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verticalthought

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

Life Is Fragile ₄

The Festival Code: Unlocking the Future ₆

**To Hell and Back—
for a Popsicle** ₁₀

**God Works
in Mysterious
Ways** ₁₂

**The Fish That
Shoots Down
Evolution** ₁₄

*Hope and Help
for Children
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Unscrambling the Meaning of Life

Discovering and interpreting secret codes has become immensely popular. Dan Brown's work of fiction, *The Da Vinci Code*, has sold millions of copies, and a movie with the same title was released on May 19. Doubleday Publishing claims that *The Da Vinci Code* is "the bestselling adult novel of all time within a one-year period" (March 19, 2004, www.csmonitor.com/2004/0319/p11s01-bogn.html).

And with immense success often comes similar-sized controversy. The book's false assertions—which in the story are discovered by a Harvard code specialist via clues in Leonardo da Vinci's works—have prompted a number of religious writers to counter Brown's portrayal of early and modern Christianity.

Some of the assertions considered to be most offensive include those stating "that Jesus was not divine, that he married the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament, had a child with her, that the bloodline survived in France, and that the church conspired for millennia to hide the truth" (www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/articles/thriller_instinct.html).

While we trust that the readers of *Vertical Thought* will not be easily duped by the fictitious ideas found in the book, what worries many religious leaders is that millions of people will read the novel or see the movie and

While much of the world's attention is consumed by controversy surrounding a fictional book and movie, the meaning of life remains a mystery to all but a few.

think the story Brown has told is true. Some see this as an opportunity to explain the truth, while others suggest that the best approach is to keep quiet because increased controversy only leads to greater sales of the book.

Ironically, while much of the world's attention is consumed by controversy surrounding a fictional book and movie,

a very real issue—the meaning of life—remains a mystery to all but a few.

Do you think I'm overstating the point? If so, type the words "Meaning of Life" into an Internet search engine and note the diversity of opinions you're offered. Ranging from the views of atheists to humanists to those with religious values, you'll find a wide variety of ideas.

Yet to find the true meaning of life, one simply needs to read what the One who gave us life says the purpose and future of life is. Our Creator explains in the Bible the reason we exist and what our destiny can be. The Bible reveals how we are made, what happens when we die and how we can receive eternal life.

Of course, the reading part is easy. It's the understanding that is a challenge. Many understand that people have the opportunity to live forever, but there is a lot of confusion over the process, the timing, what happens when we die, whether hell is real and who is receiving the opportunity to receive eternal life now.

Much of the confusion in understanding how and when human beings can receive eternal life exists because people have overlooked the clues God has embedded in His annual Holy Days. Yet these festivals with their coded meanings reveal how God works with us, His timeline for establishing the Kingdom of God on the earth and how we can be part of His governing family.

In this issue, we help you unscramble the meaning of life. Read carefully. Take note. Don't overlook the clues that reveal a truly meaningful, purposeful life.

David Treybig, Managing editor



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It was one of those moments when I felt overwhelmed by the vastness of the universe. Why are we here? What is the purpose of life?

by Larry Greider

Have you ever seen a sunset so beautiful that you hoped it would never end? Have you been startled by a falling star streaking like a bullet in the night sky? Have you seen the northern lights shimmering off a Canadian lake? I've experienced many such moments that had me gasping for a reality check. Who am I in the vastness of the universe?

I've been addicted to adventure and challenge most of my life, whether it's skydiving, skiing, scuba diving or biking down a long, steep hill. But as I get older, I'm growing more cautious. Life's daily patterns of living, working, sleeping and existing shield us from an amazing fact: Life is precious! Life is fragile and life, as we know it, will end. It is appointed for all people to die at some point (Hebrews 9:27). How many more breaths will I breathe in and blow out?

What about you? Will you live to accomplish all that you dream? When you lie down to breathe your last, will your life have been worth living? These are heavy questions, but ones all of us must ponder eventually.

Last Breath: The Limits of Adventure

Recently I read with fascination a book by Peter Stark titled *Last Breath: The Limits of Adventure* (2001). The author describes adventure junkies who push the limits of their sports, often coming too close to the edge only to realize too late that life is very delicate.

But life is extraordinarily precious and delicate in another way totally unrelated to any risky sports or hobbies we may be involved in—and that is by virtue of the relatively tiny speck of dirt we occupy on a small blue planet suspended in the unimaginable vastness of space.

Speaking of our tiny bubble in which life can exist, Mr. Stark writes: "If you set the small belt that offers the precise conditions necessary for human life against all the rest of the planet—against all the earth's surface that is desert and ice, rock and ocean—you realize exactly how limited our life-sustaining environment actually is. More important, you realize how simple it is to step beyond it, how easily we can break through the thin web of life that supports the delicate human organism.

"And if you set that band of life against the enormity of the

Life is extraordinarily precious and delicate by virtue of the relatively tiny speck of dirt we occupy on a small blue planet suspended in the unimaginable vastness of space.

Life Is Fragile

It is clear that we are unique in our galaxy and we are being sustained in a narrow band of life forces. Considering the fragility of life, one would suspect the questions waiting to be asked are “Why am I here?” and “What is my destiny?”

solar system, or of the Milky Way galaxy, or of the unknown reaches of the universe, we as a species occupy a niche far smaller than a tiny tuft of wildflowers sheltered by a small boulder atop an otherwise barren mountain peak that harbors in that single tuft the only life on an entire planet of barren mountain peaks.

“This is what, at some level, science and religion both are trying to tell us—how infinitesimally small the scale of human life is against the scale of the cosmos . . .” (p. 5).

The biblical character Job, when his comfortable and blessed life was disrupted, saw the fragility of his life. He asked, “What strength do I have, that I should hope? And what is my end, that I should prolong my life?” (Job 6:11). Answering these questions is about as important a task as anyone can attempt.

Extraordinary earth

Benjamin Wiker, in a 2001 article titled “The Privilege of Life on Earth,” commented: “Do you think that our Earth is an ordinary planet? Do you think that we have a ‘commonplace’



sun, and live in a run-of-the-mill solar system, in an unremarkable galaxy? If so, think again, advises astrophysicist Guillermo Gonzalez. Our sun, our solar system, and our galaxy are quite extraordinary—so extraordinary, he contends, that they must have had an Intelligent Designer. This, he emphasizes, is a statement based not on religious faith, but on the latest findings of astrophysics . . .

“Recent advances in science are demonstrating that life demands very particular conditions which are quite difficult to meet. In fact, these conditions must be met not only on a planet, but in the solar system and galaxy which support it.

“Dr. Guillermo Gonzalez, a fellow of the Discovery Institute—the Seattle-based think tank on Intelligent Design—is one of the leading researchers in this area. With Discovery Institute fellow Jay Richards, he is currently working on a book which argues not only that Earth was designed for complex, intelligent life, but that the position of the Earth makes it the best observa-

tion point from which intelligent inhabitants might view the universe. ‘What better mandate could we have for the scientific enterprise than to discover that the universe is set up for it?’ he asks” (www.arn.org/docs2/news/privelegedearth112001.htm). Since this was written, the book by Guillermo and Richards has been published. Called *The Privileged Planet*, it has also been made into an excellent DVD production.

The Bible makes it clear that God is working in the lives of human beings, made in His image, to offer the gift of eternal life. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Eternity in their hearts

Wise King Solomon went on to say that God “has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). That is to say, no one can figure it out with his imagination alone. God must reveal these amazing truths to us. And yes, the truth is more remarkable than fiction.

The Bible continues to bedazzle us: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1-2).

It is clear that we are unique in our galaxy and we are being sustained in a narrow band of life forces. Considering the fragility of life, one would suspect the questions waiting to be asked are “Why am I here?” and “What is my destiny?” For answers to these questions, request our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* You may request, download or read it online at www.ucg.org/booklets.

Life is more than just the physical. Jesus Christ said: “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25).

Indeed it is! Life is a precious journey where we are privileged to learn of God and His amazing plan for mankind. While you have breath and imagination, use your fleeting years to reflect on life—life that is enjoyable, challenging and eternal. That gift is promised to those who learn to think *vertically*.

Larry Greider is a member of the *Vertical Thought* staff, chairman of the Youth Education Team and coordinator of the United Youth Camps. He also serves as a United Church of God pastor in Los Angeles, California.

The following letters from and to Abdul are composites, but the events pictured by God's Holy Days are real! In fact, these little-known celebrations contain coded messages that reveal the future for everyone.

by Mike Bennett

Dear United Church of God,

You don't know me, but I have read about your organization in the Feb. 8, 2006, edition of the Italian newspaper *Libero*. I found the interview with one of your ministers when I was doing a Google search for Christians who observe the festivals of the Bible.

You see, although I live in a country where it is very dangerous

booklet we publish called *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* (www.ucg.org/booklets), starting on page 30.

A turning point in history

"The Feast of Trumpets depicts nothing less than the return of Jesus Christ to earth to establish the Kingdom of God! The book of Revelation reveals a sequence of earth-shaking events depicted by angels sounding a series of seven trumpet blasts. The seventh angel's sounding of the last trumpet signifies that 'the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ' (Revelation 11:15).

"The return of Jesus Christ stands as the final and most significant event associated with the blowing of the prophetic trumpets. Of all the prophecies in the Bible, this one surely heralds the most exciting news possible for this weary, sin-filled world!

"The Feast of Trumpets also marks the future fulfillment of the many Old Testament prophecies that speak of a

The Festival Code: Unlocking the

to become a Christian, I have become very interested in the Bible. I am beginning to believe that Jesus Christ truly is the Savior. As I read the Bible I find that Jesus Christ is called our Passover, and I find that the Church of God started on the Day of Pentecost.

If these two festivals are so important, I suspect the other festivals must be as well. But as I learn about many Christian churches, I do not find them observing these days. Many of them say the meaning of these festivals has been fulfilled and therefore it is no longer necessary to observe them.

In the *Libero* interview, your minister said, "What distinguishes us is the observance of the biblical feasts . . ." Since this is so, please tell me, what does the next biblical festival of the year, the Feast of Trumpets, mean? Also, is there future meaning behind these festivals or are they simply memorials of historical events?

Sincerely,
Abdul

Dear Abdul,

Thank you very much for your message and interest in the meaning of the biblical Feast of Trumpets. We applaud your courage and desire for the truth even in difficult circumstances. You've asked some profound questions about matters that few understand.

To begin answering your questions, let me quote from a

Messiah coming as a king who will rule with power and authority. The concept of a conquering Messiah was on the minds of the apostles immediately after Jesus' resurrection. When He appeared to them in those early days, they asked questions such as: 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6).

"Even in His earthly ministry, Jesus had spoken of distinctions between His first and second coming. When Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, questioned Jesus just before the crucifixion, Jesus stated clearly that He had not come to rule at that time.

"My kingdom is not of this world,' Jesus told the government official. 'If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Then Pilate asked Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered in the affirmative: 'You say rightly that I am a king. *For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth*' (John 18:36-37)."

The Bible, Abdul, shows trumpets were used to communicate important messages, such as calling people to meetings or giving an alarm of war. Trumpets could also furnish a festive sound (Numbers 10:10). With their ability to transmit sound over long distances, trumpets were ideal for attracting people's attention.

The New Testament gives additional understanding of the significance of the blowing of trumpets. The apostle Paul

described the return of Jesus Christ this way: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Paul also wrote of the people God has called now (pictured by Pentecost) being resurrected to immortal life. In 1 Corinthians 15:52 he says this will happen “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

The apostle John also linked the blowing of a trumpet with Christ’s return: “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15). These passages dramatically show the significance of the Feast of Trumpets.

The **Feast of Tabernacles** teaches us that when Jesus Christ returns, a new society will be set up to rule the earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:4; Leviticus 23:39-43; Matthew 17:1-4; Hebrews 11:8-9). God’s laws will spread throughout the world to bring a period of peace and prosperity never seen before (Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:35, 44; 7:13-14).

Finally, a separate one-day festival, now referred to as the **Last Great Day**, immediately follows the Feast of Tabernacles. This Holy Day pictures the Great White Throne Judgment, the seventh step in God’s plan as described in Revelation 20:11-13. People who have died having never heard about their incredible potential will have their true destiny revealed to them.

All the dead who have ever lived—people like the queen of Sheba, inhabitants of ancient Nineveh and the people of Christ’s own time—will be resurrected together (Matthew 12:41-42). That resurrection of billions of people back to physical life is detailed in Ezekiel 37:1-14. These are the “rest of the dead” spoken of in Revelation 20:5. Billions of human beings will repent of their past sins and receive the gift of everlasting life.

Though few understand it, this important step in God’s plan has always been in the Bible. And understanding the biblical Holy Days helps unlock this code.

God “desires all men to be saved” and is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Through His wonderful plan, all of humanity will be given the opportunity to learn God’s truth, come to repentance and receive salvation. (See *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God* and *What Is Your Destiny?* For a more complete explanation of the festivals, request our free booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan*. These booklets are all available at www.ucg.org/booklets.)

So, Abdul, the meaning of life, of the universe and of our future is tied up in these biblical festivals! These observances lay out the plan by which Jesus Christ is going to return to earth to establish the Kingdom of God, and they reveal how we can be part of it. What an incredible gift of God to allow us to understand these as we read and believe His Bible and obediently celebrate His commanded days!

Mike Bennett, a minister of the United Church of God, is the managing editor of *United News*. He, his wife Becky and their two daughters live near Cincinnati, Ohio.

Future

Real life offered to all

There is much more in the booklet about this Holy Day, as well as about the three festivals that follow soon after it: the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the eighth day that we call the Last Great Day. These festivals help decode the mystery of God’s plan for all human beings—for life itself! Briefly, these mean:

The **Day of Atonement** teaches us that Jesus Christ gave His life to pay the penalty for—to atone for—the sins of all mankind. It also points to the time when Satan, the ultimate source of sinful thoughts and attitudes, will be bound for 1,000 years (Leviticus 16:29-30, 20-22; Revelation 20:1-3).

Lost Festivals?

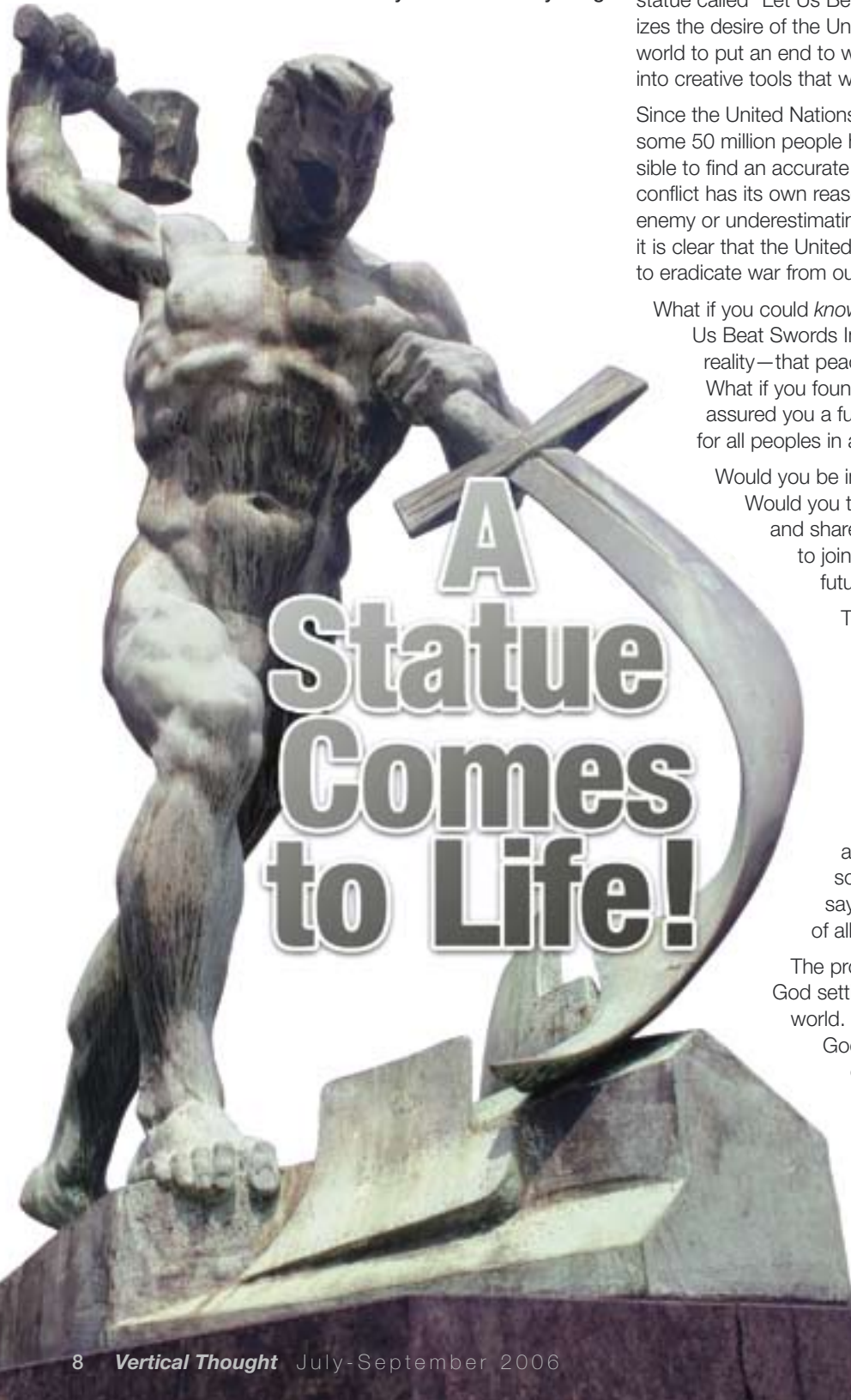
Why do so few Christian churches keep the festivals of the Bible? That is another story, and a long one. But in short, it goes back to the first few centuries after Christ, when Christians were considered a sect of Judaism and were being persecuted along with the Jews. Many sought to distance themselves from those customs considered Jewish.

This culminated, by the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine, in the complete rejection of many of the laws of the Old Testament. Then, in order to attract and assimilate those of other religions into the church now supported by the Roman Empire, other holidays were adopted and the biblical Holy Days were rejected. (For more on this, see the booklet *The Church Jesus Built* at www.ucg.org/booklets.)



The setting: the United Nations gardens in New York City. The plot: a dream symbolized by a statue becomes reality. The cast of characters: being chosen now . . .

by Ken Treybig



Several sculptures and statues stand in the gardens around the United Nations headquarters buildings in New York. Donated by various countries over the years, these items represent the hopes and dreams of the world.

In the middle of the last century, the Soviet Union donated a statue called “Let Us Beat Swords Into Plowshares.” It symbolizes the desire of the United Nations and of the peoples of the world to put an end to war and convert destructive machinery into creative tools that will benefit all nations.

Since the United Nations came into existence in October 1945, some 50 million people have been killed in war. It’s all but impossible to find an accurate number since each side in an armed conflict has its own reasons for inflating the casualties of the enemy or underestimating the number of its own dead. However, it is clear that the United Nations has utterly failed in its effort to eradicate war from our planet.

What if you could *know* for certain that the meaning of the “Let Us Beat Swords Into Plowshares” statue would become reality—that peace would break out all over the world? What if you found the code to a hidden secret that assured you a future of peace and prosperity was waiting for all peoples in all nations?

Would you be interested in unlocking such a code? Would you think such a find should be advertised and shared with others? Would you be willing to join in an annual celebration picturing that future time of joy and peace?

That’s exactly what the fall feasts of God—particularly the Feast of Tabernacles—picture. (Be sure to read “The Festival Code: Unlocking the Future” beginning on page 4 for more details.)

Compiling the clues

In chapters 8 through 11 of the book of Revelation, the apostle John saw seven angels blow trumpets. When the seventh sounded, he heard loud voices in heaven saying Jesus Christ had become the ruler of all the kingdoms of the world.

The prophet Daniel was also given a vision of God setting up a kingdom that takes over the world. Describing a union of rulers opposed to God in the end time, he wrote: “In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

God declared the Feast of Tabernacles as one of *His* feasts, com-

manding it as a seven-day celebration starting on the 15th day of the seventh month of the sacred calendar (Leviticus 23:34). This corresponds to the months of September and October on our modern calendar.

God went on to explain that His people were to save a 10th of their income each year so they could afford to travel to the designated place for keeping that Feast (Deuteronomy 14:22-27). It was His command that the whole family travel to the Feast and use those funds to rejoice (verse 26)—to have a great time!

Many know that ancient Israel celebrated this feast in appreciation of the year's harvest. But later in the Old Testament, God began revealing that this feast pictured much greater things to occur in a future era—the time when Jesus will return to this planet and establish the Kingdom of God.

Some of these later prophecies reveal that during that future period God's truth and law will spread to the whole earth from Jerusalem (Micah 4:2), that it will be so abundant a time that harvesters will still be working when it comes time to plant the next crop (Amos 9:13), that the nature of animals will be changed to be peaceful (Isaiah 11:6-8), that weather patterns will be changed so even deserts are fruitful (Isaiah 35:1-2, 6-7), and that debilitating health problems will be healed (Isaiah 35:5-6).

Interestingly, the very passage that inspired the sculpture the Soviet Union donated to the United Nations is found in a prophecy that describes what the Feast of Tabernacles pictures. Isaiah 2:4 speaks of mankind beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and of nations no longer fighting or even learning warfare anymore!

Isaiah 2:4 speaks of mankind beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and of nations no longer fighting or even learning warfare anymore!

Let the "feasting" begin

No wonder God says to rejoice when we celebrate this feast! And young people from all around the earth will gather in designated locations to do just that as they observe the Feast of Tabernacles, this year Oct. 7-13, with their families.

What's it like? Here are a few quotes from young people about how they view this exciting time, commonly referred to simply as "the Feast":

• "I get to spend a lot of time with my family, learning more about them and, in turn, them about me. We're in a really great atmosphere for learning and experiencing God's way of life and acting on it while we're there with our families! The Feast almost always brings everyone together in a good environment." —*Codi*

• "The Feast of Tabernacles is one of the most inspiring of God's festivals. The message of the Kingdom, and the blessings we receive physically and spiritually, give me enthusiasm and hope for the future.

"Some of the great rewards of the Feast include the building of personal relationships, spending time with people of like mind and enjoying the prosperity afforded to us by following God's tithing laws. The blessing of being able to obtain the physical things our heart desires helps me to know the loving nature of God and that He does bless us for following His commandments.

"Sharing time with brethren helps me know that I am not alone. The Feast gives me an opportunity to build relationships that I will maintain through this life into eternity." —*Eddie*

• "The first thing that comes to mind when I think about the Feast is the unity and fellowship of God's people. The entire Feast is something that I look forward to every year as a whole, but I think specifically of the really big gatherings where there are barbecues, games, sports and dances, such as last year.

"There was a positive, godly air around everybody and it spread throughout the group. It is easier for Satan to deceive us as one person, but when all of God's people come together and grow as one, Satan doesn't stand a chance; for not only do we have our brethren encouraging us in the way of the truth, we more importantly have God on our side. The Feast to me means strength, unity and an amazing way to end a long year and start a new one." —*Julie*

• "When I think about the Feast, I look forward to the activities I will be doing and the people I will be spending time with and to growing spiritually. There are always good messages at the Feast. A few years ago at the Feast, I came to understand the

concept of giving without expecting anything in return." —*Erin*

• "I look forward to the Feast because it is a time like no other where you get to do new things, such as travel around the country and world, take a break from regular life, make new friends, have fun and have a daily reminder of the reason we are able to do these things. If you stop and think for a minute, if God had not created the Feast for us then we would all just be at home, going about our normal lives." —*Bonnie*

• "Before leaving for the Feast last year, I was worried about some issues that were unfolding in my life. After listening to the sermons, attending the Bible studies, holding small Bible discussions with my friends, and doing some praying, I came to a state of serenity. Colossians 3:15-16 became a living reality as I gained

Continued on page 11

To Hell and Back—for a Popsicle

The story is real. The Popsicle was sweet. The understanding is priceless.

by Randy Stiver

Jerusalem's sizzling summer sun in '73 fiercely scorched my exposed skin and slow-cooked my brain. I found archaeology at the Temple Mount to be good, hard, hot, dusty, thirsty work. It was so hot and three of us so thirsty that we stood at the edge of the precipice that noonday summoned the nerve to launch an expedition into the very depths of hell itself to find something to cool our dry tongues and parched lips.

Down we went, down, down into the Valley of Hinnom, down into Gehenna, down into the very hell that Jesus spoke of, down, down . . . until we found the small grocery store that sold the most delicious pineapple Popsicles you can imagine. We bought four, including one that I got for a beautiful coworker (now my lovely wife), and marched back up the steep street happily licking our treats. After that, we regularly went to hell and back for Popsicles.

Hell must not be so bad then? No, hell is bad enough, but more importantly hell is badly misunderstood by every religion of the world—especially traditional Christianity. There is no need for you to misunderstand hell, however. Come, let me take you on a quick tour of the Bible. We'll go to hell and back with true understanding.

Hell to the world

At the turn of the 21st century various surveys show that in America about half of the population believes in a hell of some sort.

Some believe in the basic, popular hell of Catholic and Protestant Christianity—an ever-burning place of torment and punishment for the immortal souls of wicked people. They're firmly convinced that the Bible teaches that kind of hell—even though it was not part of Christian doctrine until nearly two centuries after Christ!

Others can't conceive that a loving God would administer such a heinous punishment for eternity. They reason that since God is so loving, everyone, no matter how evil and demented, will receive eternal life and no one will go to hell—never mind that such a philosophy has no basis in Scripture, and its logical conclusion would be that nothing is really wrong or evil.

Hell in the Bible

The truth is, there are actually three "hells" mentioned in the Bible as it is commonly translated into English—and not one of them matches either of the above schools of thought. The confusion arises when the usual Christian theology swirls the three "hells" together into one great muddled mass. Let's look at each as the Bible explains it and sort out fact from fiction.

Hell #1: Hades or Sheol. *Hades* is the Greek word often rendered as "hell" in the New Testament, and *sheol* is the corresponding Hebrew word used in the Old Testament. Both words simply mean "the grave."

The classic example drawn from the beautiful, Shakespearean-sounding King James Version is in Acts 2:27: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." The word translated "hell" is the Greek *hades*.

This verse is a direct and inspired quotation from one of King David's psalms in the Old Testament—Psalm 16:10. There the Hebrew word translated as "hell" is *sheol*. Both passages refer to the fact that Jesus as Messiah would not remain in the grave, but would be resurrected.

We will all go to this kind of "hell," for it is appointed for all men to die once (Hebrews 9:27). But the grave is not a place of constant conscious torture and torment!

Solomon wrote of the grave like this: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave [*sheol*] where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). The grave is simply a place of very dead sleep until the resurrection, which itself is another story. You will find no Popsicles in this hell.

Hell #2: Tartaroo. This Greek word, found and translated only once in the New Testament as "hell," has a very clear and specific application: "God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment" (2 Peter 2:4).

Fallen or sinning angels do exist. They are called demons and the chief one is Satan the devil. God has justly prepared a condition of spiritual restraint or imprisonment for them today. This is the idea behind the use of the term *tartaroo* in this passage.

However, there are no human beings who will experience the hell of *tartaroo*. Yet much of Christianity thinks that the traditional ever-burning hell will be like *tartaroo*, where they think the immortal souls of bad human beings will suffer forever.

Here's the bombshell—they're wrong because human beings have no such thing as an immortal soul! But that is a huge, other story.

Hell #3: Gehenna. Now we have arrived at the business end of the biblical hell. God will offer the gift of eternal life in His great Kingdom to every last human being. But to accept

the sacrifice of Christ for our sins—and to live God’s way of life of overcoming—forces each of us to make a choice. Do we want to live forever or not? The answer should be obvious, right?

But “should be” sometimes gets slippery. The bottom line is that those few who ultimately rebel against their Creator and refuse to change their ways to embrace His ways will *die* in the true hell of the Bible. God means what He says: “The wages of sin is *death*” (Romans 6:23, emphasis added), not eternal life in some bad place.

Completely contrary to the hellfire of many religions and certainly most of Christianity, the hell of the Bible simply *ends the life* of the wicked—it does not torture and torment them forever. After all, how could an average 70-year life of a sinner equal a never-ending eternity of heinous agony?

The true hell reflects both God’s justice, by enforcing His divine laws of life, and His mercy, by swiftly ending the existence of the unrepentant few who choose to be the evil, the covetous, the thieving, the cowardly, the unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and liars (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8).

How to go to hell and back

Now here’s how I went to hell and back for the Popsicle. *Gehenna* is a Greek word meaning “valley of Hinnom.” Jesus used *gehenna* to describe the true hell that He also called the *lake of fire*, the place of destruction of the wicked referred to in the prophetic book of Revelation (20:15).

The site of ancient Jerusalem, then as well as today, was marked by two deep valleys, almost canyons, running along its east and south sides. The valley to the south is the Valley of Hinnom or *gehenna*.

During part of ancient Israel’s history it was the site of idolatrous shrines where disobedient and perverted Israelites committed the evil sin of child sacrifice. By Christ’s day it had become Jerusalem’s city dump, where refuse was always being burned. As the historical site of infanticide and then as a trash dump, Jesus chose *gehenna* (Luke 12:4-5) as a fitting reference for the lake of fire.

The Temple Mount excavations where my wife-to-be and I were working that hot summer stood uphill from the lower end of the Valley of Hinnom. During our noon breaks we had time to walk down into *gehenna*—hell—and get those delightful Popsicles. That is, get Popsicles and do some deep thinking about our lives and life itself in the light of God’s Word.

Life has consequences. Knowing what you and I know now, if we choose life, then a happy eternity in the Kingdom of God is our destiny. If, however, we choose to reject the great and loving God who made us, then our conclusion is death in the lake of fire, the true hell of the Bible. And believe me—we don’t want to go there!

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Columbus and Cambridge, Ohio.

A Statue Comes to Life!

Continued from page 9

peace through interacting with other Church members and God Himself (through prayer and thought). I went on to enjoy the physical aspects of the Feast after its spiritual backbone was firmly supporting me.”—*Preston*

- “I look forward to seeing people I’ve met through the years. The network of friends you can make is astounding. One of the biggest lessons the Feast has taught me is that you can choose to have fun and not do anything wrong. You don’t have to do “bad” things to enjoy time with others who are also making right choices. And you can have a ridiculous amount of fun doing things that are right.”—*Lena*

- “I look forward to spending time with my family, which I don’t normally have time for because life is so busy with work, school and everything else. At the Feast it’s a full seven or more days with family. During the Feast I also like the opportunity we have to go places and do things we would not be able to do otherwise. At the Feast we focus on God. Hearing different sermons helps me understand why we are there. It’s time we focus on the Kingdom of God and not the world.”—*Stuart*

- “It’s so full of laughter and fun times. The things I look forward to at the Feast are great activities, seeing close friends, making new ones, special music songs, learning more about God, Bible studies and deeper understanding through encouraging and inspirational sermons. At the Feast I’ve learned about reflection, kindness, love and knowing this is the right path for life.”—*Rachel*

An awesome educational experience

As these young people expressed, the Feast of Tabernacles is truly a time of great rejoicing—looking forward to the time when Jesus Christ will return to bring about what mankind has been searching for, but has been unable to attain—an age of universal peace and prosperity.

But the Feast is not only about fun. It’s also about education. In Deuteronomy 14 where God says to save a tithe to keep the Feast where He designates, He also says that one of the purposes is so we will learn to always fear God (verse 23). The word *fear* involves the concepts of revering, honoring and putting God first in our lives.

Those who follow the example of the New Testament Church by keeping the feasts of God learn many wonderful lessons. And when they keep the Feast of Tabernacles, they not only learn about God, they also celebrate the fact that God will bring what human beings can only dream about on our own—a time of great joy, health, prosperity and peace.

If you’d like to learn more about the difference between today’s popular holidays and the ones that picture important events in God’s plan such as the sentiments of this statue coming to life, request, download or read online our free booklet *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* You’ll find it at www.ucg.org/booklets.

Ken Treybig is the director of United Youth Camp Carter and pastor of United Church of God congregations in East Texas.

God Works in Mysterious Ways

Who would have thought I would have to leave my country to find a church that existed in my own city? This experience took me to Africa and back. And I returned home with two sweet rewards.

by Daniel Fitzpatrick

Have you ever wondered, “Why did God choose me?” Or if you are not yet baptized, “How do I really know that this is my calling?” Let me tell you a little story that may help you to think about both of these questions in a slightly different way. This story takes place in the far-off land of Burkina Faso!

First, where in the world is Burkina Faso? That’s what I said eight years ago when I was sent an invitation to join the Peace Corps. I looked at a globe and, to my amazement, Burkina Faso did not even appear to exist! How could I go to a place for the next two years that didn’t even exist? I called my recruiter and she calmly explained to me that the name of the country had changed from Upper Volta in 1987.

Burkina Faso is located in West Africa. It’s a landlocked country of 12 million people bordering Niger, Mali, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Benin and Togo. This little country was where I first heard about the Church of God. I met the one woman out of 12 million people who was part of the Church there, and she later became my wife. What are the odds? Clearly, to me, God made this happen.

I left my home in Boston, Massachusetts, in June of 1997 to join the Peace Corps. At the time, my spiritual life was in shambles. I was a member of a major Christian denomination but was not a good “practicing” Christian.

Growing up, I had attended church every Sunday with my family. On graduating from high school, however, I was spiritually thirsting for more. A few years passed, and I decided that I wanted to be a priest. I know, pretty crazy, huh? After deciding against the priesthood (since I wanted to get married and have kids), I still didn’t know what to do with my life.

In the fall of 1996 I heard about the Peace Corps. I would have a chance to travel the world, learn about a new culture, live with this new culture for two years and truly get to know a different people. How was I to know that God was steering me halfway across the world to learn of the true faith? In fact, it was also available in my own backyard, but God has a sense of humor.

Meeting my future wife

Six months into my service I met a wonderful lady. Up to that time I had been attending the church I grew up in almost every Sunday. I felt I was connecting with God somehow. It was kind of like getting a fix or trying to satisfy a need.

After a few weeks of getting to know each other, my future

wife started showing me the Bible. It was a new revelation for me! I think I may have opened a Bible maybe one other time in my life!

She continued to tell me about things her father had learned through a magazine he had received back in 1970 through a *Reader’s Digest* ad. He was baptized in 1972 and remains to this day the only known baptized member of the Church of God in the entire country! Again, how incredible it was that I was led to this particular woman in Burkina Faso who knew God’s truth!

God knows each and every one of us. He gave us all the power of choice right from the beginning. When God calls us, we have two choices: We can live our lives according to His Word or we can ignore His admonitions and live our lives according to the ways of this world.

Deuteronomy 30:19 tells us that we will live if we choose God: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”

Filling the emptiness

If we follow God, we cannot go wrong. I didn’t realize that the need and emptiness I was feeling in my youth was a craving for God’s true Word.

I was gradually made aware of teachings I had no idea existed. Some of these included the fact that God’s Ten Commandments are what makes life work and that He *really* expects us to live by them. And that God has special Holy Days He wants us to keep, special times that do a wonderful job of explaining why mankind exists in the first place and what’s in store for us all. And that He has other laws, like tithing (this was a tough one for me, but I eventually came around!), that He expects us to obey.

If you’d like to learn about these instructions, simply request, download or read online our free booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*

I started following God when I learned of His expectations. Looking back now, it feels as if I just kind of slipped into His way of life. But I know better. I know that all the time when I was groping around for something I didn’t know existed, He was working with me. I believe He even had this crazy plan to send me to Africa to find Him!

How about you? Do you find yourself feeling there has to be something more meaningful or fulfilling in your life? Are you thinking of being baptized? Many of you reading this magazine have grown up in the United Church of God (publisher of *Vertical Thought*), so your experiences have been very different from mine. Others reading this magazine are learning for the first time about the biblical Christianity practiced by the first-century Church, which is the same Christianity that God expects of us today.

For those of us responding to God's call, 1 Peter 2:9 explains that He is calling us "out of darkness into His marvelous light" so that we will become His "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people." How great is that?

I believe that if you are reading this magazine, you are thirsting for the answers to big questions, like "Why are we here?," "Who is God?" and "What makes this Church different from all

other churches?" My advice to you is to keep thirsting for that truth and never stop until you have found it!

Remember, God works in mysterious ways. He did with me, and He may be doing the same with you right now. He is an awesome God who can make anything happen for anyone.

Daniel Fitzpatrick earned an Ed.M. in International Educational Development from Boston University and is currently the Director of Student Records at the Boston University School of Education.

From Our Readers...

Regarding *Vertical Thought*

Wonderful and true information! When I stumbled across your Web site through surfing, I was so pleased to find someone out there who had the same beliefs as myself. You know, most religions don't teach the truth. After ordering your magazine and reading it a few times, I knew you had the truth going on. Keep up the great work and spread the truth.

Nancy

Used to be a Muslim

I used to be a Muslim. I just became a college undergraduate this year, and I am now free from my father's strict watch. At college a guy gave me a beautiful magazine belonging to your association, and I read it with great enthusiasm. I found it relevant. Your magazine spoke on issues about my education, future and career.

Name withheld

African concerns

Most of your articles do not address things that happen to African readers. That is, there are things that work in the United States but not in Africa. So please if you can include things for Africans, I will be so glad.

Ayoniyi

Thanks for your e-mail. We do appreciate your interest. Since approximately two thirds of our readers live in the United States, we do write mainly for an American audience.

That said, we want to effectively reach our readers who live in areas outside the United States too. To help broaden the perspective of our articles, we have recently added international reviewers living in England, Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. And we are incorporating input they provide into our articles.

While God's laws are applicable to all people in all nations, we realize the specific issues facing youth will vary by region and country. Thus we always appreciate input from readers regarding issues youth face in their respective countries. We also appreciate everyone's prayers that we may more effectively reach young people living in all nations.

"Helped me stick to my faith"

I have a very close friend that I recently found out tried to contact the dead—and that he's done so many times before! Two years ago, I read your Oct.-Dec. 2004 issue (dealing with the spirit world and explaining beliefs). But I'd grown up in the Church of God and really just took all that knowledge

for granted—it was simply a "duh."

When I heard what my friend had done (and had been doing), at first I rationalized that everyone is entitled to his own beliefs. Then I thought back to that magazine issue, reread it and realized that I don't want to be deeply involved with someone caught up in such contagious danger! So thank you very much! The article "Is the Spirit World Real?" has really helped me stick to my faith and not just "let it slide."

Anyway, I just thought I'd share my little story of how you helped me get back on track and take this opportunity to thank you again for providing such a wonderful service (FREE!!!) to the teens of the Church and beyond.

Courtney

Feels strongly about the effects of the popular media

As busy as I am, I don't always read *Vertical Thought*, but I did read almost everything in the April-June issue, partly because I feel so strongly—as all of you do—about the effects of the popular media. Very good articles. Thank you.

Don

"Christian Through College"

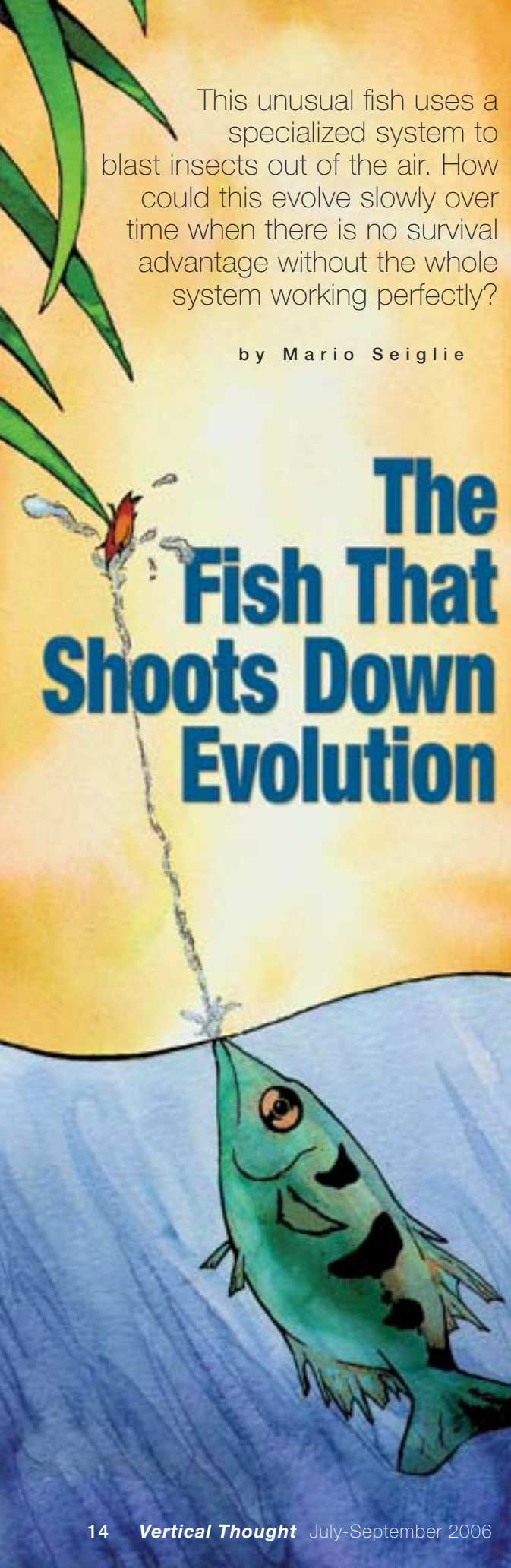
I have a comment about your article "Christian Through College" [Jan.-March 2006 *Vertical Thought*]. I did not find it helpful. All the comments from college graduates pertained only to dealing with pressures from professors.

What about pressures to go out on a Friday night, handling non-Christian roommates, drinking and sex? All these problems are a lot more real than having problems with professors. Most colleges have policies pertaining to religion—that it's illegal for professors to discriminate. I was looking forward to hearing about fellow Church members who have dealt with the same pressures I'm dealing with right now. It was a little disappointing.

Erin

Thanks very much for your input. At our Web site (www.verticalthought.org/), you'll find previous articles in our archives and "Questions and Answers" that address the subjects you mention. For example, see "Staying Christian on a College Campus" (www.verticalthought.org/issues/vt03/collegecampus.htm) and the July-September 2004 issue. We'll also keep your suggestions in mind for future articles.

If you have comments or questions, feel free to e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org. Messages may be edited for clarity and space.



This unusual fish uses a specialized system to blast insects out of the air. How could this evolve slowly over time when there is no survival advantage without the whole system working perfectly?

by Mario Seiglie

The Fish That Shoots Down Evolution

In Asia, Africa and Australia lives a remarkable creature, the archerfish, that shoots down its prey from the air above it with a burst of water. It uses its tongue and the top of its mouth to form a groove similar to a gun barrel. Then, by compressing its gills, it squirts water up to six feet with deadly accuracy—in spite of the distortion caused by seeing the target from below the surface of water.

What's so amazing about the archerfish's ability to shoot straight? When light passes between air and water, it is refracted, which causes a distortion. If an archerfish simply aimed at the object where it *appeared* to be from below the water, it could never hit its target! Yet scientists have found that archerfish are able to strike their target when sighting upwards at angles of 40 degrees!

More amazingly, marine researchers have discovered that these fish can hit their prey whether the amount of refraction is large or small. They have also found that the fishes' binocular vision allows them to see clearly at considerable distances above them, an ability other fish do not have.

An experiment

Here is an experiment. In a clear glass of water, hold a pencil at an angle halfway under the water and look at it from different positions. Notice how the pencil appears different below and above the water. That is the refraction of the light changing from the water to the air.

So how can the archerfish compensate for this distortion and know how to shoot at the right place?

Evolutionists don't know

Evolutionists still don't know how the archerfish got its amazing abilities. They can only wonder! Viewed through the distortion of evolution, they cannot explain how the archerfish gradually learned to *not* aim where its eyes see but to aim instead at a different spot where the target *actually* is.

Without its binocular vision, it could not see the object with such precision, and without the special shape of the upper mouth and a specialized tongue, it could not make the groove it needs to shoot the concentrated jet of water. Many factors have to appear *together*—and be perfectly formed—for this shooting mechanism to work. This, of course, goes totally against Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, which is based on a gradual, step-by-step process.

Darwin wrote in *The Origin of Species*, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down" (1859, p. 171).

The archerfish offers precisely such an example, since *several* complex systems must all appear at the same time, *perfectly* and not gradually formed—binocular vision, a specialized mouth and tongue, specialized gills to compress and expel water and an aiming system based in the brain and not in the eyes. If any of these parts is missing, the mechanism will not hit the target and no survival advantage is created.

Shooting down Darwin's theory

When you get down to the facts, the archerfish with one squirt of its gills shoots down Charles Darwin's entire theory of evolution—and that by Darwin's own admission!

So evolution doesn't have the answer to this mystery. But the Bible does. Genesis 1:20-21 says that God created all the creatures that live in the water. He created a great variety of perfectly formed fish, including the archerfish with all its special features, such as binocular vision, other specialized organs and a built-in ability to compensate for the distortion of the water.

Mario Seiglie is a pastor of United Church of God congregations in Garden Grove, California, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

From a Scientist Who Believes in God...

Vertical Thought discusses evolution and the problems with this theory with Dr. Steven Holladay, a professor of anatomy and toxicology at Virginia Tech's College of Veterinary Medicine.



Interview by Kristin Yarbrough

Vertical Thought: From colleges to zoos and everywhere in between, it seems like scientists are pushing the theory of evolution. Are there any scientists who don't believe in evolution?

Dr. Steven Holladay: Sometimes it seems like everyone who works in scientific fields supports the theory of evolution. But they don't. In fact, 100 top scientists recently published "A Scientific Dissent on Darwinism," publicly stating their skepticism about the theory of evolution and encouraging its careful examination. [See details at www.reviewevolution.com/press/pressRelease_100Scientists.php.]

VT: Are these scientists considered reputable?

[See "DNA evidence prompts famous professor to renounce atheism," *The Good News*, March-April 2005, p. 17.]

VT: What's so compelling about DNA?

SH: For a long time scientists haven't been able to explain how DNA is produced. The proteins needed to make DNA cannot be produced without using DNA. But DNA cannot be produced without these proteins. It's a chicken-or-egg scenario. And this is true of even the simplest single-cell organisms.

VT: How do evolutionists explain that?

SH: Evolutionists suggest that the very large proteins needed to assemble DNA may have first assembled themselves over extremely long time periods. But many scientists, including Dr. Michael Behe, a well-known biochemistry professor who formerly accepted evolution, agree that no available data support this belief. [See "What Do DNA Discoveries Mean for Evolution?," *The Good News*, May-June 2005, p. 8.]

VT: So it's not very likely that the proteins could assemble themselves over time?

SH: Look at it this way—picture the earth as a lifeless planet strewn with boxes of car engine parts. Evolutionist logic argues that the random shaking of the earth's crust, over billions of years, correctly assembled at least one of these engines. According to their arguments, this explanation for the assembled engine must be true, because assembled engines obviously exist today.

VT: When you explain the likelihood like that, it's hard to believe.

SH: Yes. More and more rational scientists, who have devoted their careers to looking closely at the "engine"—DNA—have decided that no amount of "shaking"—random chemical reactions—could assemble the engine.



DNA molecules are like a highly advanced language, similar to computer code, but much more advanced than anything human beings have developed.

SH: Yes, if you consider biologists, physicists, chemists, mathematicians and anthropologists from internationally recognized research institutions such as Yale, Princeton, MIT and even the University of California at Berkeley to be reputable. Lists like this make it clear that there are well-educated, rational thinkers who have serious reservations about evolution.

VT: Why do they question the theory?

SH: Ironically, it's advancements in science, like the study of DNA, that have caused scientists to question the theory that life was created by random forces. In fact, Dr. Antony Flew, a famous atheist and professor, recently reversed his long-held belief in evolution based on increased understanding of DNA as an information-carrying molecule. He now argues that an intelligent source had to be involved in the production of DNA.

VT: Is that the only problem DNA presents to the theory of evolution?

SH: No. The discovery that DNA molecules carry a "language" that's totally independent of the molecule is an even greater hurdle. You see, DNA is more than just a set of chemical structures within a cell; the structures also contain information needed to construct complex proteins. Imagine this page is a DNA molecule and the words are the information. The magazine page is a vehicle for transmitting the concepts we're discussing, but the paper doesn't contain the concept itself.

VT: Is the information as sophisticated as the English language?

SH: Many actually describe the information in DNA molecules as a highly advanced language. In fact, Microsoft founder Bill

Gates, who obviously knows quite a bit about complex codes, describes the DNA code as similar to computer software programs, but much more advanced than anything human beings have developed. [See details at www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.09/hood_pr.html.]

VT: So how is that a problem for evolution?

SH: The code (or concept in our previous example) and the vehicle (or magazine page) that the code is being transferred in can't develop at the same time. The concept must be developed before it can be "printed out" on the page. There is no known process or chain reaction that makes information spontaneously transform into matter, according to Professor Werner Gitt, information systems expert and director of the German Federal Physics and Technology Institute.

VT: What if the process just hasn't been discovered at this time?

SH: Even if our code-containing DNA molecule appeared spontaneously, it would have been useless outside of a cell. And that cell would need complex features and functions that give it the ability to stay alive. Observations like these, which fully flesh out how remarkable molecular life really is, are leading increasing numbers of scientists to agree that DNA and life itself are products of intelligent design.

VT: Do you think teachers and professors are hostile toward

students who don't accept evolution?

SH: I wouldn't say hostile. Condescending is probably more accurate. They generally view students who don't accept evolution as both ignorant and naive. They kind of smile with a look that seems to say, "Poor, unthinking person."


VT: What do you think is the best way to approach them?

SH: Dealing with professors and teachers who teach and firmly believe evolution can be difficult. Try gently suggesting the fact that some of their colleagues feel the same as you do, letting them know about the statement the 100 scientists made. If a lot of these teachers looked more closely themselves, and were made aware that other educated people had concerns with the theory, they might begin to question it a little more too.

VT: Faced with attitudes like these, why did you decide to go into science?

SH: I've always been interested in science and nature, and over the years I've learned nothing at the cutting edge of science that has made me question God as Creator. In fact, the more I learn, the more I realize there simply *has to be* a Creator.

Kristin Yarbrough works at the Home Shopping Network as a copywriter. She and her husband Sean live in Brandon, Florida.



Q. Would you please give a short overview of the festivals of the Bible? What makes these days different from the traditional holidays (Christmas, Easter, etc.)?

A. The festivals of God reveal His plan for the salvation of mankind in a step-by-step manner. Once you understand them, you can explain God's plan from beginning to end.

Briefly, the meanings of the biblical festivals are as follows:

- **Passover** reminds us of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins.
- **The Days of Unleavened Bread** point us to the need to seek God's help to live a sinless life based on the Ten Commandments and the other laws of God.
- **Pentecost** reminds us of the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit upon His people and the founding of the Church. It reminds us that this is not the only day of salvation. It is

the time of evaluative judgment of those God is calling at this time.

- **The Feast of Trumpets** reminds us of the coming of Jesus Christ at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, and the resurrection of those who have responded to God.
- **The Day of Atonement** pictures the binding of Satan. Besides showing Satan's responsibility in instigating sin, it reminds us of Christ's sacrifice for all mankind, which makes it possible for man to be reconciled to (or made "at-one" with) God.
- **The Feast of Tabernacles** represents the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth.
- **The Last Great Day** represents the second resurrection when all those who never had the opportunity to understand God's way of life will be given that opportunity.

The explanation above does not include scriptural references, so the details are missing. To better understand the festivals of God, we recommend you read *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* (www.ucg.org/booklets/HD/).

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

Career Tips

Knowing that many of our readers are trying to decide what careers to embark upon, *Vertical Thought* asked for suggestions from those who have recently found jobs about how they decided on a career or got the job. Here is some information that can be of help when you make these important decisions.

Pursuing a career in Web development and design

When I was young, like most kids I had many dreams about what I was going to be when I grew up. I remember early on wanting to become a soldier in the U.S. military like my father and uncles. Thankfully, God had already made that decision for me.



Brett Washington,
27, Web Design
Coordinator, Kaiser
Permanente Northern
California

Throughout junior high and high school, I explored various careers. My thought was to find a career where I could use all of my strengths and just have fun doing the work.

I had a pretty strong understanding of mathematics, so initially I thought I wanted

to get into some type of engineering—more specifically, aeronautical engineering. I loved planes and thought I would move forward into a career of designing planes for the military, but again there seemed to be a moral dilemma with that career choice.

I also loved to draw and illustrate. I took several drafting classes in high school and had the opportunity to be mentored by an architect who volunteered time at my school. He took me by his office and showed me the many things he and other architects do. While architecture interested me, I came to feel that it wasn't right for me as a career path. I thought I would eventually get bored with it.

Toward my final years of high school and into my first few years of college, I began to take a lot of computer programming classes, and here is where I was first introduced to Web development and design.

I have a friend who used to work as a systems analyst for 3COM in Santa Clara, California. One Sunday while visiting with him, he showed me a Web site he was building for his family to help track their family history. Looking back on it now, it was a pretty basic Web site. I asked him to show me how he set up everything so I could do the same.

As soon as I got home, I registered an account with geocities.com (which was not a part of Yahoo back then) and began to build my first personal Web site. I convinced my mom to buy me a scanner, and when I got it, I scanned and posted almost a hundred pictures on my newly built site.

I had no concept of bandwidth and file size or the many practices that Web designers use to make Web sites user

friendly, less resource intensive and more appealing for the audience. So I began to look at Web sites all over the Internet and gauge things that I liked and did not like about them. I would bookmark all of the sites that I liked because of their design and then check the source code (view >> source) to figure out how they were built.

Obviously I could only learn so much by looking at other developers' source code, so I began to read on the subject and changed my major in college from biochemistry to computer information systems. Learning to construct and design Web sites and then implementing what I had learned started to become really fun and a passion for me. Once I had found work that really did not feel like work at all, I knew that was the career path for me.

How I chose my career in marketing

The often-given advice to choose a college major and career that align with one's interests seemed obvious, but it wasn't particularly helpful to me in my first year of college because I was interested in so many subjects!

More certain of areas I preferred to avoid, I've sometimes joked about choosing a marketing major because it required the fewest higher math and science courses! I figured I'd prefer any courses to physics or calculus, and remarkably, though I knew virtually nothing about them beforehand, economics and business law became two of my favorite subjects!

By my senior year, I was confident I had chosen the right major, but unclear in which industry or type of company I should seek employment. I sincerely prayed, "Father, you know what kind of work you've equipped me to do and what I like doing, but I don't know where a job that fits all this might be. Please make it clear to me."

I signed up through the campus career services office to interview with several employers. The first company made an offer several weeks prior to my other scheduled interviews. I wondered if it would be wise to accept so early in my search, but the job did appear to be an excellent fit—an answered prayer, I now believe—and, as my father pointed out, if this job didn't match my skills and expectations I could always transition into another.

My advice to others is: After seeking God's guidance with the faith that He will respond, consider your talents and interests as well as dislikes, and keep an open mind regarding industries and functions because your perceptions regarding them may be limited.

Consumer packaged goods and sales didn't initially excite me—I wasn't sure what the first meant and the second evoked images of annoying cold callers. I interviewed because of the job description, surprised that it was sales at all. I now reflect on a satisfying series of positions with this same company, a career brimming with activities I enjoy such as writing, speaking, teaching and learning, problem solving, leading teams and competing in a good-natured way.



**Sharon Treymbig
Babcock,** 31, Trade
Marketing Development
Manager,
General Mills, Inc.

My life was going to be forever changed, that much I could understand. I knew Mom and Dad were not getting along very well, because sometimes at night, through my bedroom wall, I could hear the sounds of arguing, then crying. But as of tonight our family would never be the same again.

A man waited in a car across the street, and when Dad got home the man gave him some papers. In less time than it takes to watch a TV sitcom, it was over. Dad packed a few things, got in his car and left. Our family of four was no more.

Divorce was a word that sounded like a bomb exploding. This was the early 1970s, and while more and more families around us were being torn apart by divorce, it had always seemed like such a remote thing. I'd heard about it, and I knew families who had gone through it, but divorce was not something that I ever imagined would touch me or my family.

But on that blackest of all nights, it did. I couldn't fathom what the future would be like, but I knew without a doubt that the rest of my life would be very different from my first 11 years.

Over the years I've likened the destruction of my family to standing on a beach with a double-fisted handful of very fine, very dry, very special sand. It has substance, but it isn't solid—it isn't anything you can really hang onto.

No matter how hard you try to squeeze and hold on to it, with every beat of your heart more of it sifts through the small gaps between your fingers and falls to the ground. You can't catch what is falling without dropping more, and you could never ever gather every grain of your special handful of sand and hold it all together again. In no time, most of it is gone and all you have left in your hands is an empty space.

Divorce's impact on children

I am far from alone in my experiences. Today the U.S. divorce rate for first marriages is 43 percent, and for second marriages it's 60 percent. Upwards of one million American children live through the divorce of their parents every year.

Whether the divorce was a messy one or a "good divorce," every one of those children is impacted in powerful and generally negative ways. For one thing, these children do not seem to know as much about building a happy marriage. The divorce rate for first marriages of children of divorce is a staggering 60 percent.

The children of divorce also have, in general, a much more difficult time

with religion and a relationship with God. Statistically they are much less religious than their counterparts from intact families. They often describe themselves as equally spiritual, but they are far less involved in any form of organized religion.

Children of divorce struggle with understanding God as a loving, tender and merciful Father. A great many feel that God is distant, aloof and generally uninterested in the day-to-day concerns of humanity.

Others reject the idea of a personal God altogether and prefer to commune with the spirituality of nature or participate in solitary meditation. A real, personal, close and loving relationship with the Creator of the universe seems unattainable and perhaps undesirable.

Learning to be able to trust again

The trauma of watching parents divorce can generate mental and emotional obstacles to a strong faith, but they are not insurmountable. The keys are in *trust, belonging and hope*.

When parents part ways, their children often feel like a sacred trust has been broken. *If I can't trust my parents to always be there for me, they say to themselves, how can I think that anyone else will, even God?*

The matter is complicated for many when the Bible says God is our Father (Matthew 6:1) and their experience of a father is negative or even nonexistent. The word "*father*" often does not engender much trust!

But God is ever and always trustworthy. He is perfect, while our parents, no matter how wonderful they may have been, could



The destruction of my family was like standing on a beach with a double-fisted handful of very fine, very dry, very special sand. It has substance, but it isn't solid—it isn't anything you can really hang onto.

never be. He promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and that is a very powerful promise!

A human being may let us down, but our Creator never will. He always knows what we need and when we need it. He may not always provide what we *want* at a given moment, but we can be assured that as we yield to Him, in His love and mercy He will always make sure we have what we *need*, which is what we would want in the long run.

Even the divorce of my parents, which hurt so deeply and changed the shape of who I would be, can be turned into something for my good (Romans 8:28). I may not be able to see how for a while, but that is a promise in which I can place my wholehearted trust.

Regaining a sense of belonging

A sense of belonging is also a fundamental need in nearly every one of us. The desire to belong somewhere seems to be encoded into our emotional makeup. Some people find belonging in sports or academic pursuits. Some find it in art and music, some in service and helping. Some even try to find belonging in rebelling.

Our God offers us a chance to belong, to be a part of something so much larger than ourselves. God promised to build His Church, protect it and provide for it no matter what. In fact, He promises that nothing can prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18). We can be a part of something that really will change the world!

God is in the process of calling many children to Him and

offering them a place in His Kingdom (Hebrews 2:10; Revelation 5:10). God is building His family, and if we humble ourselves and yield to Him, then you and I can and do belong there!

Looking forward with hope

Trust and belonging then lead to a wonderful hope. Divorce and all the accompanying pain and problems do little to foster hope for the future. But as we learn to trust our Father in heaven and realize we belong with His people and in His Kingdom, we can grasp and take to ourselves the hope God offers to all mankind!

He assures us that the world is not going to end with a total collapse of the earth's ecosystem or in a cloud of poisonous gas or in radioactive dust from a nuclear holocaust. Rather, God gives us hope through promising that He will intervene and send Jesus Christ to usher in a new and wonderful world of peace unlike anything mankind has ever seen before (Isaiah 9:7).

But more immediately, there is hope that our lives can be different. God has laws that govern relationships, especially marriage. If we will faithfully follow those laws, and revere the institution of marriage God created, we do not have to end up among the 60 percent who cannot seem to find success in marriage. We don't have to be among those without a daily relationship with the majestic God!

God means what He promises

When my parents divorced, I watched as the only family I had ever known turned to sand and drained away through my fingers. It affected the way I viewed everything in my life. But I discovered through the pages of the Bible—and through personal experience with my Creator—a trust, a sense of belonging and a wonderful hope for both now and the future.

I have never been divorced, and my wife and I have shared more than two decades together quite happily with our children. My faith is strong and growing, and it's the underlying foundation to virtually everything I have ever accomplished. My life today is fuller and more complete than I could have ever dreamed of on that dark night several decades ago.

When God inspired the apostle Paul in Romans 8:28 to pen the words "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose," He meant it—even to children of divorce. **GN**

The author's name has been withheld for family privacy.

Hope & Help for Children of Divorce

Every year millions of children experience the trauma of their parents' divorce. Millions more have already gone through that pain and been affected in ways large and small. What can help children of divorce? One who has been there shares the keys that helped him through that experience.



Duke: Lessons From a Cat's Life

“There is nothing in the animal world, to my mind, more delightful than grown cats at play. They are so swift and light and graceful, so subtle and designing, and yet so richly comic.” —Monica Edwards, children's book author

by Amanda Stiver

Duke was a wonderful cat and an institution in our family. He was practically as old as I was; in cat years he was ancient. He was a Maine coon cat—huge, orange and furry!

We got Duke one spring around Mother's Day. He was an immensely cute kitten, and because Maine coon cats take time to mature he remained in kittenhood for three or four years.

Gradually he began to fill out and develop the massive frame and mass of fur for which his breed is so well known. Despite his size, he was an amazingly zany cat with whom you could play for hours with a simple piece of string and wax paper. It's quite a sight to see a 20-pound cat twitch his ears and crouch down to pounce and fling himself wholeheartedly at a piece of crumpled paper.

As an older kitten, Duke discovered that at full length he was just the right height to stand on his hind legs and wrap his long front legs around my 5-year-old waist. He waited along a short pathway of forest undergrowth that separated our yard from a field behind it. Hunkered down among the weeds and grass, he jumped up just as I came through, grabbed me around the waist, gave me a squeeze, then let go and scurried off at high speed. He never used his claws.

Though they will not be with us always, we can appreciate our creatures while they are with us for a while. To be a keeper of creation is a great blessing and an honored responsibility.

Duke was capable of heroic feats as well. He was only a year old when he disappeared for a week, unscrupulously taken, we now believe, by a neighbor who moved away at that time. We were all very sad at the loss of Duke, especially my mother.

One day as she sat on the sofa, facing our sliding glass door and patio, around the corner came a scraggly, wet, dirty fur ball, limping and hungry. Duke had returned! We never knew the distance he had traveled, but it was more than enough to wear down the pads of his paws.

Marmaduke (his “official” name) was with us for 19 years, and at about 16 or 17 he began to slow down. We didn't notice at first, but it slowly became more and more obvious.

He made a last hurrah, though, and was my best buddy when I went through a difficult, debilitating bout with the Epstein-Barr virus and chronic fatigue my last year of college, plus the following year. When I couldn't get off the couch all day, Duke would climb up and sleep beside me until I began to feel a bit better. He was always there with a tail to wrap around our legs and a cheerful chirp for which Maine coons are famous.

The stories could go on and on, but one spring, when he was 19 years old, we noticed Duke was struggling to eat and move around, and as several days went by, he wasn't getting any better. His time with us had come to an end. We will never have another cat exactly like Duke, but our experience with him added a special sweetness to our lives.

Pet lessons

It's not an easy process to lose a pet, whether from accident, illness or old age. Today's high-tech society is far removed from the barnyards of yesteryear, and we seldom grow up around the cycle of life and death.

We grow more attached to our pets, sometimes because they are the only animals we know. There are no cows to be milked, no chickens to feed, no cattle or sheep to be raised for meat; so these cats, dogs, guinea pigs and other little critters become in our minds as close as friends.

Indeed, there are many stories of the heroism and devotion of a pet for its owner, even to the point of giving its life in some cases. These enduring traits provide a profound lesson from God's creation for our own character.

However, sometimes it is necessary to step back and assess the real reason God blessed us with these creatures. Obviously He gave some animals for our food (the kind listed as edible on His “clean” meats list) among other purposes. Other varieties He made for other reasons—either to populate the wild or to be domesticated.

These domesticated types provide our family pets. People keep them as companion animals now, but in the past, when society and culture was more rooted in farm life, they had other jobs.

Dogs were and still are trained as herders to assist shepherds or cattlemen with the sheep and cattle. Other breeds are more suited to guarding the family home or farm, and barking an alarm to their owners should an intrusion occur. In the far north, huskies and malamutes are known for their abilities as beasts of burden, pulling sleds and hauling people and goods.

Some animals were hunters, protecting the farm from overpopulation of rodents and other vermin. Both dogs and cats are primary examples, dispatching rats and mice in the barnyard. In Asia, Siamese cats were actually bred as guards in palaces. Maine coon cats, like our Duke, were bred to love the sea and lived on ships, keeping the rat population under control.

People lessons

When God created animal and plant life, He gave mankind dominion or caretaker status over them (Genesis 1:26). This means that we should be kind, not cruel, in caring for the animals God entrusts to us (Proverbs 12:10). Animal tending helps us to turn our thoughts outward toward the needs of His creatures.

Human beings and animals are both physical creatures, but God reveals that an impassable chasm separates people from animals. People have a distinct level of consciousness and understanding within us that makes us human (1 Corinthians 2:11). And only human beings are described in the Bible as having the opportunity to receive eternal life as “sons of God” (see Hosea 1:10; John 1:12; Philippians 2:15; 1 John 3:2; Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:53).

Reflecting this distinction between people and animals, Ecclesiastes 3:21 asks, “Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?”

Of course, animals do have varying levels of abilities and instinct. Pigs are particularly smart and trainable—not to mention monkeys, horses and many other animals, especially domesticated ones, if you have the patience and skill to teach them. However, they are not offered the promise of eternal life. God simply did not make them for the same purpose as human beings.

Only human beings are made in God’s own image with the potential to become part of His family. God has a magnificent plan for the future that accounts for every human life that has ever been or will ever be. Animals were made for other reasons, including companionship and to teach us great lessons of character. They are a part of the earthly creation, and each population, when in proper balance, keeps one aspect or other of the creation in order.

Our cat Duke gave us a chance to see dignity, devotion and loyalty in action, with an added dose of joy and humor. I discovered that when a pet dies, it is a good time to look back and give thanks for the many lessons we have learned and also to look forward to the new lessons and experiences we will have when we are able to have a new pet.

Though they will not be with us always, we can appreciate our creatures while they are with us for a while. To be a keeper of creation is a great blessing and an honored responsibility.

Amanda Stiver earned a B.A. in history from the Robert D. Clark Honors College of the University of Oregon and currently resides in Columbus, Ohio.



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IN THE NEWS

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

Funnies Not So Funny Anymore?

Geoff Brown, the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* comics pages, finds more and more questionable material in the cartoons he screens. "I have seen . . . a decided tilt toward the outrageous—risqué images and language, name-calling disguised as political satire, oodles of toilet humor and several attempts to slip in a certain curse word and a certain racial epithet" (Bill Eichenberger, "Filtering the Funnies," *The Columbus Dispatch*, April 4).

Such humor is inappropriate and especially influential in a negative way for young children who are often drawn to the comics because of the pictures and bright colors. But they aren't the only ones impacted negatively.

In the daily business of guarding our minds, everyone is at risk from all directions, including the cartoon page. The Bible warns against empty laughter and coarse jesting (Ecclesiastes 7:4-6; Ephesians 5:4), and screening the comics to avoid inappropriate humor is, sad to say, another action we now must take to avoid degrading our values and attitudes.

Army of Couch Potatoes?



The poor health of the present younger generation has begun to impact the American military. The current recruiting pool of 17- to 24-year-olds, often referred to as Generation Y, is increasingly proving too obese and too reliant on mind-altering drugs that treat attention deficit disorders to be capable of attaining the basic standards of military service.

While we may not serve in the military, we can learn something from the trends in the society around us. What is making these young people so unhealthy, and how can we avoid the same pitfalls? As soldiers of Christ, we, too, have certain standards to uphold (2 Timothy 2:3).

The United States is suffering from a 30 percent rise in obesity among adults, a decline in physical fitness in which one third of teenagers are considered unable to pass a treadmill test, and, partly due to the former two issues, an increasing reliance on drugs to solve hyperactivity problems that could be decreased by losing weight and increasing exercise (Pauline Jelinek, "Uncle Sam Wants You—Well, Not All of You in Prime Recruiting Age Group," Associated Press, March 12).

Watching our health and losing weight if necessary, adopting a healthier eating plan and getting more exercise are ways to combat the unhealthy influences of society. Our physical bodies are a blessing from God, and it is important to treat them with respect. For more information, request or download *Making Life Work* (www.ucg.org/booklets).

Outsmarting ADD

Attention deficit disorder (ADD) has climbed to near-epidemic proportions in the last 20 years. Some of the causes are environmental—such as heavily increased amounts of sugar and other additives in food and the impact of television and other technologies on neurotransmitters—but other times the cause is hereditary.

Girls often suffer more severely from ADD because a diagnosis is not always easily made. According to Dr. Patricia Quinn, girls can hide their lack of attention longer than boys are able to restrain their outbursts. Girls tend to hold in their frustration about poor achievement in school rather than act out, which causes a tendency toward depression and anxiety (Mary Bridgman, "Girls With ADD Often Struggle in Silence," *The Columbus Dispatch*, April 3).

The good news is that ADD is highly treatable, not only by medications, but also with behavioral therapy that boils down to organizational strategies to support the development of a longer attention span and better grades in school.



Ready for Marriage?

Marriage has become a widely debated subject in recent years, but God teaches that marriage is properly a lifetime commitment between one man and one woman. As a result, making the decision to step into that commitment is a significant one and doing

so wisely requires consideration and reasoning that supersede the emotional excitement of perceived "love."

People generally expect to hear religious officials discuss the issues of a good marriage, but would you believe—the Army? The U.S. Army has delved into the realm of what makes a successful marriage because of the stressful life of military personnel. Army chaplains have developed a program that helps soldiers narrow down and carefully consider their choice of spouse.

The program is called P.I.C.K., which stands for "Premarital Interpersonal Choices and Knowledge." It uses another acronym to outline its basic principles: F.A.C.E.S.—family background, attitudes, compatibility, experiences in previous relationships and skills brought to the union. Participants are taught to use the brain as well as the heart when choosing a future mate (Pauline Jelinek, "Army Teaches Troops How to Pick a Spouse," Associated Press, Feb. 4).

The program does bring up some interesting points. All the elements of F.A.C.E.S. are important considerations for anyone in preparing for marriage, but especially the issue of compatibility.

Finding a spouse of like mind, particularly on issues of belief in God's way of life, is an essential element to success in marriage. This means waiting for God to provide the right person who shares those beliefs.

Seeking counseling, usually through the ministry, that prepares a couple for marriage is one way of determining some of the aspects of compatibility. For more information, request or download *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* (www.ucg.org/booklets).

A New Species, the Pig-Worm?

What's wrong with this picture: a pig wallows in its sty while sporting the latest in worm genes? The experts claim that splicing an omega-3 fat producing gene from the roundworm *C. elegans* into pigs will produce a meat that will make pork eaters healthier.

Once these pigs, which will be produced by cloning, are perfected, researchers plan to move on to chickens and cows using the technique developed by Dr. Jing Kang of the Harvard Medical School (Paul Elias, "Geneticists Try to Make Bacon as Healthy as Salmon," Associated Press, March 26).

Pork is a forbidden meat according to the Bible. It simply was not created to be consumed by human beings. Pigs are one of God's natural garbage disposals, and their internal structure is such that they eat and digest all manner of rubbish, after which those wastes are stored in their flesh. Whoever



eats the meat then gets an unhealthy dose of toxins.

Attempting to manipulate the genetic material that God created by splicing the genes of one plant or animal into another is stepping into dangerous territory. There is a reason God is the Creator and we are

not. He knows more about it than we do!

To obey God's laws regarding clean and unclean meats and to stay in good health, it is important to pay attention to what goes into our bodies and to seek foods grown or produced as close to the way God created and intended them to be consumed. For more information, request or download *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?* (www.ucg.org/booklets).

Super (Un)natural

God expressly forbids witchcraft and worshipping or communicating with demons. But the popularity of television shows and children's fiction that feature main characters who are witches (or who are deeply involved in witchcraft) have brought emphasis to the idea of witchcraft as a religious alternative, especially for young people raised in nonreligious households.

According to research by the Barna Group, 7 million teens believe they have encountered an angel, demon or other supernatural being. Two million teens believe they have communicated with the dead, and one in 10 has participated in a séance.

One out of 12 has tried casting a spell or mixing a potion, 30 percent have had their palms read, 27 percent have had their fortunes told and 9 percent have consulted a psychic. Almost 2 million youth claim they have psychic powers.

The Barna Group research found that teens who were connected to the Christian faith tended to be least likely to explore witchcraft ("Teens and the Supernatural," www.barna.org). Knowing the truth of the Bible regarding Satan, the demons and the sin that results from dabbling in witchcraft helps

keep young people on the right path.

Just because it is popular with society by no means makes any activity, particularly a sinful one such as witchcraft, acceptable. As always, be on your guard for the wrong influence and actively seek God's truth. For more information, request or download *Is There Really a Devil?* (www.ucg.org/booklets).

TV, Another Source of Peer Pressure

A study was recently done on the influence sex in the media has on adolescents aged 12 to 14. The result was that the highest level of exposure to sexually charged media resulted in increased sexual activity among those studied.

Sex is continually portrayed in the media as fun and risk-free, and fewer parents are educating their children about the proper use of sex in marriage. As a result, the messages on TV and in other media become a "superpeer" that influences young people more intensely than regular peer pressure ("Study: Sex-Filled Media Linked to Promiscuity," Reuters, April 3).

Just like violence in media, sex in media is finally being officially recognized as a pervasive and dangerous influence on young people. It may seem a pretty obvious conclusion, but as always, the society around us influences us more than we realize.

Guard your mind and seek to watch, listen to and read things that reflect respect for marriage and sex in the context God intended. For more information, request or download *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* (www.ucg.org/booklets).



The Cost of Youthful Addictions

Young people who start alcohol or drug dependencies early on have a much harder time breaking the cycle of addiction. Almost

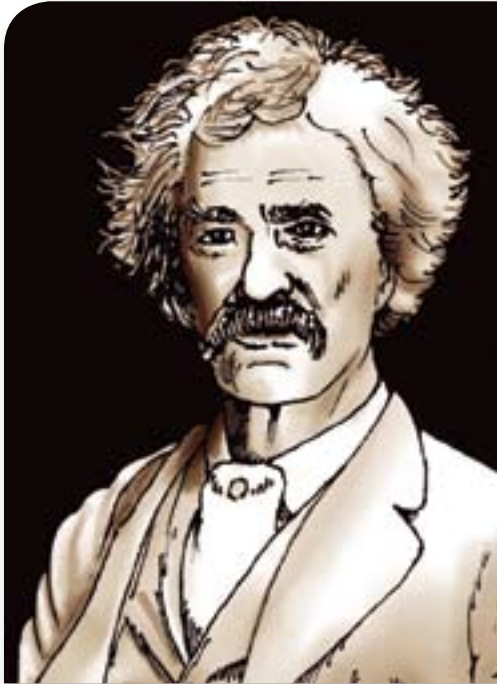
half of regular drinkers who start before age 14 will become alcoholics.

Recent brain-imaging studies are showing that the teenage brain is a rapidly changing organ, and drugs and alcohol disrupt the renovation of the brain that occurs during adolescence.

The drugs or alcohol set up mistransmissions of the brain from an early age, making the possibility of addiction much greater (Tina Saey, "Drug Use Can Damage the Brain and Lead to Addiction," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 1).

Genes have long been blamed for alcohol dependence, but recent studies in Finland and Missouri show that alcohol dependence can be developed simply by starting at an early age, regardless of a genetic tendency.

To keep young people from becoming addicted to brain-destroying substances requires strict parental monitoring and strong personal responsibility by the teens. Young people who don't start abusing a substance don't get addicted.



Dan Dowd

Mark Twain almost quoted Scripture:

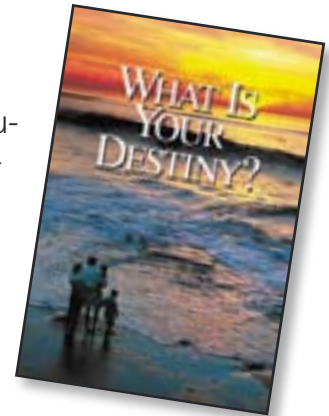
“Man was made a little lower than the angels . . . And he’s been getting lower ever since!”

(Hebrews 2:6-8, with a twist).

Is that the grand destiny of mankind—to degenerate into a depraved race of dismal failures? If so, that’s sad.

Thankfully, it’s not so!

Humanity will soon stop sinking morally and spiritually. There is a higher purpose for human life—and you can know it!



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