
 PRESS & TELEVISION

article in the Swedish environmental journal *Ambio* about the potential climatic impact of soot from fires begun by nuclear war. A team led by Sagan did a computer study. The result, released in 1983, asserted that a 100-megaton nuclear exchange would cover the globe with a soot cloud 10 miles thick. The upshot: 18 months of weather colder than Nome, Alaska, in winter, and four billion deaths.

The computer model, ignoring such factors as wind, was "worst case-analysis run amok," says Seitz. Yet the study won wide notice, generated by a report in *Science*, by Sagan articles in the Sunday supplement *Parade* and in *Foreign Affairs* (where he called for "dramatic" nuclear arms cuts), and by a \$100,000 conference in Washington, D.C., on "The World after Nuclear War." *The Cold and the Dark*, a conference report coauthored by Sagan, was hailed as "the most important book ever" by a *San Francisco Chronicle* reviewer. The impact was great abroad, too. Said New Zealand's antinuclear Prime Minister David Lange: with Nuclear Winter "we know we will freeze with the rest of you."

Despite their doubts about the Sagan projections, says Seitz, scientists kept silent, afraid to be labeled hawks. But critiques began to air at conferences and in learned journals. In January 1986, Britain's *Nature* remarked that the Nuclear Winter literature was "notorious for its lack of scientific integrity." But this news, notes Seitz, was "unheralded" in the press.

Finally, scientists at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) concluded in 1986 that the climatic effects of a nuclear exchange would be mild—at worst, July temperatures no lower than 50 degrees Fahrenheit in Kansas. Nuclear Winter, wrote NCAR researchers Starley Thompson and Stephen Schneider in the Summer 1986 *Foreign Affairs*, had a "vanishingly low level of probability."

Yet Nuclear Winter lives on in the press. Only last year, a *New York Times* story repeated the four-billion-deaths forecast. Why? Seitz recalls the musings of Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist Victor Weisskopf in 1984: "Ah! Nuclear Winter! The science is terrible, but—perhaps the psychology is good."

 RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Who Was Jesus?

"Who Do Men Say that I Am?" by Cullen Murphy, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 1986), 8
Arlington St., Boston, Mass. 02116.

More than a billion people belong to a faith holding that Jesus the Christ was the Son of God, who lived on earth, died to save man from his sins, and rose from the dead. But what is known about Jesus the man?

Murphy, the *Atlantic's* managing editor, surveys the study of the historical Jesus and finds "no consensus—not if one looks at what real people actually believe—as to the identity of Jesus."

The New Testament Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Murphy notes, "offer clues about Jesus," but are "imperfect historical docu-

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

ments," compiled from oral accounts at least one or two generations after his death. The historical inquiry into Jesus began during the Enlightenment, and was long contentious. German scholar David Friedrich Strauss lost a teaching job because his *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835) judged "sacred history" to be "fable." Thanks to the work of archaeologists and others, says the University of Chicago's David Tracy, "more has been written about Jesus in the last 20 years than in the previous 2,000."

Scholars know that Jesus lived for roughly three decades during the first century A.D., and that he was born as a Jew, was circumcized as a Jew, and prayed as a Jew. He referred to himself as "the Son of man," but never as "the Son of God," "the Servant of the Lord," or "the Messiah." There is no evidence that he aimed to found a church. But he spoke with great authority, personalizing his relationship with God by calling Him, in his native Aramaic, *Abba*, a term akin to "father dear."

New Testament scholars do not know what Jesus looked like, whether he was an only child, where he was born (in Bethlehem, or in Nazareth, where he grew up), or when. (Christmas seems to have replaced a pagan Roman feast day coinciding with the winter solstice.)

But does all this matter?

What concerns Tracy, a Catholic priest, Murphy reports, is not biographical facts but faith. No research, he thinks, can reveal what *any* historical figure "really felt or thought." Dutch theologian Edward Schillebeeckx sees in Christology both limits and opportunities. "The New Testament," he says, "is the testimony of believing people, and what they are saying is not history, but expressions of their belief in Jesus as Christ." Through knowing the historical Jesus, that faith can be "filled up."

Veblen's God

"Bellamy and Veblen's Christian Morals" by Charles G. Leathers, in *The Journal of Economic Issues* (Dec. 1986), Dept. of Economics, California State Univ., Sacramento, Calif. 95819-2694.

The irascible Norwegian-American economist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) was the scourge of America's Golden Age of business expansion. His major work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), written when robber barons were building Newport mansions and cities teemed with ill-housed immigrants, added "conspicuous consumption" to the language.

The Wisconsin-born misanthrope's Yale Ph.D. gained him a series of university posts, in which he vivisected his colleagues and discouraged students' ambitions. A rationalist in theory if not by nature, Veblen railed against organized Christianity. The church's "archaic" values, he said, impeded technological progress and the fair distribution of wealth.

Yet Veblen flirted with Christianity in a 1910 essay, "Christian Morals and the Competitive System." Why? He was drawn, says Leathers, a University of Arizona economist, to Edward Bellamy's utopian fiction.

Like Veblen, Bellamy rejected the church and the capitalist ethos of individual achievement. Yet Bellamy had hopes for the new Protestant