

From the desk of **GOD**

aka, Ken Wolvington, Editor
...often wrong, but never uncertain

I've been watching way too much TV lately about World War-II. It started when I responded to a TV commercial for a boxed set of DVD's, titled, *The Nazis, a Warning from History*. Produced by BBC, the (nearly five-hour) series provides a riveting review of Hitler's rise to power from the ashes of WW-1 to the finale in a Berlin bunker. There is considerable footage never seen before outside of Germany and numerous interviews of aging Germans, a few of whom—to this day—defend Hitler. Each chapter in the series is introduced with the photo of a very young boy giving the Nazi salute. The sound track accompanying that photo is a spine-chilling excerpt from Brahms' *Requiem*.

The package from BBC included a second boxed set of DVD's (five more hours) documenting the horrors of Auschwitz. Need I say more?

Evidently not content with watching a mere ten hours of humanity's seemingly limitless capacity for inhumanity, I'm in the process of going back through the Ken Burns PBS documentary, *The War*.

This immersion into the horrors of World War II has caused me to think more deeply about God than I ever have in the past. In a nutshell, how could an all-powerful, loving God have allowed these horrors to happen? And just as I was about to begin writing this column, the disaster in Japan unfolded—a tragedy of such magnitude that it overwhelms our capacity to fully comprehend the consequences. Where are you now, God?

If our supposedly "loving-God" is truly "almighty," why do so many bad things happen to good people? It's an age-old conundrum that even has a name for itself: "Theodicy." The term was coined in 1710 by the German philosopher, Gottfried Leibniz, who wrote an essay claiming that, "...evil in the world does not conflict with the goodness of God and that, notwithstanding its many evils, the world is the "best of all possible worlds.."

Well, perhaps.

It seems to me that the usual theological explanation for catastrophic events has always boiled down to something like, "We will only come to understand God's mysterious doings in the fullness of time."

Big help!

Of course, all this talk of God directly affecting hu-

man events is dependent on belief in what John Shelby Spong refers to as a "theistic" God—one that runs the world like some giant puppeteer in the sky.

God's Desk has discussed this subject before; but the difference this time is that my pondering on the nature of God has led me to a new and childish simplistic perspective. And, for the record, let me admit that I'm venturing onto very thin ice that can only get me into trouble.

During the period that I was courting Jean in Denver *cons* ago, I often went with her to services at her Christian Science church. There, inscribed in gilt lettering on the wall behind the speakers' dais was the phrase, "God is Love." It didn't mean all that much to me at the time. Yes, God loves us. That's nice. And I more or less dismissed it from my mind. But as I began puzzling recently about all of the world's disasters—along with Spong's rejection of God as Puppeteer of the Universe—the image of that Christian Science credo came back to me. It didn't say, "God is loving," or "God loves you." It said God *is* love. In other words, love is who and what God *is*.

What an interesting notion! In pondering on this, (and please remember that the Desk *is* very slow in the head), the power of love dawned on me. Imagine what love can do: "Climb every mountain, ford every stream..." And the *absence* of love? The Holocaust.



Yet we come back again and again to the theistic God of our childhood—that anthropomorphic creature in the sky that grants athletes home runs and touchdowns, that heals our cold sores and "blesses" us with Thanksgiv-

ing dinners and job promotions. Our Christian liturgy is absolutely *loaded* with reminders that God is a being that dispenses blessings and justice, for example the Lord's Prayer and the Doxology—not to mention many, if not most, of our hymns. Even the irreverent logo at the top of this sorry column implies a God that hurls thunderbolts from the heavens.

So, how does prayer fit into the vision of God *as* love? Are prayers of petition and intercession useless? What about the prayers of "joy and concern" that we share around the table every Sunday? Are we just deluding ourselves, wasting our time and energy?

To some extent, the answer is yes, if our expecta-

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tion is for the "puppet-master" to intervene. But I would like to suggest that it is *we* who are energized and changed by prayer—not a theistic God. It is *we* who are called by prayer to be a loving presence, a loving activist, a loving spouse a loving friend, a loving caregiver and a loving member of the Body of Christ. We were created in the image and likeness of God—and God is love. And, as we will remember in Holy Week, Jesus' final commandment to his disciples was, "Love one another as I have loved you."

Finally, returning to the horrors of WW-II, the Holocaust and the tragedy in Japan, we need to understand that God was not totally absent from those events. Extraordinary acts of courageous love took place during the war and the same is true today in Japan. We can be thankful that God as love was not, and *is* not dead.