

## PERSPECTIVE

Earl Palmer

**H**ow do we imagine God? In what evidences do we put the most trust during our search to know who God is and what God is like? When our search is underway, how do we distinguish truth from our own imaginative projections, which we then claim represent God as he actually is?

In *The Horse and His Boy*, one of C.S. Lewis's Narnian Chronicles, the lad Shasta finally meets Aslan, the Son of the Emperor Beyond the Sea. Actually, due to the obscuring mist on the mountain trail they are walking, all Shasta meets on this occasion is Aslan's voice. "Are you a giant?" Shasta ventures.

"You may call me a giant," the Voice replies, "but I am not like the creatures you call giants."

Our descriptions of God are limited to our experiences or the experiences of others. Yet no words will ever be able to convey the full mystery of who God is. Giant, mother, father—all our words fall short of his greatness. God is beyond all words.

Moses found that out right away when he encountered the living God at the burning bush and was given a vast task to do. In an attempt to validate the amazing mandate given to him, Moses asked, "Who shall I say sent me?"

God's response, "I am who I am," has become the single most important name for God. Moses was to identify the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as "He Is"—Yahweh. Used some 1,800 times in the Old Testament, this holy name for God means that he speaks for himself and that he makes himself known.

Do we want to know who God is? Then we must listen as God speaks

for himself. God's greatest speech of all was more radical than the voice at the burning bush. That speech occurred when the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

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God. Watching him and listening to the teaching of him who is our Savior and Lord, we discover the character of God. What Jesus said and did shows us who God is.

Neither the inner experiences of our own uniqueness nor our mystical experiences define God. When we conceive large thoughts, we simply show the powerful possibilities of the human mind. As remarkable and impressive as these thoughts are, they are still incomplete when they try to encompass God. God speaks for himself in his son, Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prepares us for the fulfillment of hope, the New Testament points to Jesus Christ as the literal fulfillment, and the Holy Spirit confirms that living speech to us today.

We must beware of creating a false God from the celebration of

our life experiences, and take joy in knowing that we do not need to discover a new name for God, as if God were in hiding until some religious movement can set him free. God, who has never been captive to our language, is the one who finds us. He is like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who was able to find both sons and grant the grace of celebration to each. It's not the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who need to be set free and reimagined; instead it is we, as the sons and daughters, who need that.

God has spoken in Jesus Christ. Now is our time to listen. ♦



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