begun to doubt the truth of the Bible, at least in the way it had been taught to him.

The second coming of Christ was among the prophecies of the good book which Congregationalists routinely ignored. Yes, the Lord might some day return, but as far as they were concerned the exact date was none of their business.

Charlie disagreed; what could possibly be more important than the spiritual homecoming? So, he and a small group of followers perused the scriptures in their spare time and, in the course of their studies, discovered that Christ had already returned; inexplicably, and invisibly, in the autumn of 1874. Not only that, but for reasons known only to him, the Lord intended to remain invisible until 1914.

This joyous news must be shared, that was the feeling; so Charlie & Co. began to publish their findings in religious tracts called the "Watchtower and the herald of Christ's presence."

On the one hand, those who read Russell's writings were shocked to discover that their Lord had crept up on them, just like that; but on the other, many were secretly grateful he was waiting until 1914 to show himself. It gave them much needed time to mend their ways.

Although the methods by which Mr. Russell derived his data were incomprehensible to most people, his conclusions were highly appealing, after all, who didn't want Christ to return?

Charles Russell continued studying and refining his calculations which, considering the subject matter, always seemed to need refining.

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In 1912, he constructed a photo drama using what was then, state of the art motion picture and sound technology. The subject was the creation and it purported to show the sequence of events from 4026 B.C., the date he set for its inception, on into what was the future and date of Christ's return. It might have been regarded as a prophetic masterpiece in later years except for one minor flaw. 1914 came and went without so much as a "Howdy" from the Lord. Russell hastily re-examined his scriptural references, looked around at the uncertain state the world was in, and concluded that Christ had indeed come back in 1914, but quickly returned to the heavens whence he came.

Apparently, there had not been enough of the prophesied wars, pestilences, famines, and earthquakes to suit the Lord's taste and he was waiting them out. He seemed content to continue waiting, too, because Russell died in 1916 and never lived to see the fulfillment of his predictions.

The ensuing power grab that went on in the high command of the Watchtower Society was acrimonious, to say the least. But when the smoke of battle finally cleared, Judge Joseph F. Rutherford was president. He swiftly imposed his prophetic views on the faithful, and those who couldn't abide his dictatorial style were immediately disfellowshipped.

Having been a judge and a tyrannical one at that, he distrusted any civil power which didn't emanate from him. This attitude was liberally reflected in many of his personal decisions, which soon made their way into the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In his view, worldly governments were obviously not Christian so Christians were not obliged to render them any obeisance, whatsoever. The pledge of allegiance and the practice of saluting the flag, any flag, were activities verboten!

Military service was contravened. Catholics, Jews, Christians; their respective faiths were regarded as products of Satanic deception and anything to do with them, their beliefs, and even the observance of holidays, like Christmas, Easter, or Halloween were considered activities incompatible with Christ's appointed.

With nothing but worldly pagans running around loose, this naturally left only them to bear Jehovah's witness in a godless world of demonic excess. And there was little time left; that much was certain. For the Lord would return in fiery zeal and wrath unquenchable to wreak his righteous havoc upon a stubborn and stiff necked humanity, and it was up to them to get out the word.

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Since they had, in their estimation, such a short time left to accomplish this task, they dared not trust to just the printed word. The need was urgent. So they began going door to door in neighborhoods all across this land. For them, this was a perfectly legitimate response to a very real problem. The response of many neighbors, however, was far from enthusiastic.

Americans, as a group, are just as religious as the next guy, provided the next guy isn't Billy Graham. They'll tolerate nearly any idiocy they can comfortably remain ignorant of. What they will not abide, in any shape or form, is door to door salvation salesmen.

There is no doubt these wandering Puritans meant well. That they believed in what they were doing cannot be doubted; after all, they had to be a true believers and a half to take the kind of verbal abuse Americans are capable of dishing out to people who invade the sanctity of their homes. And that was what the Witnesses could never understand. People who wanted to hear tales from the crypt were already out there, intently listening to their favorite prophet of doom. Those who didn't spent their spare time with family and the last thing they wanted to hear about during quality time were chilling tales of Armageddon.

There were other reasons the Witnesses' philosophy never caught on in a big way in this country, though. Conventional religions are bad enough; they screw up half of each weekend as it is. With the Witnesses, however, almost all that spare time is spoken for. So much so in fact that there's not even enough time left to go on a decent drunk. And that's not the worst of it. In their estimation, only a select few get to go to heaven. And that lucky number is so small that when it's plotted against the total number of individuals who have ever lived on the planet, it's hardly worth the saving! Let alone the bother.

This lucky number turns out to be 144,000. And it's the product of an arbitrary selection process, as well. A heavenly draft, and like the draft there's not a damn thing one can do to alter the inevitable. If you're not one of the few, the proud, and the incredibly lucky, the best you can hope for is a physical life span, so long it just seems like forever, right here on good old Planet Earth.

Judge Rutherford remained at the helm of the Watch Tower Society through one and a half world wars. He never lost faith that the end was near. During World War I, he and several other Witnesses who politely declined Uncle Sam's gracious invitation to join in the fray, were tried and convicted for the grievous offense of "unlawfully, feloniously, and

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willfully" (which one had to assume said it all) "caused insubordination and disloyalty by refusing servitude in the military and Naval forces of the United States while at war." Rutherford got eighty years for his impudence, the others lesser terms. All were released from prison when the war ended, however.

The judge died during the middle of the second "war to end all wars," a dispute in which the Witnesses once again refused to take part. Despite the implied constitutional edict mandating an individual's right to freely practice one's religion, it was rapidly becoming clear that such freedoms had definite limitations.

When it's the enemy's time to die, that was it, and there was to be no second guessing kindly Uncle Sam. Even a war with the popularity rating World War II received was insufficient motivation for Jehovah's Witnesses to alter their view point on killing their fellow man. Unlike the deities of other faiths, their God was, in their estimation, perfectly capable of doing his own killing without any help from them.

In keeping with Biblical protocol requiring all true Christians to be in subjection to worldly governments insofar as those requirements didn't conflict with the laws of God, they were quite willing to serve the nation in noncombatant capacities. Some were allowed to fulfill their magnanimous uncle's demands in this manner, but many others who received their hearing in front of less sympathetic judges ended up in the crowbar hotel for refusing to compromise their religious beliefs.

After World War II, the world continued its slippery slide into decadence, decay, and licentiousness, so the Witnesses remain convinced that the human race is, thank God, living in the "last days." They are, therefore, positive that Jesus will return soon to smite the wicked, ban evolutionary science, and elevate the righteous to positions of eminent rulership in New Jerusalem.

With no one left alive but Saints, however, it is unclear who they will rule over.

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14

THE UNCHURCHED

By the mid-1800's, America had become the religious supermarket of the world. Every traditional faith had found a home here and many that were nontraditional were making it their home. Among those settling the wild west were thoroughly independent "unchurched" Americans. They'd come here to hunt, fish, and trap, and they took a dim view of any government, secular or religious, which arrogantly assumed it had some god-given right to interfere in their lives. To their way of thinking, people either knew the difference between right and wrong or they didn't. If they didn't they had problems no amount of preaching would cure. And if they did, what in the hell did they need to be reminded of it every week for?

Despite their seeming irreverence and lack of subservience, they weren't atheists or agnostics. They believed in a real god, of sorts, but they suspected he had a lot more important things to do with his time than dog people's footsteps twenty-four hours a day, just waiting for them to screw up. Their concept of God was a lot broader than that, hence, they chose not to affiliate themselves with any particular belief.

Many of them were "deists" who felt that the very word "religion" carried with it unfortunate connotations of strife, bigotry, and oppression. They believed a Supreme Being created everything, alright, but they believed he knew what he was doing. They were of the opinion that everything was working out just fine down here, quite according to a divine plan which was probably none of their business, anyway.

God required no hired help, that was the theory. In their view, everything was under control, so career opportunities among them for unemployed or would-be clergy were nonexistent. Naturally, this endeared them to none of the established religions whatever. If beliefs like this caught on, preachers everywhere would have to start earning an honest living. Such fears were groundless, however, for there always seemed to be a sufficient number of sheep who needed fleecing and they more than made up for those who didn't.

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THE UNITARIANS

Hard on the heels of the Unchurched were Unitarian Universalists, a comfortably vague name for a comfortably vague belief. Theirs was couch potato religion at its finest. For Unitarians, God was whatever the consumer decided he was. They were the original religious relativists. Their God enjoyed no privileged frame of reference, as such. To them, the Bible was just a nice collection of books written by a motley crew of various personages. It could, perhaps, lay claim to a certain amount of divine inspiration, but only because, in their view, all people are divine by nature.

Having never met Genghis Kahn, Attila the Hun, or me before I have my first cup of coffee in the morning, they are of the opinion that all men are inherently good!

They reject without so much as a "pardon me" the idea that the Bible is the handiwork of God. Their idea of Holy Communion is a coffee break after services, which are held whenever they get around to it and, since life itself is a sacrament, they see no need in glorifying the obvious. As far as the virgin birth goes, if Mary was a virgin, that was her business, nobody else's.

Prayer, to their way of thinking, is anachronistic. There's probably nobody upstairs listening anyhow, so most veteran Unitarians meditate when they feel like talking to themselves. Heaven and hell are states of mind, not real places, and how anyone could preach about them and a god of all encompassing love in the same breath is proof positive that neither could exist.

They don't go door to door or attempt to proselytize anyone. They consider religion to be a personal and private matter. Becoming a Unitarian is simple; many people are, without even knowing it. Those who believe in the value of every individual are willing to live and let live, are open to new knowledge and understanding, and willing to welcome all others in an open religious community regardless of race, sex, or creed, are already there!

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16

THE VOLSTEAD ACT

Unitarian theology and the willingness of mainstream Protestant churches to accommodate changing realities were regarded as godlessness under different names by many fundamentalists. The Lord and his teachings must not be compromised.

Hints of Darwinian evolution had been creeping into the collective consciousness of the nation at this time and the righteous were appalled. Humans evolving from monkeys? An earth far older than 6,000 years? Missing links? Well, there some links missing all right, but only in the craniums of the scientific idiot's who thought up this garbage!

Humans were the noblest expression of God's creation. Not the by-products of chance copulation by a pair of oversexed orangutans. Were ones grandparents apes? What were their grandparents then? Renegade particles of warm ocean slime? Of course not. It was obvious to them that the human race was the result of Divine Family Planning.

There was a sublime orderliness to the world that belied evolution. The earth was made for humans. The atmosphere was composed of appropriate gases in exactly the correct quantities necessary for human existence. Planetary temperatures were as painstakingly crafted for the Eskimos who had been created in Alaska as they were for Arabs who had been created in the desert. There were plenty of plants and animals to eat and an abundance of fresh water to drink. Perfection is no accident. Thus, the very idea of a creation without a creator was ludicrous.

These Sunday appetizers provided a welcome entree to an otherwise steady diet of shake and bake, fried Christianity. Some jaded parishioners actually began looking forward to Sabbath services and not with an eye toward self improvement either, but rather to hear for themselves what new outrages an agnostic scientific community had heaped upon God during the week.

By the 1920's, those outrages included such tools of the devil as telephones, railroads, steamboats, and airplanes, to name but a few, and still

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more hellish inventions were rumored to be on the way. Fundamentalism at this time enjoyed a period of revival. Not that any two persuasions managed to agree on what they thought the Bible said; they didn't. What they all agreed on was what they thought science was saying, which it usually wasn't.

On the basis of these misperceptions, hard core fundamentalists swiftly abandoned their uneasy truce with democracy. Separation of Church and State was one thing, but this was war! Their first target was education which, considering the kind of support religion had historically provided for the educated (namely, the stake), was hardly surprising. They goaded legislators in over thirty-three states to introduce bills banning the teaching of evolutionary science, bills which actually passed in Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, and a host of other, mainly southern, states.

The Theory of Evolution in these states was then blamed for "the progressive worsening of crime, delinquency, immorality, and war." It was paving the way for an increase in agnosticism, atheism, and Communism.

The situation was desperate. America's virtue was on was on the line. True believers everywhere saddled up to ride. They put on their breastplates of self-righteousness and armed themselves with their two edged swords. They hadn't had an enemy this definable since the last Mormon was shot. Victory seemed inevitable.

But when they got to the battlefield, no one was there.

Darwin had been dead for quite awhile, by this time. All that was left was just an idea and, try as they might, they couldn't burn that at the stake. So, in an expression of Evolution at its finest, Religion adapted to fit its changing environment, and increasing numbers of theologians adopted the Theory as the method by which God chose to create the universe.

Although Church and State were legally separated, they continued to pay each other conjugal visits from time to time. In 1874, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, or W.C.T.U., was founded. They were, apparently, not content to let their conscience be just their guide; they wanted it to be everybody's guide, or else.

Carrie Nation from Medicine Lodge, Kansas, was a charter member of W.C.T.U. Seized with the zeal of the newly converted, she began patronizing local saloons in her area with a vengeance (and a hatchet). She was determined to rid the earth of "demon rum." There were women

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who were welcome in saloons at that time but Ms. Nation was not one of them. She was the kind of woman who would rather make one man miserable than a lot of men happy.

One woman with a hatchet may disrupt the quiet fellowship of a local bar temporarily, but that's about it. In 1895, however, the situation changed. A group of preachers, teachers, and businessmen incorporated to form the Anti-Saloon League of America. They hired their own political lobbyist, Wayne Wheeler. Patiently and methodically they worked state by state until the required majority of states had ratified an article of prohibition. On January 16, 1920, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, banning the production, sale, and consumption of any beverage containing more than 0.5% alcohol, became the law of the land.

Wheeler, not the country's duly elected representatives, was the author of the Federal Enforcement statutes and although this, in and of itself, was unconstitutional, it was viewed as a trifling misdemeanor which was easily disregarded when compared to the felonious behavior it was designed to inhibit.

Wheeler & Company were a modest lot. They unselfishly allowed the Republican Representative from Minnesota, Andrew Volsted, to take the credit (and, if necessary, the rap) for their creation. The enforcement provisions mandated a hefty \$1000.00 fine and/or six months in the slammer for first time offenders. With a law in place that would make even Ms. Carrie smile, the political goals of religion, at the expense of personal liberties, had at last been achieved, or so they thought.

But prohibitionists had apparently forgotten what it was that had gotten humans kicked out of the garden the first time. Now that liquor was illegal, men and women who, heretofore, would not have been caught dead in a saloon found themselves tormented by a desire to drink and carouse! Speakeasies, which derived their name from the obvious necessities of stealth and secrecy, sprang up virtually overnight. While sly references about "striking a blow for liberty" were intuitively understood by all, and thus alcohol, far from being vilified became equated with freedom itself.

The Volsted Act was repealed in 1933. Having never achieved the popularity of the Masters and Johnson Act, it was a dismal failure. Utah became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the 21st Amendment to the Constitution repealing Prohibition on December 5, 1933. Liquor was once again legal. It wasn't any too soon, either. The country was in the throes of an economic depression, organized crime was corrupting the morals

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of innocent politicians, and a world war was threatening. If ever a nation needed a drink, it was America.

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HE MASTERS & JOHNSON ACT

The Masters and Johnson act has never been, even in these enlightened days, recognized as the truly great religion it ought to be. Yet, with literally billions of devoted practitioners worldwide, it is conceivably one of the most passionately held beliefs women and men have ever embraced.

This belief espouses only the naked truth as its sole sacrament and is ideally predicated upon the twin pinnacles of love and devotion, culminating hopefully in a deeper and more intimate understanding with a fellow human being.

For many converts, mere lip service seems to suffice, while for others various kneeling and supine postures are required for heightened sensations of religious ecstasy

Due to the obvious dedication of its many adherents, thousands of potential converts are initiated every day, usually at the climax of evening services. Of all major religions it is the least recognized, yet widely spread, belief on earth.

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THE WORLD TOMORROW

From his teenage years on, Herbert W. Armstrong's self-stated ambition was to become wealthy, powerful and a valued cohort of both rich and famous alike. As a means to this end, he went into the advertising business, counting on it to fulfill these altruistic ambitions. God, however, perverse joker that he is, threw one monkeywrench after another in the young man's path, curtailing his career at every turn. The fact that the nation was still in the midst of a severe economic depression, or that the lad might have been slightly inept at his chosen occupation, had little or nothing to do with his initial and subsequent failures. As he would later tell the story from the pulpit, it was God, and God alone, who was responsible for the sabotage.

Failure after failure, however, finally forced him to re-evaluate his life and goals, and to his shock and dismay he began to see himself for what he truly was, to see himself through God's eyes (as he would later become fond of saying), and he fell to his knees in abject prayer before the Lord of Hosts, realizing at last, what a wretched, despicable, revolting piece of scum he truly was. He repented on the spot and determined that, from thence forward, he would dedicate his life to telling everybody else that they were, too.

Where to start was a daunting prospect, however, for there seemed to be an unusually large number of people out there who had no desire to hear this good news. He began to search for God's true church. His initial attempts to find just the right one were complicated by the fact that there were so many faiths to choose from. A cursory examination of their dizzying variety of beliefs led him to hypothesize that, even from a purely parochial point of view, they couldn't all be right.

It would hardly do to worship the Lord of Hosts in an imperfect manner, of that he was sure. One must be painstakingly precise when worshipping an entity so unpredictably prone to wrath and violence as the God of the Bible. After many more prayer-filled nights and studious

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days, God, according to Herbert, began, bit by bit, to make Holy Truths (many of which had been prophetically sealed for centuries) known to his chosen servant.

To start with, ninety-eight percent of the churches worldwide were irrevocably and unquestionably pagan. Parishioners attended services on Sunday (when they attended at all), whereas the true day of rest and devotion was Saturday. This revelation, quite naturally, narrowed the field of likely candidates considerably.

Herbert and his wife, Loma, thus, began attending the Church of God Seventh Day. For awhile, it appeared that they had, at last, found their niche. Herbert was soon ordained an elder and, later, actually began to preach at times to the local congregation which was modestly growing. Thorny doctrinal issues began to arise, however, as more newcomers swelled the, hitherto, rather stagnant ranks of the organization so, heeding the biblical admonition that wisdom is to be found in a multitude of counselors, a council of twelve was appointed to look into and render judgment on all controversial matters of scriptural interpretation. Herbert, unbelievably, was not among the twelve.

He promptly tendered his resignation. After many more days and bitter nights of prayer, fasting and soul searching, God revealed to him that this, too, was part of his divine plan and that, in fact, Herbert was "a chosen and consecrated vessel prepared from before the foundation of the world to usher in that final era of God's great work on earth," which Christians the world over had long looked forward to. Toward this end, he was commanded to start a new church based on the faith once delivered to the Saints.

Due to the rather shaky financial predicament of God's chosen vessel, this awesome ministry began humbly, in the 1930's in a ramshackle, one room Oregon school house. The first parishioners were a small circle of friends and a few neighbors.

Due to continuing deficiencies in the holy cash flow of the enterprise, the little flock was, almost immediately, made aware of a providential revelation concerning tithing. God had commanded, they were told, that ten percent of their gross, unadjusted incomes, which included the crops from their gardens, all firstborn male sheep, cows and goats (and anything else fit to eat, drink or wear), were to be handed over to the ministry, forthwith.

God continued to reveal additional "mysteries of the kingdom" to Herbert W. at a breath taking pace as more of those chosen from before

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the foundation of the world were added weekly to the congregation.

Due to the requisite increase in tithes, offerings, livestock and dry-goods brought on by increased membership, fasting became less of a necessity. Herbert was able to purchase state of the art communications equipment, a mimeograph machine, to spread the good news far and wide. Soon after that acquisition, he was able to buy time on a local radio station. Hundreds, thousands and, by the late fifties, tens of thousands were thus able to hear Herbert's spiritually uplifting message, as inspired by God, that humans were, individually and collectively, selfish, gluttonous, disgusting swine, fit only to be damned, char broiled alive and trampled under the holy feet of the righteous (whoever they might be), and that he, Herbert, stood before the door to eternal life, holding it open just a crack, so that those whom God had truly called might slip on through.

As time went on, the fledgling church grew to such an extent that a name, differentiating it from all the other called and chosen religious entities of the day, became an absolute necessity. After much prayer and goal-specific fasting by the entire congregation, the inspired name of "The Radio Church of God" was selected (this remained the divinely inspired name from the 1940's through to the 1970's, when God, unaccountably, changed his mind and re-inspired his faithful servant to convert its name to "The World Wide Church of God").

Herbert now possessed sufficient funds to "give himself over completely to the ministry." He studied day and night often uncovering, in the wee hours of the morning, new biblical truths that other religions had either missed or ignored.

Many of the first born were astounded to learn that, irrespective of their diverse ancestral heritages, they were all Israelites. A thorough study of history and the Bible made that plain. America, Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, France, Ireland, and Holland were, in fact, the lost ten tribes of Israel. Herbert had discovered their "Roots!"

Furthermore, even though Christ had returned, was crucified and died for everybody's sins, no one, in fact, was yet forgiven. One had to earn that free gift by living one's life according to a strict code of conduct, which was being constantly updated by Herbert.

To begin with, those traditional religious holidays celebrated by a majority of Christian churches were an absolute abomination in God's (and Herbert's) sight. Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter and Halloween

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were pagan festivities of a most idolatrous sort. They were, primarily, Babylonian in origin and had been adopted as a recruiting inducement by that great harlot in Italy, the Roman Catholic Church, in a nefarious attempt to corrupt and deceive biblically unsophisticated masses the world over. However, all was not lost; God had provided suitable replacements in lieu of Sunday and the holidays.

The Sabbath, all were taught, was the beginning. For this was the day, their theology had it, that God, after creating the entire universe in one week (6000 years ago) had settled down to rest and admire his handiwork. On that day, all Christians were to do likewise. A problem arose for some of the called at this point since, having never created universes themselves the previous week, they really had nothing to rest up from.

Herbert's Idea of a properly kept Sabbath bordered on an egregious violation of America's constitutional prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. Sabbath began, in his estimation, at sundown on Friday. From then on, until sundown Saturday, no form of activity outside of reading Herbert W.'s private interpretations of the Bible was permitted.

On the big day, the called and chosen bestirred themselves from their mild mannered walks of life, donned such formal attire as they were financially capable of affording after taxes, tithes and obligatory offerings, and strode forth to become the future masters of the universe.

A rented hall was God's chosen arena for their weekly metamorphosis, tastefully furnished with the most uncomfortable fold out steel or wooden slat chairs humanity had, at that point in time, been able to devise. And it was here that they sat, while Herbert preached, for three or four hours at a whack.

By the nineteen-fifties the organization, thanks largely to the technology of radio, had grown and spread to many cities throughout the northwestern United States and Canada. Herbert, despite his awesome calling, had discovered that he could not be everywhere at once. New teachers of the way were desperately needed so, with an abundance of tithes and offerings in his pocket, he started Ambassador College, his own private college of theology in Pasadena, California. Its mission would be to turn out a ministry steeped and indoctrinated in the gospel according to Herbert.

The curriculum at AC, as it came to be called in shorthand, was simple. The entire universe was six thousand years old. Modern science

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was all wrong (and was, in point of fact, inspired by that wily old serpent, Satan the Devil himself), as were the concepts and practitioners of modern medicine, dentistry and, especially, psychiatry. If one had faith (and was nearly as perfect as Herbert), God would cause all one did to prosper. If one had faith, one would be supernaturally protected from all manner of evil and attendant maladies... except mental illnesses. These were, and remained to its final days, in private church theology, at any rate, the products of either self-deception or demon possession.

If one had the faith! That was the catch. And it couldn't be just a smidgin of faith, either. Anyone who expected results had to have it all (and what an escape clause for the new ministry). There were actually members who, during after-services counseling sessions, were overheard to complain, "But I tithed the (by now) thirty percent of my gross income to the church. I've given offerings (freewill and otherwise) amounting to another twenty percent. Income taxes ate up an additional twenty-five percent and I'm having a hell of a time feeding my fruitful bough and our four young olive plants on the twenty-five percent which remains. Why hasn't God provided for me?" "BECAUSE YOU LACK THE FAITH, BROTHER!"

As with Sunday, Christmas, Easter, and all the rest of contemporary Christianity's holidays were, the brethren were told, pagan. They were, in fact, satanically inspired counterfeits of God's true Holy Days. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, the first of these, "Joyful Occasions" began in the spring.

The order of service on all Feast Days (except the Day of Atonement) involved a three hour morning sermon, a two hour break at around one for the actual potluck feast, then another three or four hour sermon(contingent, of course, upon the stamina of the preacher and the sanitary preparation, storage, and handling of the food) in the afternoon; replete, as per divine command, with an obligatory freewill offering.

As holidays go, it was a poor substitute for Christmas. Furthermore, the mandated omission of any and all leavening agents (from which the feast derived its name) precluded the inclusion of bread, rolls, biscuits, cake and pies, at least any that would have been visually or gastronomically identifiable as such by the average person. Of course, there was (and usually remained to the end of the Feast) copious quantities of unleavened bread. But this was because no mortal human could possibly choke down more than a couple mouthfuls per millennium.

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To be fair, this was not lost upon the ladies of the congregation whose God-given responsibilities included (but were by no means limited to) all meal preparations and clean-up. It was their job, after all, to concoct these boot leather offerings.

The problem was that year after year of trying and failing had done nothing to dampen their zeal. They were unwilling to admit defeat. There was a holy quest, this search for an edible unleavened bread. It existed; it was out there somewhere and they would find it.

Pentecost was next in that hierarchy of joyful occasions which, one was assured, made up for forsaking the vile practices of the world. At least though, at this one, the chosen weren't required to deal with weird foodstuffs. Just the usual five to seven hours of hell-fire and brimstone coupled with the traditional afternoon empty-your-wallet ritual.

The Feast of Atonement was unique, however. So much so that even hard bitten disciples occasionally wondered (in private at any rate) just how it came to be called a feast in the first place. To start with, no one was allowed to eat or drink anything from the sundown preceding the feast to the sundown following. Brushing ones teeth was even frowned upon during this period as the temptation to ingest a little Pepsodent and water might well prove nigh overpowering. There was, however, no shortage of "Spiritual Meat" at this festivity.

The famished brethren (and their equally famished children) were obliged to sit through and digest a typical Atonement Day sermon, the subject matter of which always reflected the meaning of the hallowed day itself and thus changed little with the passing of the eons.

On that day, one and all were reminded just where it was sin came from. And, that, since Adam had sinned, all had sinned. Transgressions were geometrically progressive in this version of theology and any hope one might have had for a merciful deity overlooking even the most microscopic of their transgressions were dealt a low blow at these proceedings.

As humans, they were God's children; no doubt about that. But they were also carnal, filthy and totally depraved. They were, they were told, worthy only of a screaming death in that great Christian barbecue coming soon to worldly neighborhoods everywhere. And it didn't matter how good they had been, were now, or ever tried to be (or for that matter if they'd never committed a single sin in their entire life.) They were liable for Adams screw ups as well.

For some neophytes, Atonement was the last feast they chose to at-

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tend; it was, as those still righteous were wont to say, that day of days which separated out the sheep from the goats. The multiple tithes and offerings, the giving up of Christmas and Easter, the being thought of as odd(if not positively insane)by such relatives and friends as one had prior to conversion, that the weak in faith could handle. But to have to sit all day with their stomach thinking their throat was cut, to hear the incredible "Good News" that their souls were in hock for the sins of people who had fucked up and died centuries before, well, that was damn near intolerable.

The Atonement Day sermons invariably offered a ray of hope, however, (for some, admittedly, too late) and always toward the end. If, (and it was a big IF) the brethren were as good as they could possibly be; IF they dutifully obeyed those omnipotent twenty year old shepherds of the flock which Herbert had been cranking out of Ambassador College at a frantic rate to keep up with the growing demand for ministers; IF they faithfully set aside that all important thirty percent of their income then maybe, just maybe, they would be accounted worthy to escape the coming Great Tribulation that God was about to mercifully unleash on his stubborn, stiff-necked, unrepentant world. And they might qualify, at last, to slide on through that crack in door to eternal life that Herbert was holding open just for them, Amen.

The faithful, by Atonement services end, were worn to a frazzle. It was tough enough(even for the unquestionably righteous) to have to sit for hours and listen to what hopeless pieces of shit they were, but to have to do it on empty stomachs, while suffering from the debilitating effects of rampant dehydration, that was torture.

Brotherly love was always at a low ebb on this day. The called and chosen simply gathered up their Bibles, kicked their kids into line and headed for the door.

That there was no one to stand in the middle of the pathway to the refrigerator five minutes before the sun went down and say, "Drivers, start your engines!" was just as well. For the instant the sun had set, the jackals descended. They gulped down jugs of brown sugar KoolAid as if it were the nectar of the gods, while insanely cramming handfuls of potato salad into ravenous maws. They devoured cold fried chickens whole until, at last, the feeding frenzy abated and all that remained were empty jugs, greasy bones, and upset stomachs outraged by the abrupt introduction of food where once was void.

Many of God's children, at this juncture, were heard to utter what

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was, perhaps, a congregational-wide sentiment, a benediction of sorts for the day, "Thank God we only have to do this once a year!"

Last, in the annual series of blessed events was the Feast of Tabernacles. God had inspired Herbert to hold this feast which, in reality, was one week long, in Gladewater, Texas. To facilitate accommodations for the faithful, he bought several hundred acres down there and commanded one and all to mosey on down, rent motels or camp out on his property in tents for a week.

Two per day sermons were the usual bill of fare at this celebration, but other than that the congregation was, for the most part left to its own devices, which was just as well; for if ever a crew was in need of a break, it was them.

Herbert had many new revelations in the fifties. A polio epidemic was sweeping Canada and North America, at this time. A highly successful vaccine had been developed. It was being made available in nearly every school to protect young children who were often left dead or paralyzed for life by the grisly disease. Herbert, though, instructed the, by now international, flock not to have their children immunized. To do so, he said, would be tantamount to placing ones faith in the medical profession rather than God.

As the flock continued to grow, there were those members who, quite naturally, desired either to divorce their present spouses or, having already been divorced prior to conversion, re-marry. "A thorough, heart-rending study of scripture (with much prayer and fasting) yielded but one conclusion," Herbert said. "Divorce and re-marriage has been, is, and will always continue to be against Gods law."

Members who had been divorced prior to baptism were instructed to seek reconciliation with their former mates, whether they were in the church or not. Failing that, they were to remain celibate until the end of their natural lives or the death of their former spouse, whichever came first. Members who had, prior to baptism, been divorced and re-married were commanded to separate and, unless and until their original mate died, they were to remain separate.

Herbert's inspirations from God ranged far and wide over even the most prosaic matters of a member's life. Women were commanded not to wear lipstick or rouge; perfumes were out of the question, and modest (which is to say, exceptionally dowdy) attire was the watchword. Women who wore such abominations as any of the above were likened to Jezebel.

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A woman's place was in the home; God had made that plain to his servant from the outset. God had created women to be help-meets (or help-meats, if one chose to be definitive about the subject). Their role was to cook, clean, wash dishes, clothes and the toilet, change dirty diapers and nearly worship at the feet of and submit to the sexual demands of their god-given mate, at any time day or night.

Children were to be in total submission at all time and to address as "Sir" or "Ma'am" any human being more than five years older than themselves. That such obedience was not a native aspect of the typical three and four year old's character was soon evident and members were sternly exhorted from the pulpit that "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him... or her". Corporal punishment was, thus, heartily approved of; and because it was often brutal in its application, it was ultimately destructive in its results.

As the sixties rolled on into the seventies, the membership (and therefore the cash flow) of the organization began to decline precipitously. This, as a direct function of the doctrine presented by Herbert. The reason was, as research at AC amply demonstrated, quite simple. By that decade, a large majority of adults had been divorced and remarried at least once. And of that majority destined to remain single if they joined Herbert's merry throng, the prospect of having to pole-vault out of bed each morning for the rest of their lives was less than appealing.

Herbert retired to his inner sanctum to study, pray and fast about the matter and (in record time) God revealed that he had decided to cut humanity some slack and that divorce, as long as it occurred prior to baptism, was now permissible.

With the barriers down, hundreds of would-be pilgrims to the promised land swelled the thinning ranks of the called and chosen, and the tithes and offerings began to flow once more.

Herbert, largely retired from the day to day running of the outfit at this time, and turned it over to his son, Garner Ted Armstrong, who legalized the wearing of makeup for all closet Jezebels. He liberalized so many hitherto "carved-in-stone" tenants that his aging father was obliged, at the shrill insistence of the rest of the ministry, to park his Grumman Golf Stream Jet and return to headquarters.

Upon his return, he was presented with unassailable data that, during Garner Ted's tenure, and due to his multiple dalliances with help-meets other than his own, the term "Headquarters" had taken on a

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whole new meaning. After a flurry of meetings with the ministerial hierarchy, Theodore was sacked and the aging prophet once again assumed the weighty burden of apostleship.

Within a few years, his cardiovascular system began to fail and it was, at this time that the Lord providentially revealed to him that, by now, it was okay and quite alright for the laity (and even Herbert, if he so chose) to avail themselves of medical care. Herbert promptly arranged for twenty-four hour, around the clock, medical personnel in the form of a doctor and registered nurse to be at his constant beck and call.

Upon his death, the called and chosen (ministry and laity, alike) engaged in a power struggle so acrimonious that it tore the organization into many small and warring fragments. It has, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist.

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TECHNO GOD

Many fundamentalist faiths had great hopes for World War II. But the "war to end all wars", although a secular victory, was just one more religious disappointment. The great battle of Armageddon had failed to materialize and the Lord had refused to return, so the best they could do was pin their hopes on World War III.

The recently developed hydrogen bomb seemed to offer promise in that regard. At least, it was thought to be a weapon of apocalyptic proportions. The prophetic works of the Good Book were thoroughly combed, obscure passages of scripture in the four gospels overhauled, and their possibilities evaluated. Verses such as Matthew 24:22 and Mark 13: 20 undoubtedly referred to these hellish devices and, thus, many true believers were comforted. If the nations could somehow manage to get in a fight with these things, there might still be hope for the righteous.

Pentecostalism and evangelism enjoyed a resurgence at this time. Pentecostalism was an audio/visual religion, not by mode of transmission but, rather, in method of worship. They sang, they danced, they spoke in tongues, and some of the more devout, having read Mark 16:17 & 18, handled live rattlesnakes or drank drain cleaner and strychnine. They wouldn't drink alcohol or soda pop, though. Apparently, the sacred promises did not extend to anything that deadly.

These practices never really caught on outside their local geographical areas, however, and were primarily limited to the deep south. Up north, people preferred to demonstrate their faith by drinking coffee, various colas, and beer.

Techno-evangelism, the use of radio and, later, television, to spread the "good news" of impending global catastrophe, began to appear about this time. It was far more efficient on several levels. Preachers, could regularly play to larger audiences on a regular basis and, since religions have historically never been regulated by truth in packaging require-

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ments, they could make any claim, no matter how outrageous, without worrying about money back guarantees.

Selling protection from the wrath to come, plus a free nibble at the Tree of Life, became a lucrative profession. Electronic evangelists so crowded Sunday morning radio and television channels as to render them inoperative, except for the few hundred thousand who regularly tuned in to hear their favorite panhandling prophet of choice plead for more "gifts of love", more tithes, more freewill offerings, more, more, more, more, more...for the widows, the orphans, the sick, the heathen, the demon possessed. Anybody else? Oh yes, the frugal minister's living (and sometimes, live-in) expenses which included, but were not limited to, his private university, a personalized 747, a multimillion dollar mansion, and those semi-monthly payments on his modest fleet of Rolls Royces.

When hard pressed about these seeming excesses, the doubting were sternly admonished that the Lord had written "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain," to which someone reportedly replied, "That may be, but nowhere did he give the ox carte blanche to devour the whole harvest!"

But if the preachers were getting richer, God certainly wasn't. This new technological God was suffering from the twin banes of the twentieth century; he was always short of time and money. He was so impoverished, in fact, that there were rumors he might have to hitch hike to his second coming. And the worse case scenario had it that, unless the faithful dug deep into their checking accounts and in some cases mortgaged their homes, his great plan for the ultimate salvation of all humanity was in jeopardy.

Their god had evolved in other ways, as well. In the good old days of America, God was an independent. Do right, he'd leave you alone. Cross him and he'd load you up with so much trouble you'd need a wagon to haul it all off. And either way, you could be done without. But things had changed; he'd joined the welfare state and without abominable sinners to prepare the way before him, or at least sign promissory notes to finance his great work, there was no chance of getting out the gospel before hell itself froze over.

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THE THEORY OF CREATION

Hell was in no hurry though; it wasn't gobbling up sinners at an ungodly rate (there always seemed to be enough to go around). Christians weren't checking in at the Pearly Gates in record numbers, either (there was always too many of them). So in the absence of a feast and a dearth of famine, the world was swiftly becoming a thoroughly boring place, as worlds go.

Fundamentalist religions, especially those based on fire and brimstone, were rapidly losing their spark. They had asked all the questions they dared to over the years, invented answers prejudiced by their superstitions, and were now stuck with the results. Meanwhile, science had begun probing the mysteries of time, space, and matter; realms once regarded as the province of God and, therefore, off limits to humans; and the answers they were finding were incompatible with theology.

Willard F. Libby developed Carbon 14 Dating in 1952. Carbon 14, a radioactive isotope with an atomic mass of 14, is produced naturally in the atmosphere as a result of nuclear reactions between Nitrogen 14 and cosmic radiation. It is incorporated into all living organisms through respiration, photosynthesis, and ingestion. When the organism stops eating and breathing, the intake of ^{14}C ceases. Since no more is being added and Carbon 14 decays at a known rate, it is possible to fix the approximate date of death by measuring the residual.

Half of a static quantity of ^{14}C will decay in 5,730 years, half of what's left in another 5,730 years, half of that half, ditto, and so on. Compared to some radio isotopes, this is entirely unremarkable, nevertheless, it permits objects to be dated out to 30,000 years. Potassium-Argon Dating was used to determine the age of the earliest humanoid remains at 1,750,000 years, while Rubidium-87, half life 48.8 billion years, revealed terrestrial and lunar rocks to be 4.5 billion years old. In the face of this and other empirical evidence, fundamentalists, who continued to maintain that the creation was only 6,000 years old had a prob-

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lem. Their response was unique.

Six thousand years ago, 9:00 a.m. Middle Eastern Time, on or about October 26, 4004 B.C., God created the universe with the earth in the middle of it, flat. In an attempt to test the faith of the faithful and frustrate future archaeologists, he antiqued the entire creation making it appear as if it was billions of years older than it actually was! He salted the earth with fake fossils and, practical joker that he is, arranged those bogus bones in such a way as to look like lizards and animals that never existed.

After resetting the radioactive clocks in all the geologic strata, he then arranged that strata to bear mute witness to grim catastrophes that never occurred. Vast pools of oil had no time to congeal naturally and so were materialized by hand under Texas, Venezuela, and the Middle East. Dinosaur bones had to be stuffed into the La Brea Tar Pits, while mastodons were being flash frozen in Arctic glaciers. On the fourth day, he created a middle aged sun, put pock marks on the moon, and reversed the magnetic polarity of the earth a dozen times over. On day five, he created every species and breed of land animal which had ever existed, including Toy Poodles and St. Bernards. In his spare time he filled the sky with birds and the oceans with fish.

November 1, 4004 B.C., prototype humanoids, homo Erectus, Homo Habilis, and Cro-Magnon man were hastily assembled then cleverly buried in the fossil record in such a way as to give the appearance of extreme age. Homo Sapiens were created last so no eye witnesses to the mechanics of creation would be present.

Saturday, November 2, 4004 B.C., the Lord rested from all the antiquing he had done and perhaps reflected that the next time around, it might be easier to create universes billions of years earlier and let them age naturally.

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A.A.

With the problems of creation so imaginatively solved, all contradicting opinions stood starkly revealed as a simple lack of faith. Fundamentalists everywhere heaved a collective sigh of relief and many of them got on with the spiritually uplifting business of doggedly serving an angry god who was broke. But growing numbers of faithful found the answers just a bit too contrived. Many in the middle and upper classes of society were leading materially successful lives at this time, so heaven as a means of escape from an unsatisfactory earthly existence was generally unnecessary.

Theirs was a kinder, gentler creation requiring a kinder, gentler creator. Because of these and other factors, there were mass defections from the stolid ranks of hard-bitten Christian soldiers. These defectors weren't cowards or traitors, however. They were conscientious objectors, avoiding the draft of a war they no longer believed in. As such, they sought asylum in more peaceful beliefs rather than joining the other side.

The laid back god of the Unitarians was embraced by many of these converts. The rolls of the Christian Scientists were similarly enlarged, as were those of the Latter Day Saints. In response to this exodus, many mainstream Protestant churches voted their traditionally harsh god out of office and elected a more amicable Chief Executive. The trend was clear; there would be no more condemnation without representation. God was either going to become a more benevolent tyrant or suffer the fate of George the Third!

For a significant portion of the disenchanting, however, and especially the young, all forms of conventional religion appeared fatally flawed. Many of them dropped out altogether and sought sanctification in chemical sacraments and/or strange beliefs which had either lost their respectability, like astrology, or were inventive mixtures of old myths and new, such as New Age, or were by products of their need to detox-

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ify from all the chemicals they'd ingested; the religion of addiction.

Are you an alcoholic? Have you ever wanted to be an alcoholic? Or have you just fooled around on the fringes? A sort of light petting social drinker?

If you are always the non-designated driver for the evening, chances are you've got a problem. If you've ever drunk more than three beers in a single day, if you ever drink alone, if you've ever taken a straight shot because you really needed a belt, A.A. may be your only hope of salvation.

Like any religion, there are inevitable meetings to attend, but in some ways it's more like a surprise party because you never know who will show up to preach. Evening services are usually opened by some nameless, nondescript individual who solemnly advances to the podium and announces to the shock and surprise of no one, "Hi. My name is Bill. I'm an alcoholic!" After this stirring introduction, the suspense is nearly unbearable as one miserable peckerwood after another steps to the confessional mike to recount horrifying details of the black insanity their lives became after that first innocent (but deadly) encounter with old John Barleycorn.

As the evening progresses, these testimonials drag relentlessly on till every newly discovered alcoholic in the room is unmasked and the benediction pronounced. The format of A.A. was soon bootlegged by every up and coming addictive disorder group known to society, and as soon as new habituations were discovered, they were added to the list. But it wasn't a religion one could be proud of apparently because whether it was narcotics, gamblers, or lovers, the surname was always anonymous.

Addiction became a way of life for friends and neighbors. So much so that the non-addicted began to feel left out. Not knowing there was a loneliness anonymous, some actually began attending meetings for habits they didn't even have. It was as if the pathway to hell had become the highway to heaven. They even had their own brand of tele-evangelists. Recovering addicts frequented popular daytime talk shows violating, at least in principal one would think, their anonymity. But the M.C.'s seemed oblivious to these contradictions. Besides, it was good for their ratings.

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ASTROLOGY

The doctrine of Unconditional Election has been around in many venues other than traditional religion and most certainly pre-dates Congregationalism. Adherents to this doctrine can still be found in almost every major city in the western world.

There's a school of thought which holds that the month, day, and hour of one's birth, in conjunction with whatever jig the sun, moon, planets, and stars are doing at the time, somehow profoundly affects the nature and course of human life. Exactly what mysterious forces these objects possess are clearly delineated nowhere. Now, the idea that Mars, rising in the crotch of Taurus, has some weird effect on those born under the sign of the Bull is just that, to those who lack faith. For those who don't, almost every strait-laced newspaper in the country, without so much as a snicker, churns out daily columns of precise astrological data which is alleged to assist believers in making life's more difficult decisions. The following is unedited scripture taken from a popular magazine.

"It is apparent that both the joys and woes of life relate to Love, Work, Health, and Money. Current planetary activity, especially the New Moon rising in Taurus, and the Sun at ecliptic odds with Saturn, signify that professionally, emotionally, and financially, you need to continually refine your goals, while giving serious thought to your long term happiness, well being, and security."

Here, apparently, are clear, unambiguous directions, carefully designed to maximize ones potential, while providing that much needed edge in today's raw and uncertain world.

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JALOPIES OF THE GODS

Once upon a time, many thousands of years ago when the earth was still the known center of the universe, unimaginatively advanced Extra Terrestrial Civilizations had nothing better to do with their technological prowess than visit this backward planet, study the evolving Neanderthal population, and make out with indigenous females. These interstellar voyeurists apparently were all males, because there were no reported sightings of female astronauts, nor any allegations of them lewdly consorting with local studs.

Now thousands of light years may seem like a long way to come for a peep show or a close encounter of the prurient kind, but one could, perhaps, imagine the unbridled lust and passion Cro-Magnon Cave Women with short squat bodies and hairy breasts might arouse in an all male crew of space farers who'd been adrift for light years in the intergalactic void.

Other than a few scattered legends, nothing much is known about these visitors from the skies, so whatever their mission it certainly wasn't educational. Perhaps the planet was just a liberty port back then because, according to tradition, they left the native stock of humanity barefoot and, in some cases, pregnant. Until the last few decades, their carnal visitations seemingly ceased altogether but, as of late, "They're back!"...this time with flying saucers.

Their latest interests are alleged to include abducting young females, playing doctor with them, and sending them home in a state of considerable disrepair. As Masters of the Universe go, they're cutting a pretty sorry swath down here, and if "gods" they be, they're unquestionably a degenerate lot.

It is the hypophysis of UFO enthusiasts that some sort of "prime directive" of non-interference, probably prevents them from showing themselves to humanity as a whole. Non-believers assert that's a cop out, however, and uncharitably maintain that from a woman's point of

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view, abduction, rape, and unwanted pregnancy would qualify as at least an annoyance, if not outright interference of some sort.

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THE MONOTONE GODS

Whatever the source of "the gods", they always seem to be coming down from somewhere. They're not very sociable and they all seem to be afflicted with many of the more common, troublesome, human frailties, such as anger, hate, and jealousy. Some deities are down right prejudiced.

"White people were created by God, black people by the devil, and all the other races are the result of unlawful hanky panky between the two. In the course of time, there will be a last great battle between good and evil, black and white. For all White Supremacists in good standing with their beloved Fuhrer, it will be both their honor and their duty to kill all Mexicans, Indians, Blacks, Orientals, and especially Jews for the sake of God and the glory of his great name. Amen!"

The world, in all likelihood, could've done without another impotent god who not only discriminates on the basis of religion but that of race and nationality, as well, but here he is, back again in all of his blood thirsty splendor. This time however he has competition.

"Black people were created by Allah, white people by the Devil, and Jews are the missing link! For reasons best known to him, he has patiently allowed the White Devils to keep his beloved black nation in a state of abject poverty and perpetual servitude for the last 6,000 years. But that's history. In the near future there will be a last great battle between good and evil, white and black, at which time, all faithful Black Muslims, on express orders from Allah (or a reasonable earthly facsimile) will rise up in righteous anger and kill Whitey (and the Jews) in a racially motivated Armageddon."

Other than color, these two gods are remarkably similar. They're ethnocentric, they're angry, and they're extremely frustrated. Nothing has been going right for them for thousands of years, but the end is near and it's high time for them to kick some ass, or at least hire it done.

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AND HERE HE IS!

By the late sixties, God had been pronounced deceased. Those proclaiming his untimely demise had been acting as if he was for years anyway, so there were no sudden outbreaks of unbridled licentiousness. Just decadence, as usual.

Some of the more conventional religions immediately jumped on the publication of God's obituary as proof positive that the last days were upon us and confidently settled back to await the Lord's return. For a brief period of time, church attendance rose and pastors everywhere dusted off their Saturday and Sunday vocal chords, exhorting the faithful to "fear and tremble" for the great and terrible day of the Lord was surely, now, at hand. He was on his way back and he was flat out pissed. He was coming back to smite the wicked, slay degenerate agnostics, and abolish sex education in high school forever.

As with the theory of the antique universe, however, no one seemed to comprehend the full implications of a doctrine of imminent return. What if God really did come back... and did so tomorrow? Actually imposed his will, as seen from these adherents point of view, on his scruffy, odorous creation.

To start with, there'd be massive unemployment in the ranks of the clergy. Preachers with nothing left to preach about would be out of a job (axed, in a word) and many of them might be facing a most unpleasant prospect of explaining to their creator just how it was they became so wealthy selling that which was suppose to be delivered free of charge, not to mention reasonably intact.

As for the diverse nations of the planet and their motley assortment of presidents, chancellors, and ayatollahs et al, well they'd better have their unemployment insurance premiums paid up also, because in a world ruling government, presided over by a king of kings and Lord of Lords there would be damned little mischief left for them to make.

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The citizenry of the earth would find themselves in deep doo-doo as well if a Christian dictator took over, because the law, according to Christians, consists of ten easily memorizable commandments. There are no man-made reams of nitpicking statutes in this law. "Lawyers, join ranks with the rest of the unemployed...at the back of the line, please!

For there would, thus, be no other gods except God Almighty, no idols. Farewell Elvis, Springsteen, and Falwell. No more "God damning" everyone who cuts in front on busy workday freeways. No working on the Sabbath. So long time and a half. No more T.V. programs with kids cursing, hitting, or otherwise dishonoring their parents. No depictions of murder, rape, robbery or of coveting that which does not belong to you. In short, all those innumerable little niceties which make this soap opera world such an interesting, entertaining, and thoroughly human place to be would all be AGAINST THE LAW if God came home tomorrow!

Moreover, if he came here, what would happen to those left behind, those hordes of righteous stranded up there in heaven? Are they orphaned, or what? With all the ensuing unemployment, strict new laws, total lack of entertainment, and nothing to listen to but harp music and stilted hymns, those who profess to desire it the most may be among those enjoying it the least.

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THE MOONIES

As the sixties and early seventies slid by, it soon became apparent to anyone who gave the matter any thought that as a nation we weren't very religious any more. No stocks or pillories, no ducking stools or debtor's prisons; why, the condemned weren't even executed in a humanely religious fashion anymore. Its was as if contemporary society had zinc plated the golden age of puritanical virtue. No public whippings or stonings, no burning heretics at the stake to save their souls from hell. It was no wonder people began turning to television for their entertainment.

In looking back there can be little doubt that American freedoms were responsible for many of these national deficiencies, especially freedom of speech. For where blasphemy is no longer a crime, the gentle remonstrances of Christianity languish. Many beliefs have found a way around the inconvenience of freedom, though, for if sanctions cannot be imposed from without, they most certainly can be from within.

Cults are notoriously hard line in this regard and the more apocalyptic the cult, the harder their line. The world is always coming to a horrifying but hardly undeserved end in the view of adherents, at which time all heretics who formerly scoffed at the plain truth of God as revealed to the world by his faithful servant, the holy prophet so and so, will burn, roast, sizzle, and fry and that will be the end of them...and who cares?

It is not the message which defines a cult however, but rather the size of the organization. Religion, when viewed as a collective entity, has instituted a very real caste system. If you belong to a faith with less than a few million members, no matter what the belief, it's a cult. If such selective paranoia has afflicted several times that number, it is one of the world's biggies. And if you live in a nation where everyone believes, or else, you live in Iran! Large or small though, they all share a common goal: the subjugation of the entire world.

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Sun Myung Moon was born in North Korea in 1920. Like many a hapless prophet before him, "God" began paying him unsolicited nocturnal visits when the lad was in his teens. The true meaning of the Bible was revealed in the course of their discussions. Things had not been going very well for God at this time and who better to reveal his frustrations to than a North Korean?

God's original plans for humanity, according to the soon to be Reverend Moon, had gone horribly wrong. It had all started in that infernal garden where he put Adam and Eve. (Their names might have been different in Korean.) There they were, two naked humans, male and female, alone in a warm, quiet woodland with their freshly minted hormones flowing. The plan was that God would perform the wedding ceremony, after which the joyous couple would embark on their honeymoon, presumably at the far end of the garden, and in the course of true love, produce perfect and sinless offspring.

But an undefined celestial emergency arose somewhere in the cosmos. Immediate supernatural intervention was required! God rode to the rescue. Meanwhile, back in the garden that wily serpent, Satan the devil, induced Adam and Eve to "garden up", unite unlawfully without benefit of clergy or the blessing of God. How much induction was required under the prevailing circumstances, it being spring time and them being naked, is anybody's guess. But, as a result of this reprehensible conduct, they and their descendants became the literal children of Satan.

God, however, was not to let his failures deter him. He was determined to save human beings, no matter what the cost. So he sent his son to earth. The idea was for Jesus to grow up down here, get married, and be husband and father to a perfect physical family. But this plan also miscarried. Jesus, it seemed, was not up to the task.

In the course of his tenure here, he had failed to cultivate the favor of the politically powerful. As a matter of fact, he had even gone so far as to offend the rich and famous by suggesting that they should be neither. Moreover, the Lord of all the earth just couldn't connect with females. The guy was a confirmed bachelor. On top of all this, he had the maddening habit of speaking riddles. This was a real turn off to the ladies.

As a result of these deficiencies, his mission was doomed. He produced no template family for others to emulate, the politically powerful were after his hide and, at the critical moment just when he needed

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them most, his followers deserted him. Without public support, he was crucified and returned to the heavens whence he came.

God was in a quandary, but he was resolute. For reasons known only to him, humanity must be saved! And it finally was, for unto all the world was born, on January 6, 1920, a Korean lad dressed in swaddling clothes, in North Pyongan Province.

Where God and Jesus had failed, the boy would not. He was raised a Presbyterian and sent to Japan to study electrical engineering. But before he could make a career of it, God revealed to the teenager his true purpose in life. The now Reverend Moon was to be the promised Messiah.

This information might have shocked lesser men, but not so Mr. Moon. With the help of the Lord, he formulated the "Divine Principals." Within a few years, he began disseminating them in his home town. Alas, he had either never heard, or else he had totally forgotten, that a prophet is without honor among his kindred and in his own country, especially if his country is a communist dictatorship. He was sent to a labor camp and there remained until he was liberated by U.S. Armed Forces during the Korean War.

He began preaching once more, this time south of the thirtieth parallel but he ran into more opposition, not from godless communists, but South Korean Christians. His message that both God and Christ had muffed it, and that he had been chosen to succeed where they had failed, was not at all well received.

But as God's chosen servant, he persisted and eventually a core of believers gathered round and his gospel began to be preached, via missionaries, to the outside world.

He made his first tour of America in 1972 and amassed a sizable fortune in real estate holdings and corporations. (All in the name of the Unification Church, of course!) Like most evangelistic millionaires, on paper he is a pauper. His primary residence at the time was a modest \$850,000 cottage in Tarrytown, New York. From there, he directed his growing empire until his conviction for income tax evasion.

It wasn't so much a case of his unwillingness to render unto Caesar that which was Caesar's, but rather, a dispute about who Caesar was. In this case, Reverend Moon thought it must be him. The state of New York and kindly old Uncle Sam disagreed however, and arrangements were made for the Messiah to spend some time with them on the hard rock pile!

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Naturally, this was presented to the Unification Church and the press as religious persecution most blatant. The House Sub-Committee, which convened to investigate the reverend's financial antics, saw things differently, however. To their obviously unconverted minds, "the systematic violation of tax, immigration, banking, and currency statutes" were activities incompatible with Christianity as they knew it.

Persecuted and convicted Messiahs are nothing new to the world. When viewed in their proper context, it's almost a rite of passage. Meanwhile, the church continued to grow and prosper to the extent that, if size and filthy lucre were the determining factors, they could no longer be considered a cult.

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THE CHILDREN OF GOD

"David Berg" was an unassuming enough name for a Baptist preacher in the 1940's. Strait-laced conventional, it was the epitome of pastoral correctness. But when starting your own religion in the late 1960's, especially one targeting the disaffected youth of that era, a name like that would hardly do. Something else was required, a name of true Biblical proportions, and "Moses David" certainly fit the bill.

At this time, "Mo" was running a Christian coffee house in Huntington Beach, California called "Teen Challenge." But God, having greater things in mind for the modest innkeeper, began appearing to him regularly. Soon, they were on a first name basis.

The "god" which appeared to Mo was a closet Democrat with Republican leanings. Yes, the world was coming to an end and California, den of iniquity that it was, was going to be the first part of that world to go. Just what iniquities Californians were guilty of committing was difficult to assess however, because the gospel as delivered to M. D. was exceedingly liberal. Just about any type of sexual behavior was permissible as long as it was kept in the family; the family of Moses David, that is. And there was no prohibition against the accumulation of worldly wealth as long as Moses David did all the accumulating. On the other hand, the world in general and America in particular were too materialistic and far too preoccupied with sex for this particular god. For these and other reasons, the end was now near!

God's plan, according to middle aged Mo, was for God to cause a mighty earthquake which would dump at least half the golden state into the Pacific Ocean. This interesting event was forecast to occur in 1968. Being forewarned of the apocalyptic calamity, Moses David led his family and followers out of the Californian Egypt and into safer parts of the promised land.

They wandered the Wilderness of North America's freeways in a caravan of aging school buses, preaching the word as revealed to Mo that

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America was about to be destroyed for unspecified crimes and misdemeanors against the Almighty. Prior to this coming period of social unrest they, as the called and chosen, would be supernaturally whisked away and protected. After that they were to form the form the proletariat of God's new government on earth.

They now envision a full nuclear exchange between Europe, China, and America. The U.S.S.R. used to be the favored tool of prophetic judgment, but since it fell apart, God apparently could make no further use of it in this regard.

But if the number of casualties they predict is accurate, it is unclear just who they will be ruling over. This has been a sticky issue for doomsday religions since time out of mind. On the one hand, they, as good guys, get to take over the shattered remains of the entire planet. On the other, with everyone but them dead and the earth a radioactive wasteland, one might be excused for wondering, why bother?

Because America, like California, is doomed and also because the Justice Department and State prosecutors began seriously investigating the constant charges of kidnaping, unlawful imprisonment, and rape leveled against Moses David and the children of God, Mo and many of his flock have deserted the United States seeking asylum in Canada, Mexico, and Europe. There they continue to prepare for their awesome responsibilities as the future lords of all the earth.

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DIVINE LIGHT

Eastern religions, specifically those of Indian or Oriental extraction, have little appeal to most Westerners. Self induced mind trips without the aid of chemical substances are hard work and few people need more of that after forty hours on the job. If a pill could be invented which conferred piety and sanctification upon ingesteers, that would be a saleable product in the colonies; otherwise, keep it short and simple. Nonetheless, a few thousand here and there have discovered the true meaning of their lives via Yoga, Meditation, and the Divine Light Mission.

Being the "perfect master" at age thirteen is a good job if one can get it, and Guru Maharaj Ji certainly had a good job. Of course, having a father who's divinely connected also looks good on ones' resume. Shri Hans Ji Maharaj, Maharaj Ji's father, had been a satguru. Christ and Buddha were notable satguru's in their day as well, so the lad kept good company.

The teenager came unto his own riding humbly in a Rolls Royce; donkeys were, apparently, in short supply. He rented the Houston Astrodome, in the early seventies, threw one hell of a party, and proclaimed the event "Millennium '73 " and, modestly referred to it as "the most significant occurrence in the history of mankind." From these austere surroundings, he imparted "knowledge" to his devoted followers and the mildly curious who attended.

One of tenants of "perfect knowledge" is that rational thought is the ultimate enemy of inner peace. The human mind, in this regard, works the very devil with one's natural tranquillity because it's always asking questions, and if there's one thing almost every religion discourages, it's critical reasoning in the form of questions.

Like questions, the consumption of meat, alcohol, tobacco, and coffee are frowned upon. True devotees live in communal "ashrams", work at a variety of outside jobs, and donate their wages to the Perfect Mas-

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ter. In return, food, clothing, and shelter are provided.

Although this is about the same trade off free societies proffer, the idea of abandoning personal intellect in favor of some nebulous "inner peace" is abhorrent to most Americans. If you can't think, you can't revolt, and if you can't revolt (or at least maintain the illusion of revolution) you have no sense of power over the forces of structure which threaten individual expression. Mystical experiences just don't cut it in the States!

Celibacy is also a requirement in the Ashrams. Most successful religious communes, whether Eastern or Western, incorporate some form of sexual abstention into their regimes. And for reasons which can only be inferred, this practice may partially account for their success. One inference is that sex is about as personal as one can get, therefore, if a person can be persuaded to relinquish control over that aspect of their lives, all else will fall into place.

Marriage is permitted, but members must first obtain the permission of their Ashram's elders. Above all, believers are encouraged to let the Perfect Master to do their thinking for them and meditate upon the knowledge thus received. Only then will they find true inner peace.

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GAIA

James Lovelock, a British chemist specializing in atmospheric science, was invited by NASA, in the 1960's, to participate in the Viking missions to Mars. The essence of the endeavor involved soft landing miniature, but still highly sophisticated, laboratories on its red and rocky surface in hopes of detecting whatever life forms the planet had to offer.

To the barely disguised relief of major religions everywhere, who, after having been forced by unassailable scientific data to recant their hitherto sacred doctrines of flat earths, six thousand year old universes, and the Theory of Evolution, no traces of Martian life were found, at least in those samples scrutinized by the static Viking Lander.

As a result of his participation in these projects, Doctor Lovelock began to wonder why the earth, that seeming jewel of the solar system, was the only planet in the entire neighborhood graced with life.

As future adherents later reported his conversion process, he suddenly found himself, like many a mystic before him, contemplating the earth from an extra terrestrial perspective. Why is it, he pondered, that the earth's atmosphere is composed of exactly the right gasses, in precisely the right quantities, at just the right range of temperatures necessary for the presence of life?

Furthermore, why do all living things (except perhaps that scum-bag species, man) exist in total harmony with their environment? And, why do humans have this deep seated feeling that they belong here, as if this planet were their home? And, by the way, what am I doing here?

Tossing his fellow countryman, Darwin's, theory of Evolution out the window, along with the, obviously flawed, precept that humans most likely felt more at home on the planet of their birth than they would, say, on Pluto, left the chemist in quite a quandary. So, Lovelock formulated a new hypotheses.

He began by envisioning the entire planet as a giant living organism and, before long, realized that, in fact, that's what it was! Through un-

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stated means (no doubt chemical in nature), he further discovered that this immense ball of rock and dirt, overlain with oceans and seas, crawling with multitudinous (and often multi-legged creatures), and overshadowed by a protective layer of elemental gasses, was alive! How could this be?

As he pondered primordial riddles which had eluded humans from Solomon to Einstein, answers became apparent.

One billion years after its debut in the solar system, the lifeless earth had, apparently, been parasitized by a "Meta-Life-Form" which began the (unaccountably viral) process of transforming the planet into its own life substance. All life forms now upon the planet, the very make up of the atmosphere, seas and the terrestrial crust itself were, thus, revealed to be part of this being.

The good doctor must have realized from the onset that his discovery would be met with some skepticism, writing later as he did that "Some of this will be a little hard to swallow." Be that as it may, disciples began flocking to him in droves, anxious to partake of this new fount of knowledge. More of Lovelock's musings resulted in further discoveries about this reclusive deity. Doctrine was established and scriptural wisdom began to flow.

Naturally a being this immense (to say nothing of novel), required a name. After all, one could hardly go around referring to the mother of all as "IT"; and the name Eve, which actually meant mother of all, in legend at any rate, was already taken.

Lovelock took this problem up with a friend of his, the novelist William Golding, author of that vaunted masterpiece on cultural decorum, "The Lord of The Flies." Golding suggested the name "Gaia" after the Greek goddess who drew forth the living world from the abyss of chaos. And so it was that, after eons of remaining nameless, the goddess finally had a name.

Since goddesses were, theoretically, composed of unfathomable materials and of unknown parentage, one need not, it was felt, inquire too diligently into these particulars. One could not handily quantify, say, the molecular constituencies of a Meta-Life-Form and, like all such beings preceding her, it seemed blasphemous to try. Nonetheless, there was much that could be deduced.

After Gaia came, from wherever it was she came, she digested the planet and converted its elemental constituents into her body. Plants, aquatic life, amoebas, insects, dinosaurs, snakes, skunks, dogs and hu-

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mans, all arose within this "Gaian Matrix of Life". To this day, it is her life force which sustains them.

But, just as in the Garden of Eden, humans blasphemed the Holy Covenant and began to do things their way; and their way was not at all in accordance with Gaia's gentle designs.

Unlike that unhappy episode in Homo-Sapien's history, however, Gaia did not kick her children out of paradise; it was they who walked out on their own and never chose to come back!

As a result of their continuing reprehensible behavior, this errant species entered into an increasingly dysfunctional and, at times, confrontational, relationship with their mother-goddess.

And now, as in Eden, even if they wanted to return to the garden they could not. It's too late. Instead, they have now been doomed to either accelerate their cognitive development (devour the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, roots and all) so that they might learn to live in harmony with their mother, or face a "looming socio-ecological apocalypse."

This looming apocalypse, like the raptures and great tribulations of Christianity, lies dead ahead, in the near future; and the horrors and attendant miseries which will decimate humankind as a result will be unparalleled in their ferocity. In this version of the apocalypse, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, just like the black book of Christianity specifies. And there will be famines and pestilence and volcanos and earthquakes in diverse places, but the end will not be yet. And, (to the delight of feminists everywhere) it won't be some nebulous "Father" lounging around in the third heaven on his sapphire throne all day, that's the cause of it all, but rather the Earth Goddess herself who awakens from sleep, finds out she's been raped, and wreaks havoc on everyone, guilty or not!

But there is still time, perhaps, to forestall these calamities. If a majority of the human race would forsake their perverted ways and start living in harmony with Gaia, if they would, for example, beat their chainsaws into hoes and their Chevy's into pruning hooks, if they would but study the sacred writings of AL Gore, author of that ground breaking ecological tome, "Earth in the Balance," if they would peruse and apply the collected wisdom of Edward Abby (and learn from the master how to spike trees, flatten the tires and, pour sand into the fuel tanks of heavy equipment), if they would just renounce their wicked stewardship of this poor violated planet, then doom might be averted.

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As in Christian theology, little thought, apparently, was given as to just what the ramifications of life in harmony with Gaia might entail. It went without saying that since one of humankind's more grievous trespasses was their incessant ravishment of her planetary carcass that this above all must first be addressed. All logging must, just as a start, cease immediately.

This was good news! Especially to the various environmental groups who had, heretofore, been obliged to wage their lonely campaigns against human depredation from a purely secular perspective.

Holy warriors, while sometimes a real pain in the butt, can infuse even the most stodgy and unimaginative of institutions with a sense of purpose; with zeal; WITH A MISSION! It could be said, even from a detractors point of view, that this is, for the most part, all to the good. Such devotees may, it is true, reconstitute more or less freeze dried organizations such as the Sierra Club or even the Audubon Society, but the process of revitalization often dampens and moderates that holy zeal to the extent both reach a comfortable state of equilibrium.

There are those disciples however who, having once been instructed in the way and the truth, ride forth to battle with the dragon itself, those for whom only a holy quest will do. They live their beliefs.

Earth First! descended upon Idaho to protest all logging everywhere, but especially in the Cove Mallard Area of the North Central portion of that state. Their general appearance did little to endear them to local residents who, like as not, bathed at least semi-weekly, occasionally used toothpaste and antiperspirants, and patched the holes in the jeans that they wore.

Shrugging off their initial unfavorable impressions of these ecological missionaries, the good citizens of Idaho adopted their usual live-and-let-live attitude, which is to say, they went about their daily business.

Which is not to say that, as soon as the newcomers were out of both sight and earshot and off into the disputed area, casual discussions concerning the overall appearance and demeanor of these self invited guests didn't take place.

"Did you see those guys?" "Why hell, I bet none of 'em 've had a bath since they was born!" "Shit all Friday, Dougie boy, if my dog looked like 'at, I'd shave his butt 'n make 'im walk backwards." "Hey Pete, what about that smell? How in hell do ya suppose their women can stand to be made love to by such creatures?" "Well Vern, I'll tell ya, the god's

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honest truth how it is. The girls hold their noses and the guys close their eyes. That must be the friggin' way of it, far as I can see."

And the conversations rolled on and nobody took things seriously because, after all, many of the inhabitants of those small Idaho towns, although approaching middle age, had been, in their day, the sixties hippies in their own right...until wives, kids and attendant responsibilities necessitated the trading in of their V W buses and beads for four wheel drive Jimmies and Stihl chainsaws. They thought that the Earth First!ers' were just kids being kids and had no idea that this was, in fact, a religious crusade.

Out in woods, however, the battle was being joined. Spikes magically appeared in trees (although none of the holy throng would admit to committing such heinous acts.) Trenches were excavated across the Cove's access roads, although exactly what for remained a bit of a mystery since the machines they were presumably trying to impede were capable of moving mountains. Tri-pods, barricades and battlements were erected out of trees, shrubs and earth, but (although one might think that this smacked of exactly the kind of desecration these constructions were designed to abort) if Gaia raised any objections to these prophylactic violations of her sacred carcase they went, largely, unreported.

There was an air of festivity which permeated this camp of the unwashed, yet presumably holy, as they bent themselves to their respective daily tasks (and partied on into the wee hours of the morning). The consecrated were thoroughly enjoying themselves. And then the logging company to whom the rapacious logging contract had been awarded showed up.

Cowards that they were (and what else could one expect from tree rapists), they brought the U.S. Forest Service with them, to say nothing of the county sheriff and the odd state trooper or two. While futile negotiations were underway with the heretics, some Earth First!ers chained themselves to the axles of various official vehicles and refused to budge. Others threw themselves to the ground fore and aft of departmental cars and trucks and announced to the, somewhat, bemused officials that they intended to stay there until all logging in the Continental United States, Canada, Alaska and, the Amazon Basin ceased forever and ever...Amen!

Fortunately for them, the county sheriff had a sense of humor. Rather than drive off with a herd of Earth First!ers clattering away under his cruisers' axles (as one obviously uncharitable official suggested), he pro-

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duced a pair of bolt cutters and freed the would-be martyrs. Those few who persisted in further acts of civil (and uncivil) disobedience were arrested and hauled away to the county dungeon to face a variety of (largely) misdemeanor charges.

Appeal after appeal was filed, and delay after delay was granted by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, that bastion of conservative ideology in San Francisco which consistently issued a string of rulings largely sympathetic to the environmentalists.

Finally, however, Congress, tired of what they perceived as the court's seemingly liberal ideologies, threatened to break it (the court) up and redistribute it throughout various judicial venues in the western districts it once ruled. The Ninth promptly began to issue slightly more conservative opinions and remains a viable entity to this day.

If Earth First! typified or were the only organization of its kind, then heretics of all persuasions, be they loggers, businessmen, miners, or farmers, could chuckle and rest easy after a hard day's work, but Gaia's disciples are now everywhere. She is taught as fact at many prestigious universities and colleges who would rise in righteous wrath if one suggested teaching creation theology. She permeates virtually every environmental organization known and, according to believers, she means business. Her requirements are modest, however. The human race must cease their extraction and utilization of her precious resources. To begin with, the forests must be saved and logging must stop.

Aside from humankind being required to fore-go the housing, resins, chemicals, and construction materials which forests provide, they would, by these standards, be forced to give up all paper products, too, and this could well prove to be a somewhat sticky selling point; for as one disbelieving citizen was overheard to mutter in the great state of Idaho, "Saving the forests may be all well and good, but saving one's ass is imperative!"

All modern forms of transportation, planes, trains and automobiles would be verboten, too, which is just as well, for there would be no fossil fuels to run them, anyway. The pharmaceutical industry, dependent as it is upon exotic petro-chemicals to produce their daily miracles, would grind to a halt and even if they didn't, there would be no system of mass transportation to distribute them, anyway. People who lived in north temperate or arctic climates would, without wood, heating oil, or electricity presumably freeze through the winters. Farmers in Canada and America, whose massive machines, petro-chemical fertilizers, her-

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bicides and pesticides, feed their respective nations and a large percentage of the rest of the world, as well, would presumably, from then on, do the work by hand.

Starving to death in the dark may seem, to some, an exorbitant price to pay for utopia and yet there are growing numbers who insist that its ultimate attainment is worth a little discomfort. There are also a great number of the still unconverted who would be more than happy to let them pay it.

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RAL ROBERTS

A god nine hundred feet tall ought to be able to make it on his own, do just what he pleased, and live however and where ever he chose; all without worrying unduly about back talk from anyone. He certainly wouldn't have to stoop to threats, blackmail, and extortion! In this instance, such was not the case.

Oral Roberts, a former Pentecostal minister who shall remain nameless, was walking along one day, minding his own business, when a nine hundred foot tall god jumped right out at him from the Great Beyond and said, "Gimme yer dough!" But the victimized televangelist only had a few hundred thousand to his church's name at the time...not nearly enough to satisfy such an avaricious apparition.

The behemoth demanded eight million in cash...or his faithful servant's life, and he gave the startled preacher only a couple of months to collect the booty. Lesser men might have called in the F.B.I. and reported an extortion in progress, but Mr. R. was made of sterner stuff. He bravely got on the air and informed his fellow "partners in prayer" that God was going to "call him home" unless money was forthcoming.

While some brethren evidenced shock and disbelief, most banded together in a feverish attempt to ransom their condemned evangelists' life. It was nip and tuck right down to the wire and, even then, their efforts were futile. They'd fallen far short of their larcenous Lord's requirements. But as the final seconds ticked away, the owner of a Greyhound racing track in Florida, having heard of the doomed preacher's plight, sent the extra few hundreds of thousands required to forestall the divine execution and, in so doing, bought Brother R. a few more years of life.

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THE RAPTURE

Before Armageddon, before the Second Coming, will be the Rapture! God, in this incarnation, has some serious problems, one of which is his inability to tell time. He prophetically mistakes days for weeks, weeks for months, and months for years. Another problem, also having to do with raw numbers, involves a totally unnecessary Second Coming. Unnecessary, because if his plan of salvation, as understood by Rapture-ists, is ultimately successful, it would be so diabolically destructive to all life forms on the planet that no flesh would be saved alive!

The plan starts off benignly enough with the Great Tribulation all Christianity has been waiting for. Millions of the righteous get roasted by the bad guys in this scenario, just for being good, which proves that no good deeds go unpunished. So many good guys get the chop, in fact, that the need for a rapture is damn near eliminated on the spot. But, somehow, enough good guys escape to warrant supernatural extraction.

Round two of the plan of salvation (what a name!) involves the economic, political, and social collapse of the entire world, which then descends into a state of barbaric anarchy, starvation, and worldwide civil wars. Side orders of famine and pestilence may be ordered at this time which decimate one third of all humans who have thus far managed to survive. Hard on the heels of these calamities comes a full nuclear exchange between whoever's left, in which a second third of earth's population gets the chop.

By this time, less than a third of the pre-tribulation populace will have survived; and the end is not yet. A two hundred million man (and perhaps, woman) army of fanatical Chinese, who presumably have remained isolated from the rest of the world and its travails, swoop down out of outer Mongolia and kill off the remaining third of human kind.

All this is alleged to occur before the Lord of the Rapture returns to take a hand and turn things really ugly. In fact, it may be necessary for God to host both the rapture and the resurrection a bit early because, at

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this point, aside from the heathen Chinese, there's no one left for him to kill!

By whatever means required, believers are asked to accept that somehow, somewhere, enough non-Chinese villains are left alive to warrant their Lord's wrath, which he, the God of love, now mercifully unleashes on his unrepentant children. He smites them with boils in unmentionable places. He turns all the water on the planet to blood, then stokes up the sun and toasts more sinners, then, they say, he sends that 200 million man Oriental Army marching toward what by now must be the totally unpopulated city of Jerusalem.

Just what the heathen Chinese will eat, what with all vegetation and animals destroyed, or what they will drink, now that all H₂O on the planet has coagulated, has never been made public but, after their long and grueling 1,000 mile plus march, they reportedly all will die in their tracks within sight of the Promised Land! (Possibly from a Big Mac attack!)

After these preliminaries, a great planet wide earthquake flattens all the cities, and then their Lord returns. Upon his arrival, the righteous, who are unaccountably still living (and those who have died over the eons), are instantly transmuted into spiritual entities and raptured away to a place of safety.

No mention is made of what they're safe from, however. All the bad guys are toast and the earth's a smoldering ruin. This plan has been referred to as a Great Mystery and, to those among us who know less, it would appear to be a qualified success in that regard. A plan of salvation in which no one is saved is, indeed, puzzling.

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HEAVEN AND HELL

Hell: that's the final destination for all bad guys. And since the vast majority of the human race seems to regard themselves as intrinsically evil, many people secretly suspect that, whatever else their problems in the afterlife, the unavailability of central heating won't be one of them.

Venerable Catholic theologians recognized early on, however, that most of their parishioners were neither of the totally good nor entirely evil variety but, rather, a divergent mixture of the two. They couldn't very well be sent to heaven in this tainted condition, that, was a given. But neither did it seem fair to send them all to hell for a handful of minor character defects. So, intermediate way stations were developed; places to go to for the vast majority of people who had merely been obnoxious little bastards, and not deliberately downright evil.

One of these places was Purgatory. Now, Purgatory, to hear official reports on the subject, definitely resembles hell but, once there, one was roasted slowly; under controlled conditions; microwaved, perhaps. "One soul, medium rare, please!" And only over whatever period of time was judged consistent with the seriousness of the indiscretions.

The Catholic Hell, however, was left intact and it was just as grim a place as the eternally saved could ever hope for or the eternally damned dread. A choking sulfurous inferno, gleefully presided over by pitchfork wielding demons whose sole task it is to torture sinners forever and ever, amen, while a merciful and loving God grins down from the lofty plains of heaven on this eternal barbecue and yells, "More picante sauce!"

This timeless doctrine of shake and bake was by no means a Judeo-Christian concept. At least, they had only one or, at the most, two bottomless pits at their disposal. Other religions have a regular smorgasbord of hells, some with even hot and cold running brimstone. Buddhism has seven hot hells, each nesting comfortably in a much larger and extremely nebulous area called the "land of no return." Buddhist Hell number one is Sanjavia, where the damned are, in time, reincarnated

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by the power of the four winds of heaven.

This, most could live with but in number two (which is what most people would do when faced with it), the unredeemable are slowly sliced to (no doubt very thin) ribbons for all eternity, while their obese patriarch grins on. Those relegated to hell number three, Sanghata, are dashed to pieces between two large and rocky mountains. Hell number four is a more or less muted place where the condemned sob quietly for all eternity. Number five is the Hell of Great Weeping, filled with eternal shrieks of the souls sentenced to wail on forever at the top of their lungs. Hell number six is uncomfortably hot and sticky with, one might presume, a severe shortage of Rightguard, but in Hell number seven, it's a regular scorcher year around and not a drop of ice water in sight.

Each of these cozy retreats is flanked by four torture chambers which include a pit full of run of the mill fire and brimstone surrounded by reeking quagmires. Although Buddhist hells sound like an unpleasant way to squander the golden years, there are worse ways to spend eternity. Despite the fact that the practical Moslems have invented one of the most interesting heavens, they've also invented seven of the more damnable hells, none of which is appealing to any friend of Smokey's.

They start off with Gehenna, a ho hum kind of place where the fires are more or less typical for a midsummer's day in the nether regions. Next comes the Flaming Fire Hell. Number three, the Raging Fire Hell, is apparently for those who deserve a bit more in the way of eternal punishment, while number four, the Blazing Fire Hell, is for those who deserve a lot more. Number five, the Scorching Fire Hell, is hotter yet, and those consigned to number six, the Fierce Fire Hell, really get the shit burned out of them. Number seven is for those so evil that even their continuous torment is of no further amusement to Allah. It's simply called the Abyss and no one knows for sure what goes on down there.

According to Moslem theology, these hells are not assigned arbitrarily either, but rather on the basis of race, creed, and national origin. In point of fact, their hells are segregated so that Moslems, Christians, Jews, Sabbean Idolaters, Persian Magi, all heretics in general and infidels in particular, are assigned a final place of lasting torture with their own kind. Perhaps in a way, this is charitable; after all, it would be tough enough for Moslems to have to spend all eternity in hell, but to roast there forever with Christians or Jews, that would be uncivilized!

In Hindu beliefs, heaven and hell are so difficult to define that sometimes it's hard to tell the difference. Reincarnation is the spiritual

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medium of exchange here. The precise nature and environment of ones future existence is predicated upon the balance of deeds both good and bad committed in previous incarnations. For those whose prior conduct was mediocre, instant replays are the order of the day, as they are forced to relive life all over again, an unappealing prospect for most people. Those who were a real pain in Buddha's rump are usually sent back in less than human form; as a rat, perhaps, or a snake.

The final abode for the naughty, the proud, and the incredibly fucked, in Protestant mythology is Hell American Style. Like all other hells, it reflects the values of the culture which generated it. No segregation is permitted, no frills are allowed, and there are no extra-curricular torments; victims just broil away forever, flat out, and that's that. This is Christianity's version of the final solution, with no possibility of reprieve. There is the usual gaggle of demons, well armed with a primitive array of basic barnyard implements, and a hoofed and horned overseer which presides over the eternal torment.

Since religions have, over the centuries, made such a hell out of living, it's no wonder a heaven had to be invented. After all, there had to be SOME reward worth all the trouble one was put through on this fucking planet.

But not all heavens are created equal. When shopping around for a palatable belief, the smart consumer will look closely at the entire menu. Some of the harshest religions in the world offer far more appetizing afterlife fare than the lukewarm pabulum dished out at Sunday School.

Those lucky enough to be martyred for Islam immediately enter a Middle Eastern version of Valhalla, where all the pleasures allegedly denied them on earth, such as "pretty boys" and "pretty girls" are theirs for the plucking. And while these erstwhile heroes of the ages feast upon the fatted calves and sup the choicest of wines, they'll be constantly attended and catered to by bevvies of beautiful Islamic virgins. Now, just how these demure damsels retain their blessed virginity, while at the constant beck and call of a bunch of dirty old men, has never been satisfactorily explained, but they will be there. We have the Ayatollah's word on it.

Of all the places one might go, Paradise, as laid out in Christian travel brochures is obviously nobody's first choice of an eternal vacation spot. The sad truth is, it's such a sterile and thoroughly boring place many of the allegedly righteous openly admit, given a choice, they'd volunteer for the nether regions, if for no other reason than out of a very real need for some simple human companionship. In short, they are of the opinion

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that, since so many of their former friends and relatives are already DOWN BELOW anyway, heaven would be exceedingly lonely. Add to that, no rock and roll, no beer, no sex, just harp music forever, and the whole damned place begins to sound less than appealing.

At least in Hell one could keep in shape. There's coal or, for the slightly more salacious, other stuff to shovel. And although their official workout video has yet to be released rumor has it that they have a devilishly good aerobics program down there; but in Heaven...nothing; just wealth that can't be spent, on beauty which can't be touched, in an eternal life without purpose. And preachers insist this is worth being good for? Fuck it! Where did these ghastly stories come from anyway?

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Six thousand years ago, 9:00 a.m. Middle Eastern time, on or about October 26, 4004 B.C., God created the universe with the earth in the middle of it, flat. In the midst of this waffle, he created two humans and called them his children. Like any father, he desired above all that his children enjoy peace, happiness, and success.

Being a merciful, loving parent, all he required of his kids was instant perfection and no mistakes. Wishing to protect his offspring, and knowing their weakness for forbidden fruit, he created a tree full of it and planted it in the middle of their nursery. Just in case they couldn't find it, he showed them where it was, but told them he'd kill them if they took so much as a single nibble. Then he left them under the watchful eye of Satan the Devil.

The Devil, a master of mass advertising techniques, knew if he could only persuade Eve to promote his product, Adam would be a done deal. And, thus, the first commercial was performed in which a naked female advertised goods and services targeted solely at a male audience. "Will this bright, tasty, forbidden fruit be good enough for our special guests? Let's find out!"

The response was immediate. Adam promptly withdrew all the credits in his moral checking account, signed a promissory note to the Devil using his soul as collateral, and rode off into the sunset with the fruit, the woman, and more knowledge than he really cared to possess.

The Lord returned to the garden later that evening. After ascertaining the inevitable, he evidenced surprise at the outcome, even though he'd written the script for the entire episode. The merciful, loving Father then threw his children out of the house and told them they could feed, clothe, and shelter themselves from then on, until hell froze over.

Unable to comprehend parental abandonment, the children comforted themselves with bedtime stories about a father who really did love them, and who one day would return...if they were very very good. Eventually they began to believe them.

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