

God, ANGELS, and REALITY

For those of us who've believed in God and angels all along, America's current resurgence of fascination with them is. . . well, fascinating. What's equally interesting is the way our culture is going about re-believing in the old realities of the Bible. In trying to make the biblical ideas more palatable, we strip them of all that seems threatening. Somehow we miss the fact that when we do, we rob them of all power to be any real help to our hurts, and most of what was wonderful about them to begin with.

Angels are a good example. The angels of the Bible are mysterious, mighty, awe-inspiring servants of the one true God, relaying His messages, rescuing His people, and executing His judgments. In the Scripture, the sight of one usually left a person trembling and dumbstruck. Regrettably, we have come to envision angels as endlessly affirming, sweetly sympathetic servants of our emotional needs. I applaud *Touched by an Angel* for what it is: an engaging and uplifting show that is light years better for the soul than the standard gunk which Hollywood has been feeding us the last couple of decades. Yet its angels, and those of similar shows, bear little resemblance to the angels of the Bible. It's sad that angels, who really are real, have for us become merely one of our trendier fairy tales.

And then, God Himself seems to be rebounding in the polls these days. At least, the word "God" is. On the other hand, whether the "God" who gets thanked so effusively each year at the Oscars has very much in common with the God of the Bible is doubtful. The holy, almighty, majestic, awesome Jehovah, the Eternal Creator, Righteous Lawgiver, and Merciful Redeemer of the Old and New Testaments, is the one Person most conspicuously absent from our contemporary cultural God-talk. We have replaced Him with a divinity of our own devising, one who is more congenial and more responsive to our values. He is "God Lite"; he's less filling, but he tastes great. He makes more sense to us than the severe God we think we remember from Sunday School.

But is he real? After all, we know reality from fantasy by the fact that fantasy is whatever we want it to be, while reality is what it is. You can affect reality somewhat, to be sure – but only in limited ways and only on reality's terms. Gravity is real. Your boss is real. Is God real?

One lady wrote me recently expressing disagreement with something I had written. She chided me,

"Every person must worship his or her own chosen Creator." I wrote back and asked her how it was that she chose her Creator, when prior to her creation she wasn't around to do any choosing. The contradiction inherent in her statement reveals this much, at least: whatever that dear woman thinks about God, she doesn't think he's real – not the way springtime and the IRS are real, anyway. I suspect that most Americans, if truth were told, believe in this same less-than-real God.

Well, if our American God is not really real, why are we so fascinated with him? Perhaps the faith-journey of Roma Barrett, one of our television angels mentioned above, will be instructive. She went back to church recently after an extended time away. She did so because she has a child now; she realizes that "religion has a very grounding influence," and she wants her daughter exposed to it. She has reservations about her church, since many of its beliefs seem rigid, antiquated, or unreasonable to her. . . but she wants that "grounding influence." She comes across in the *McCalls* interview as a kind and earnest person, hoping to find spiritual home turf in the religion of her childhood, despite her discomfort with its harder edges. She's typical of many Baby Boomers.

What many of us Boomers fail to consider is that the reason Christianity has a grounding influence is that it is itself grounded in God. The hard-edged and unyielding aspects of the Christian faith come from the hard-edged, unyielding nature of reality – especially Ultimate Reality Himself. Any religion that even claims to be grounded in reality will, if it's honest, have similar hard edges about it. Reality is just like that. It's quite rude and intractable, and we don't like it. I resent reality when it shows up in my mailbox in those little official-looking envelopes with the windows in them. And, as much as the next guy, I chafe at God's stubborn unyieldingness – sometimes. Other times, His rigidity just serves to remind me that He's real.

I don't know about you, but I'm deeply suspicious of a deity who will readily adjust himself to my preferences. I would have to suspect him of being an Ultimate Reality who isn't ultimately real – a god who isn't really God. He wouldn't be Someone in whom I would try to ground my children. Nor could I set him before people in my home town as a being worthy of their worship, one who could give them a reason and show them the way to live.

If the real God, the God of the Bible, is Someone you want to find, for yourself and your children, I invite you to come seek Him with us. I pray His richest, "realest" blessings upon you.

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