

SPECTRUM

I am who I am In search of God

METANOIA

With John Valk (Campus Ministry)

That's what God answered when Moses asked who he should say sent him to liberate the Hebrews from their enslavement by the rulers (Pharaohs) of Egypt. Like Moses, I'm sure the Egyptian rulers struggled a little over that one. In any event, they were not impressed. They discovered the hard way, however, that "I Am Who I Am" meant business, and that he/she ought not to be taken lightly.

Who this "I Am is, was or will be is rather difficult to fathom completely. Volumes have been written over the matter. I won't pretend to make even a dent in the discussion here. Rather, let me respond in brief to a "Letter to the Editor" which maintained the following: "God cannot be placed within boundaries nor should he/she be seen as an outward goal to be reached for. God is everything, everyone.... Mankind must be willing to look to God not as an external order but as a direct internal being that is part of us which

allows us to grow and feel life as it should be."

The Judaeo-Christian tradition has maintained that God is both transcendent and immanent. That is, God is both above, beyond and greater than humans and the created universe and, at the same time, intimately involved with them and the world.

Humans do, nonetheless, like to put God in a box ("within boundaries"). They refer to God frequently in male gender terms, describe God in medieval, monarchical and bellicose language, understand God as a strict authoritarian and disciplinarian, and, more recently, portray God as all-accepting and all-forgiving.

Despite our lofty intentions, we are limited to human analogies to describe God. We can use only languages, images and symbols that are familiar to us. What is used to describe God, therefore, generally says more about us than it does God. And that is what is most in-

teresting.

To say that God is "everything, everyone" is, I suppose saying that little distinguishes God from nature and humans. Mother Earth Spirituality has seized upon the former; the New Age Movement on the latter.

Mother Earth Spirituality has taught us that nature is more than a piece of inert Newtonian clockwork, ticking to mechanistic precision. The Gaia principle asserts that the natural world, with its sensitive ecologically balanced rhythm, is a giant living organism. It "moans and groans" when tampered with, but will intentionally adapt its environment to continually maintain itself. However, nature's unique ability to "breathe," and survive the destruction heaped upon it does not warrant assigning it a spirituality, much less identifying it with God. It would seem, rather, that this survival-oriented organism points beyond itself, to a creator.

To state that "God is everyone,"

or its converse, "everyone is God," may be placing humans on an unwarranted pedestal. We would, in effect, be worshipping ourselves, which is what many sociologists and philosophers as early as the 19th century asserted.

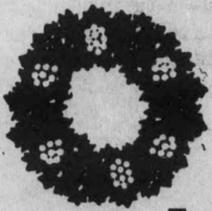
Undoubtedly, we like to think we have great potential, and we do. That fit in particularly well with the 80's image, when booming stock market, a pot of gold at the end of each investment, and an extended and rejuvenated longevity made us believe it was only a matter of time before our utopian prosperity, peace and self-fulfilment became a reality. No wonder we had such a positive (God-like) image of ourselves. Our ingenuity, technical creativity and cosmic vision would soon bring us to the "promised land," North American yuppie style.

Unfortunately, we frequently create God in our own image, rather than the reverse. The focus shifts to the individual, bringing to light or developing the God within. And,

as we seek many and various ways for our self-realization, we frequently adopt a "whatever makes you feel good" mentality, and a concomitant set of private morals, values and ethics.

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures speak instead of a God not so much interested in having us reach a divine level, or making us feel good, as in encouraging us to be human. And, there is a difference. We can speculate about human potential, and we can think of all kinds of things that make us feel good. But what our concentration ought to be, and what can make us feel good on a long-term, rather than short-term, basis is frequently neglected or resisted.

A God that lives in us; as opposed to being us, continually challenges us to seek our authenticity. That was made distinctly easier with the coming of Jesus Christ, which was the original intention of the Christmas celebration. Remember the Christ in Christmas, and have a good one.



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