

Route 1, Box 35
Waterloo, S. C.
September 6, 1966

Rabbi Norman Lamm
131 West 86th Street
New York, New York

Dear Rabbi Lamm:

Enclosed find a copy of a letter I have written to Anglican Bishop James A. Pike. Indication of Bishop Pike's reply is contained in the note of introduction before the letter. I ask that you give serious thought to the conception outlined herein. Won't you give me your opinion?

I sent this to Yeshiva University, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. In reply, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman suggested that I send a copy on to you. He indicated that you have been dealing with some of the problems involved in the enclosed.

I consider myself a Christian, but notice that the Deity who results from my process of thought remarkably resembles the Jewish idea of God.

The theology of the enclosed is based on the so-called "Big Bang" cosmogonical theory. As you may know, that is the most advanced scientific theory of the origin of the universe, suggesting in effect that all matter was originally in one mass, which exploded, the fragments forming the galaxies, the sun, the earth.

Also involved is the concept of curved space, a concept developed from Einstein's theory of relativity. The periodical—Science Digest—has its offices at 250 West 55th Street, New York City, and would, I would suppose, make available to you the quotation mentioned in connection with the curved space idea. Or your local library might keep back copies.

I might say that other important churchmen have expressed real interest in the theology of the letter. I have recently sent copies to about 125 Protestant seminaries and leaders, also to several seminaries of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Crenshaw
Robert E. Crenshaw

The following is a letter addressed to Anglican Bishop James A. Pike. Excerpt from Bishop Pike's 670-word reply: "It was with particularly intense interest that I read your letter, one of the few I have ever received which posits the basis for a new (possibly synthetic), viable and exciting theological development. . ."

Route 1, Box 35
Waterloo, S. C.

Bishop James A. Pike
Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions
Santa Barbara, California

Dear Bishop Pike:

As a liberal Christian, I have read with great interest several lengthy press accounts concerning your unorthodox theological views. I have lately come to some equally unorthodox conclusions via the "death of God" debate with which I am sure you are familiar, and in this letter I would like to share these thoughts with you. I would deeply appreciate receiving your opinion.

First, let me identify the general theological position to which I subscribe. I think I can quickly accomplish that by saying that I receive regularly, and read devotedly, the liberal journals The Christian Century and Christianity and Crisis. I have written these periodicals—and others—concerning the following conception; however, that which I have in mind needs substantial development by someone more theologically articulate than I. . .

I reject the "death of God" thesis, but I believe that legitimate issues are involved in it. I believe in God, I believe that He is everywhere present, and I believe that, in order to accomplish the redemption of man, He was revealed in Jesus Christ. However, that which is so startlingly evident must be faced in faith: that the God we hail as both Christlike and "truly present" does not, for instance, snatch a child from the path of a train, give aid to a suffering innocent, etc.—things which we, and even the most pagan of our contemporaries, would do, were we "truly present" at such events—things which Jesus, through whom we are to see God, would certainly do, were it possible. If conventional theology is right in suggesting that God is in a position to take direct action—perform "miracles"—in the universe, then we are called upon to love a God who simply stands and watches in any number of instances of human suffering, and this when He is perfectly able to reach forth and relieve that suffering. A locomotive may bear down on an innocent two-year-old—and the God of conventional theology stands and watches and meditates. . . Multiply this instance by billions through the centuries—is this the Great and Good Samaritan? Does such a God even remotely resemble Jesus of Nazareth?

But I cannot as a Christian put aside the conviction that the absence of direct action on the part of the Divine is in fact an expression of his love—however difficult that may be to comprehend! But how could that be? Would it be unreasonable to suggest that the physical universe might be subject to destruction upon exposure via relativity to direct action on the part of the Divine? I would suggest that the answer to the "death of God" thesis may well be something along these lines, and the purpose of this letter is to invite you to explore the possibility of such a destructibility of the physical. (I should insert here that I am not thinking of utter destruction, but of destruction in the sense of "cataclysmic explosion".) Permit me to theorize. . .

We should start at the beginning—ten billion years ago, according to the best estimates of science, when all the matter now scattered throughout space was packed into one tremendous mass. (See Encyclopaedia Britannica: "Cosmogony".) We may say that God established Creation to operate and develop (via evolution) indefinitely on the basis of mechanical and unchanging laws, and too on the basis of free-willed decisions on the part of man and on the part of such moral counterparts as man may have in other parts of the universe. But why evolution? Why did God not simply create a finished and orderly universe?

We may theorize first that space is a thought of God set apart unto itself, that it has definite, though not discernible, boundaries far beyond the uttermost stars. We may say that these are boundaries of relativity—boundaries within which a direct action on the part of God may become particularly relative to the physical universe operating near the center of the thought-realm.

In connection with this, I would like to quote from an article in my encyclopedia:

"RELATIVITY. . . (In physics, the theory of the interdependence of matter, time, and space.) The theory of relativity, developed primarily by the German-American physicist Albert Einstein, is the basis for later demonstration by physicists of the essential unity of matter and energy, of time and space, and of the forces of gravity and acceleration. . . Within the framework of the axioms laid down by Einstein, many lines of development are possible. Space, for example, is curved. . . Its curvature in 'empty' space is not certain. Moreover, scientists disagree on whether it is a closed curve (such as a sphere) or an open curve. . ."

From the April, 1966, issue of Science Digest, page 6:

"Many theoretical models of the universe incorporate a concept of curved space. This would make it possible for objects to actually appear larger as they recede to extreme distances, as the light from them would travel a curved path."

These quotations certainly seem to point in the direction which I have suggested. I am thinking of space as a sphere.

We may draw the conception together by suggesting that all physical matter is the embodiment of the primordial thought of God that went into the establishment of Creation, and, as such, is inherently linked in sensitivity to the mind of the Divine. We may theorize that, due to a destructibility—an explosibility—on its part bearing ever in sensitivity directly upon any impulse in the mind of God which might initiate direct action in the physical realm, the intrinsic nature of the totality of physical matter has caused the preclusion of all direct divine action in the realm of the physical.

In short, we may say that God is everywhere present, that He does take direct action beyond the realm of the physical, but that He is present in the realm of the physical with a capacity for direct action upon which He will not draw because of his concern for our welfare. According to the principles of Jesus, surely it would be an immoral act on our part to stand and watch a locomotive bear down on a child—but if the above theory is true, surely it may be an immoral act on God's part if He should do otherwise. Indeed, it obviously is never God's will to alleviate human suffering via direct divine action, since He never does so—and I would

contend that, in the context of the above theory, He cannot do so and remain a moral and loving God.

We may say that this state of destructibility on the part of matter causes even the preclusion of direct communication on the part of the Divine in the realm of the physical. Thus when we pray we hear nothing, yet we feel that we are being heard. We may reasonably theorize that there is a power within God that is beyond any classification with other energies employed in direct divine action, a "moral power" which may emanate from the make-up of the self of the Divine. (John 15:26: "...the Spirit of truth. . . proceeds from the Father. . .") God may "speak" to us by manipulation of "moral power" upon our moral receptivity, and beyond that upon emotions and words stored in the subconscious. (We could suggest that a definite measure of this "moral power" may be capable of drawing the soul—the essential self of man—at death to the ultimate source of the Divine—that is, unless a person has chosen against that measure.)

All the above would, I think, explain the crudeness of the primordial mass, and would also explain evolution's ever-attendant question of why God did not simply create a finished and orderly universe. For the above theory is based upon the explosibility of Creation upon exposure via relativity to direct divine action, and certainly direct divine action was necessary to bring the primordial mass into existence. It is significant that the currently accepted scientific theory of the origin of the universe—the so-called "Big Bang" theory outlined in the Encyclopaedia Britannica article "Cosmogony"—fits quite well into the theory I have advanced. We may suggest that in an instant of time the mass was created—an instant later it was blown apart. . . Would it be unreasonable to suggest that direct divine action in the realm of the physical as it exists now might provoke myriads of cataclysmic explosions throughout the universe—the earth, the sun, the galaxies—all living things on earth and on other planets being destroyed? We are in fact thinking in terms of an action by the Supreme Being. . .

If we accept the above theory, then we must reject the idea of a "miracle," at least insofar as the term is used to imply a direct action of God in the physical realm. We may emphatically affirm that God can influence man through prayer and application of the aforementioned "moral power." We may affirm that in these ways many events have been effected, though we can agree that the method is uncertain and dependent upon the moral receptivity of man—thus a people not receptive to the grace of God might well conclude that "God is dead." In any case, is not the above only Christian realism—is it not precisely the way God is operating in the world today?

Thus we may explain the God who lives within each Christian, who listens to and "speaks" to each Christian. We may suggest that in Jesus we see a person so open to the Father that his direct actions were perfectly representative morally of the Father, so open to the Father that the character projected through his openness was truly God. These words of Jesus are significant: "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. . . Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. . ."

Though we might be unable to accept the idea of a "miracle" as defined above, we should be open-minded concerning the happenings described in the Bible. There may be natural explanations for many of the events described, though we should not feel bound to believe all these descriptions. Many faith-healings may be valid, I think. Medical science can now testify that attitudes originating within a person can contribute to health, if not heal. And faith in the goodness of God is an attitude which might contribute to health, and this without the involvement of a direct action on the part of God. In fact, in one instance Jesus almost said as much: Mark 5:34:

Bishop James A. Pike

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"Daughter, your faith has made you well. . ."

I know of no theology other than the above that takes into account the Creation Event as explosion—as the most knowledgeable scientists see it. I must wonder at the apparent indifference of theologians to such a radical, thought-provoking view of the Creation Event—a cataclysmic explosion, almost beyond comprehension in terms of power unleashed. Should theology not ask: Why explosion? Why not simply a setting forth of the Creation? Surely there is something here to which theology should devote its powers of reflection!

But I will not deny that much is involved in the above that will not satisfy the conventional Christian. In any case, won't you please give me your opinion concerning this matter?

Sincerely,

Robert E. Crenshaw