

# Mark Twain: Space, Time, and God—

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May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face  
to smile upon you and be gracious unto you  
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and bring you  
peace. (Aaronic benediction, Numbers 6:23)

But the Lord did not bring peace to the soul of Mark Twain, according to Twain scholars writing over the past century, thus “Mark Twain’s Quarrel with God” became a type statement for Twain’s distress with the spiritual climate in which he lived. His own quest for faith ended in despair, with God as an object neither of faith, belief, nor even respect. Instead, he described his characters lost in space and time and saw himself as a nonbeliever. Yet, his canon is marked by an intense involvement in spiritual doctrine and an even more intense attempt to wrestle from that doctrine not merely literary materials but also a personal position that might rationalize an otherwise irrational and perverse universe. Harold Baetzhold and Joseph McCullough offer the most concise analysis of Twain’s religious background: “His own intellectual development from the fundamentalist

Presbyterianism of the Hannibal Sunday school to a Deism molded by Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* and later modified by the evolutionary determinism of Darwin and his followers places Mark Twain in the mainstream of the nineteenth-century conflict between science and religion" (xvi). Everett Emerson briefly summarized the four points of Twain's upbringing as a continuing interest in the Bible, a fundamentalist view of Christianity, a Calvinistic emphasis on sin and Hell, and a sense of religion as socially restrictive (629–32). If this narrow perspective had been modified creatively, along the lines defined by Messianic Judaism as God's covenant with man to bless humanity, a far more hopeful picture of the world might have been possible for a man of Twain's vision.

Even in some of Twain's more "optimistic" works, the sense of being lost in space and time is apparent. Miles Hendon, the happy-go-lucky soldier of fortune who resolves to rescue the little prince in *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882) is representative. Having been displaced from his ancestral halls, Hendon becomes a professional soldier. Being rich in the humanity gained through experience, when he encounters the heroic prince-turned-pauper, he resolves to rescue him even though he thinks him crazed. However, in the final plot reversal, Hendon is amazed to discover the prince returned to his rightful throne:

Miles Hendon was entirely bewildered. . . . He stood gazing at the fair young face like one transfixed. . . .

Lo, the lord of the Kingdom of Dreams and Shadows on his throne!

[Hendon] muttered some broken sentences, still gazing and marveling; then turned his eyes around and about, scanning the gorgeous throng and the splendid saloon, murmuring, "But these are real—verily these are real—surely it is not a dream."

He stared at the king again—and thought—"Is it a dream . . . or is he the veritable sovereign of England and not the friendless poor Tom o' Bedlam I took him for—who shall solve me this riddle?" (391)

Hendon then tests reality by seizing a chair and exercising his right to sit in the presence of the king. Previously robed and sceptered as "Foo-

foo the First, King of the Mooncalves,” the young Prince now claims riches and wealth, but with such a tentative feeling of a dream that the image has poignancy. The novel ends by distancing the action far back to a reign of only a few years but “a singularly merciful one for those harsh times” (401). Similar conflicted passages dominate many of the unfinished later manuscripts. The various “great dark” manuscripts are set in this format, realizing fears of displacement and lostness. Several volumes in the Iowa-California edition of Mark Twain’s works are dominated by literally hundreds of pages of such material—*Mark Twain’s Fables of Man; What Is Man? and Other Philosophical Writings; Mark Twain’s Which Was the Dream? and Other Symbolic Writings of the Later Years* (containing “Three Thousand Years among the Microbes”), and *Mark Twain’s Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts*.

Rather than analyzing these, however, I want to look at a moment in *A Connecticut Yankee* (1889) similar in lostness to the one in the *Prince* discussed above. In Chapter 18, “In the Queen’s Dungeons,” Hank Morgan, the Connecticut Yankee (Sir Boss), in the midst of an industrial democratic reform of feudal England and a housecleaning of the oppressive dungeons of Morgan le Fay, muses

Training—training is everything. . . . We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own. . . . All that is original in us, and therefore fairly creditable or discreditable to us, can be covered up and hidden by the point of a cambric needle, all the rest being atoms contributed by, and inherited from, a procession of ancestors that stretches back a billion years to the Adam-clam or grasshopper or monkey from whom our race had been so tediously and ostentatiously and unprofitably developed. And as for me, all that I think about in this plodding sad pilgrimage, this pathetic drift between the eternities, is to look out and humbly live a pure and high and blameless life, and save that one microscopic atom in me that is truly *me*: the rest may land in Sheol and welcome for all I care. (217)

Taking the thoughts of a character for the accurate statement of an author is to collapse literary vision into biographical fallacy. Nev-erthe-

less, Hank's reference points take us into a religious context, to Adam and Hell, and his catalog includes Darwinian creationism as the human ancestral starting point of a "pilgrimage," one freighted with sadness. Such images of dislocation in space and time seem to define the painful predicament of Twain's best heroes, otherwise confident, egalitarian, professional men: riverboat pilots, or doctors, such as "The Only Christian" doctor in "Was it Heaven? Or Hell?" The relationship of egalitarian politics with religion seems in itself an association of Yankee Presbyterian/Congregationalist logic with the displaced condition of man elsewhere in the canon.

Evidence of Twain's personal dilemma can be detected in a birthday letter to his sister-in-law connecting the fiction to the life through imagery of displacement. The letter reveals two arresting posits. First, the imagery of lostness in space and time—the dream, followed by an abrupt return to mundane details—is recaptured from *The Prince and the Pauper* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Points within this imagery describe a spiritual quest that was doomed to unfulfillment. Second, the fact that the imagery of fiction transfers to real life is testimony to the power of Twain's mind to interpret his world, desperately, as a series of events in time but not in "meaning"—wherein lies the crisis of faith that dogged him throughout his life.

TO SUSAN CRANE Villa Viviani  
Settignano (Florence)  
March 14/93

Susy [Crane] dear, this is Suzy's [Clemens] birthday + she is 21—facts which will be drifting through your mind as you sit at your breakfast three hours from now— + there will be pictures drifting with the facts,— + ghosts. Well-a-day!

I dreamed I was born, + grew up, + was a pilot on the Mississippi, + a miner = journalist in Nevada, + a pilgrim in the Quaker City, + went to live in a Villa out of Florence— + this dream goes on + on + on, + sometimes seems so real that I almost believe it is real. I wonder if it is? But there is no way to tell, for if

one applied tests, they would be part of the dream too, + so would simply aid the deceit. I wish I knew whether it is a dream or real.

Betty the perfect-tempered, left last night for Bad-Nawheim—her mother is dying. It is only a dream, probably, + doubtless there is no Betty + no mother; but it all had the effect of reality. Jean cried a good deal.

Mr. Phelps will arrive here in a few minutes to spend the day + take luncheon + dinner.

I sail in the Kaiser Wilhelm II next Wednesday 22d for New York.

Susy dear, won't you put those 5 machine-royalties in your will, giving 2 to Suzy, 2 to Clara + 1 to Jean? I will give Jean another one—then all the children will have pin-money to spend one of these days.

March 20/93.

Mr. Phelps + Mrs. Laffan dined + spent the evening, + we had a high time.

Love to you + all

Samuel<sup>1</sup>

Attributing these sentiments to later personal disasters would be incorrect, as an 1870 letter to his wife Livy demonstrates:

Troy [NY], Saturday, Jan. 8 [1870]

Sweetheart, this is the anniversary of the battle of New Orleans, which was fought & bloodily won by Gen. Jackson, at a time when England & America were at peace. . . .

How insignificant we are, with our pigmy little world!—an atom glinting with uncounted myriads of other atom worlds in a broad shaft of light streaming from God's countenance—& yet

<sup>1</sup>The letter is in the collection of the Mark Twain House, Hartford, CT, and is quoted by its permission and that of the Mark Twain Foundation through the Mark Twain Project, Bancroft Library, University of California, which retains

prating complacently of our speck as the Great World, & regarding the other specks as pretty trifles made to steer our schooners by & inspire the reveries of “puppy” lovers. Did Christ live 33 years in each of the millions & millions of worlds that hold their majestic courses above our heads? Or was our small globe the favored one of all? Does one apple in a vast orchard think as much of itself as we do?—or one leaf in the forest,—or one grain of sand upon the sea shore? Do the pismires argue upon vexed questions of pismire theology,—& do they climb a molehill & look abroad over the grand universe of an acre of ground & say “Great is God, who created all things for Us?” . . .

I do not see how astronomers can help feeling exquisitely insignificant, for every new page of the Book of the Heavens they open reveals to them more & more that the world we are so proud of is to the universe of careering globes as is, one mosquito to the winged & hooped flocks & herds that darken the air & populate the plains & forests of all the earth. If you killed the mosquito, would it be missed? Verily, What is Man, that he should be considered of God?

But I must stop. I have concluded to stay here to-day & tomorrow, as this hotel suits me first-rate. I had the sagacity to enter my *nom de plume* on the register, & so they have made me very comfortable. (For I find that the landlord is a frantic admirer of mine.) He is a good fellow, too (naturally.) . . .

(*Letters 11-14*)

The notes to this letter in the California edition of Mark Twain’s letters identify the source of its ideas and images as articles on astronomy and Earth chronology from the *Eclectic Magazine* for January 1870. The images and the ideas connected by Twain to them constitute the news of the day—revelations of facts not previously considered as part of the cosmic plan. How could someone like Twain not be influenced intellectually by such discoveries? Their train of imagery stretches across the major portion of the author’s life as a philosophical position. The feeling of lostness is pervasive and is placed within a biblical context. The integration of religious belief within the

scientific vision is important but seems an angry response to a scientific problem. Twain seems more at ease when admiring his children—a personal grounding to offset the intellectual instability which such discoveries brought to *many* uncertain believers. With some significance, he later noted in a margin of Rufus King Noyes's *Views of Religion* (1906), "When religion and science elect to live together, it is a plain case of adultery" (Gribben 511). Twain recognizes a problem here that I will address later. However, his own reference should have tipped him off to the irrelevance of one position to the other.

Joseph Twichell, Twain's close friend and pastor, might have been the person to ground Twain's faith on an appropriate rock, but he seems never to have filled that office. Twichell was a central figure and intimate friend involved in Twain's life from Twain's introduction to Hartford in the early 1870s. Twichell was intensely involved in the life of Twain's family at their brightest and darkest points, officiating at Twain's wedding in Elmira, New York, in 1871; becoming part of Twain's creative process in two books, *Some Rambling Notes of an Idle Excursion* (1877) and *A Tramp Abroad* (1880); consoling him in the wake of the Whittier Dinner fiasco; comforting daughter Suzy as she lay dying in the absence of the family; and officiating at the funeral services of both Livy Clemens and Twain himself. A crucial entry in Twichell's autobiographical memoir at Yale's Beinecke Library records that Twichell had gotten down on his knees beside Mark Twain to pray with him that God would send belief to the great humorist. But God did not. Twichell later described Twain, only partly joking, as the most desperate of men: a Calvinist who didn't believe in God. (Strong refers to this without a direct citation of Twichell [139–40].) Twichell's sense was that Twain's anger at the damned human race left him with the idea of innate evil but without the hope of salvation. God was so annoyingly unresponsive to Twain because Twain made the wrong prayer. His concept of God was inherently flawed, as an examination of his religious experience and Twichell's Protestantism, put in a modern context, will illuminate.

Twain's early experience of religion would seem unhelpful until certain intriguing facts poke out. While his mother was a committed

Methodist who switched to Presbyterianism, his father was not religious. Stern and forbidding, he was absent emotionally until death removed him altogether when Clemens was twelve. If the father provides the image of God in the mind of a child, and the mother tempers it, we have a paradigm for Twain's intense sympathy with humanity and his dark and isolated sense of God's work on Earth, especially as outlined in "The Mysterious Stranger" and other pieces like it. Problematic authority models at the top of his personal spectrum were further conflicted by examples from the low end of social observation. Twain's sense of localized religion was reflected in the king's fleeing of the camp meeting in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and the rigid "pilgrims" of *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) and the restrictive old maids of "Was it Heaven? Or Hell?" provide little to demonstrate belief in God as personally transfiguring. "Don't scrunch up like that, Huckleberry" is the watchword.

The religion available to Clemens had its contradictions. Clemens's mother, as devout as she was, was unconventional enough to have been backed into defending Satan, as Twain recorded in his *Autobiography* (1924). Doris and Samuel Webster reported that Jane Clemens also occasionally worshiped at the Jewish synagogue in St. Louis. Twain himself, learning that a young girl visiting him in Elmira was Jewish, probed her for stories and tales, according to Jerome and Whisby (182); the incident suggests his interest as well as lack of background. His unpublished "To the Editor of the American Hebrew," written in 1890, shows a simplistic and stereotyped understanding of both the faith and culture of Judaism; that avenue was not available to him (*Fables of Man* 446–48). As Richard Cracroft has suggested in assessing Twain's projection of Mormonism, Twain's interest was primarily literary rather than spiritual. No philosophical inheritance from either the rigid Presbyterianism of the mid-nineteenth century or later New England Congregationalism, as compromised by science, was available to him as a resource. Thus comment after comment, amounting to hundreds of images, epigrams, and statements, emphasizes the void.

Twichell was not the theoretician to fill this void. His sermons

and related documents have been researched by Steven Courtney, an MA candidate at Trinity College and reporter for the Hartford *Courant*. Courtney finds texts which suggest Twichell's Victorian propensity for making biblical figures into heroes and dramatizing their actions for an audience, as in the case of David confronting Goliath with "the light of valor shining in his young face." Twichell returned to the David matter frequently, and his later sermons show him more sophisticated but still externalizing the power given to David rather than subordinating him to a covenant relationship with God. Such a distortion of the nature of war, particularly from a Civil War veteran, undercuts the credibility of Twichell's Congregationalism.

Twichell's favorite sermon was on Luke; Courtney counts thirty-five presentations. The Luke sermons focus on 2:51-52, expressing the idea that we know nothing of Jesus' youth because the missing history is a parable for the undeveloped spirituality of men that must be rectified at maturity, that Jesus' ordinariness befits a humble Christian character. He concludes that the missing facts are an injunction to put a low value on worldly biography and thus on worldly things in general. Such doctrines could not satisfy Twain's temperament and border on hypocrisy considering Twichell's congregation. The Asylum Hill Congregational Church, at which Twichell preached and the Clemens family maintained a pew, was a well-to-do institution. Twain originally labeled it the Church of the Holy Speculators, and he himself became one of those speculators. Twain was neither ordinary nor likely to put a low value on worldly things. He was a materialist, and his intense empathy for suffering is rooted in his worldliness, as reflected in Yokel's diatribe in *The Prince and the Pauper*, Hank Morgan in *A Connecticut Yankee*, or even Huck and Jim's pleasure in food on Jackson's Island in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The symbolic quality found by Twichell is dubious. To make real life into a parable is to endow it with alternate purpose and meaning that is not of the earth nor human in context; to do so is to distance the Messiah from humankind in a way that makes him inaccessible.

Twain consistently reflects impatience with such religious logic ei-

ther as homily or entreaty. Horst Kruse notes that in *Backlog Studies* (1873) Charles Dudley Warner, Twain's neighbor and co-author of *The Gilded Age* (1873), using a character apparently modeled on Clemens, reports this speech: "If you are going into theology, I'm off," and later, "Don't switch us off into theology. I hate to go up in a balloon, or see anyone else go" (qtd. in Kruse 237). The evidence suggests Twain's impatience with rationalization. Any appeal through reason was undercut by Twain's earlier reading of Thomas Paine; the appeal through emotion, if it would come via Twichell, would be by rhetoric, not a tool to trap one of the most creative users of American language in our history. Twichell's modest influence on Twain was by his own personality rather than his doctrine.

In fact, Twain's relations with Twichell—those of a committed and longstanding close friendship—seem very different from his response to Twichell's religion. Protestant pastoral rhetoric with its alternate appeals through Christian imagery and traditional hermen- eutics was antithetical to Twain's vision. In 1871 Twain wrote of a New York minister's pulpit talk that "in its honest and well-meaning way it bores the people with uninflam- mable truisms about doing good; bores them with correct compositions on charity, chloroforms them, stupefies them with argumentative mercy without a flaw in the grammar, or an emotion which the minister could put in the right place if he turned his back and took his finger off the manuscript" (*What Is Man?* 54). Allowing sermons ten percent of the moral influence market and giving theater the rest, Twain indicts the form of religious discourse which most typifies Protestantism's bid for moving personal involvement. His objection was based on the levelling value of all mediums, his vision of cultural equality.

One of the most notable components of the unpublished works is Twain's anger at the lack of egalitarianism in religion. Subjected to the logic of democracy, suffering, and special providence—virtually every- thing religious people pray about—become agonizing puzzles darkened further by Calvinist "sin." Stories like "Little Bessie" in 1908–09 or "The Second Advent" in 1881 (both in *Mark Twain's Fables of Man*) echo remarks made as early as 1869 in *The Innocents Abroad*, when a

ship's officer on the *Quaker City* complains that the pilgrims are praying for favorable winds when hundreds of other sailing ships would suffer and they themselves are steam-powered! Religion and democracy conflict in Twain's vision of a zero-sum universe where one must lose if another wins. So Twain rebuked Twichell when Twichell advised him to hold back on his criticism of missionary greed in "To the Person Sitting in Darkness." Twain argued that Twichell shouldn't teach people to hide their opinions when they see abuse and dishonor and asked how he squared silence with his conscience (Zwick 20). Twain saw no room for moral compromise. No system of Christian belief founded on spiritual logic like Twichell's could rebut this position. Twain had sermons to deliver, as he recognized himself, but he needed a more tenable religious position to give him a basis for action.

I pose Messianic Judaism as one way of solving Twain's dilemma. My theme revolves around concepts which Twain never experienced, and one caveat is appropriate: the basis for my discussion is frankly personal—my own experience with New England Congregationalism (the religion in which I was raised in New Haven), Messianic Judaism (the religion which I now practice)—as well as informed historical analysis of Twain's religion.

Messianic Judaism sees itself within Judaism, honoring God and the Torah, but different from other branches of Judaism in that it recognizes the fulfillment of the promise of the Torah in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus of Nazareth) and therefore uses both Old and New Testaments in its liturgies. Messianic Judaism is centered on the Abrahamic covenant and finds in this covenant the laying on of a duty—the yoke of the Torah—for the Jews as a people designated to bring recognition of God to the world and in so doing to "bless the nations." With the coming of Yeshua the covenant is renewed, strengthened, and unified with the gentile world, which is recognized as having the opportunity to join with the Jewish people in fulfilling God's design. Faith is mysterious in its justification, based in the wisdom of the holy scripture rather than in logic. The covenant is God's desire to bless the world, originating in the act of creation itself. The primary command, as given to Adam and Eve, is to be fruitful, and the Abrahamic covenant

is a renewal of that command rather than an answer to the “fall.” Only a part of the doctrine involves the Adamic fall, which is not its driving force. The covenant is evidence of God’s determination to complete, with man, the work begun in creation. Through obedience to the covenant, fullness of life, variety, and joy are available to us. In accepting partnership with God, communicants are not guaranteed freedom from pain nor guaranteed an immediate physical victory—no Biblical figure seems to have been, including Abraham himself. This is an active faith, not passive fatalism, and its focus is very distant from Calvinism. “Hell” as a concept, which Twain accused Jesus of inventing at one point, is deemphasized in favor of the more powerful concentration of Old Testament values on life rather than afterlife.

Such a point needs stress. Messianic Judaism takes a world-centered approach on a mystical basis. It is anti-logical but subsumes science within the broader confines of its theology. Some answers are not accessible to believers. In obedience to God’s laws, including observance of the Shabbat—the day of rest—and the passing of traditions from generation to generation, the Messianic Jew finds the justification of his faith in itself and the duties involved. The work of the Garden of Eden was not completed there, and “sin” was not the primary hurdle to be overcome. After forgiveness of “sin,” as Twain brooded through his satires of the “saved” of his day, a better world may still not be the result. For Twain, conventional nineteenth-century religion did not keep children or wives alive, nor did it free the Congo, but the action of enlightened men keeping covenant with a Creator who desires to bless mankind could do some realistic good in the world.

As a teenager, late one night in my room looking out at the steeple of the nearby “Church of the Redeemer,” I once prayed that God would send me a “sign” of his existence so that I could believe. As Thomas Paine had shocked young Clemens into deism and later disbelief, Bertrand Russell and George Bernard Shaw had provided the same function for me, making me an unbelieving believer, toting my high school skepticism. A second or two after my prayer was completed, the recorded chimes of the steeple bell began to toll. And, a second or two

after it concluded, I began rationalizing with myself the coincidence of the event. I think it was the kind of prayer—or an unfulfilling fulfillment—I was vulnerable to as a perhaps superficial Protestant Congregationalist. Redemption from my rather unimpressive collection of minor sins was not a significant issue. More helpful would have been a confident expectation that I could sign on to a contract the terms of which were already known, and then proceed on a sound basis, coherently mixing rational, spiritual, and mystic elements. My prayer was no more likely to have succeeded than Twain's prayer for faith beside Twichell.

Messianic Judaism might recast the transaction this way: the hard work of belief for me the individual had *already* been done. God made the covenant with Abraham, and he didn't spend a whole lot of time palling around with Abraham, Moses, or any of the others recorded to have covenanted with him, so he probably won't be visiting me much either—the expectation of a personal meeting is unrealistic, church bells notwithstanding. The message to be interpreted from the Bible is that God loves variety, wants to bless humanity in his image, and leaves man to be highly independent. Belief is not “sent” in answer to prayer; it accompanies praying and doing, acceptance of the power of God's plan to work ultimately for good. It is not subject to logic or science for the simple reason that God is a mystical being; the confirmation lies in a history which revolves around acceptance rather than “proof.”

The promise of the Torah has already been completed; the reconfirmation lies in Yeshua. God's ways and the working out of his creation are not “logical,” although they are strictly obedient to permanent laws, nor would they be egalitarian or democratic—political systems created by us, by which I do not mean to demean them. If we insist on killing, for example, coveting, or worshiping other gods, we diminish the possible blessings and joy we and others can take in God's creation. In the case of the Shabbat (Sabbath), if we don't honor God by respecting the Shabbat, we get to work an extra day. This was not his plan, the creation model. Shabbat's justification as a day of rest lies in history; learning to honor it strengthens us. I can't, however, prove the law; I wouldn't try. More important, even, is the wisdom that would admit my doubts as part of the human condition. They were shared by

many of the great figures of the Old Testament, and these models coach me to persevere, as the Messiah Yeshua's ultimate model does in larger proportions. To focus on rescuing man from an evil state is to posit the worst possible construction on what could otherwise be the covenanted work of perfecting creation one step at a time.

The "apple" was a setback but does not define us. While the evils we see seem to deny the blessings we need to bring forth, they are not God's ultimate plan. Twain insisted that they were, and stories like "A Dog's Tale" or "The Victim" in *Fables of Man* present repelling images in protest. To equate God's relationship with man to a bacillus feeding on a virus, even if translated into human likenesses as Twain does, is to create a false democratization which is inconsistent with the covenant between God and man. For Twain, no mediating "logic" was possible. Twain himself was bemused by Thomas Beecher's statement to him in the early 1870s in Elmira that Beecher did not believe in God but that he would in a year's time. Beecher fulfilled the contract and became a powerful religious influence in the area. Twain himself was dismayed at the self-malleability of mind involved. Therein lies Twain's difficulty. If active involvement with faith *and* action was Beecher's path, his success must have brought him very close to the Messianic Jewish position. The essence of Beecher's story is that the man controlled his own spiritual destiny by working through his own system of belief.<sup>2</sup>

A summary of Mark Twain's faith leaves his life and his canon in fragments. Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* (1847) provided a model for the Christian family which Nook Farm and Sam and Livy followed, but Twain only weakly supported his family in church attendance. Neither he, nor they ultimately, found nurture there. His anger with restrictive Protestant doctrine brought him to declare in the 1880s that the Bible "not only was not written by God, but was not even written by remarkably capable men" (*What is Man?* 58). The position responded to Twain's experience of the prevailing nineteenth-century emphasis on the Bible as a rigid, literal, stand-alone divine revelation. He might have been better served seeing it as a body of extensive wis-

<sup>2</sup>I am indebted to Mark Woodhouse of Elmira College for locating Mark

dom about a partnership between man and God which has to be realized in history by men acting with God's inspiration.<sup>3</sup> Twain's attack is made on a God who is a replica of man, rather than the other way around. The complaint, over and over, is that God does not exercise enough power, enough omnipotence, to eliminate pain, disbelief, and evil. Never does Twain consider that to do so would also deprive man of identity and the capacity for doing good.

Many Protestant sects segment the Bible and emphasize the New Testament as the central document. This practice created a logical absurdity for Twain whose observation of the behavior of missionaries in China and Africa and of community leaders in small-town America never fits Jesus Christ as paradigm. Such adventures as the trip to the Holy Land on the *Quaker City* in 1867 derive their humor from this divergence. Twain's more bitter complaints, such as "The Second Advent," attacked the application of prayer to immediate problems and any concept of divine intervention as helping one by damaging another. God is made obedient to a zero-sum blessing in "The Second Advent" that one must lose if another wins. Reducing the New Testament to absurdity by setting it in a small town in Arkansas feels to Twain like a compelling degradation, but its basis lies in levelling mankind by egalitarian presumption with the rest of the universe, a destructive presumption.

For all the Bushnellian emphasis on the "nurture" of children's faith, Suzy was left in a void not unlike her father's angry combination of belief and denial. Twain recorded the "wisdom and pathos" of Suzy's uncertain prayer that there "be a God in heaven—or something better" (*Mark Twain's Autobiography* 2:39). She, too, became a relativist. Faith cannot descend from generation to generation without a covenant that allows a stronger belief than this in the face of doubt. As a democratic capitalist Twain found the biblical stories equally affronting. Louis Budd in "Mark Twain on Joseph the Patriarch" finds that in 1906 Twain identified Joseph skinning people of every last

<sup>3</sup>Appendixes 7 and 8 in Baetzhold and McCullough's *The Bible According to*

penny with Rockefeller whitewashing Joseph. The concept is true Twain but false religion: he misses the point that there are ways of working in the world that are *not* subordinate to human imposed ideas of egalitarian order. Without a value system accepting the special nature of chosen responsibility, covenant, and a plan beyond human knowing (which Rockefeller claimed to have), Twain was left appalled at Rockefeller's finding a mandate for commercial rapacity in the Old Testament, a troubling spiritual paradox for Twain. Huck Finn was his ultimate example of the victim of a conventional conscience, and the "stupefied humanity" of southern religion, with its rigid logic-bound providence, could not tolerate the humane wisdom of a more generous raft voyager. So Huck dramatizes Twain's retreat to the position that a sound heart is a safer guide than an ill-trained conscience. Still, Twain was so close to the answer so many times that we must see it as a tragedy that he never got it. Certainly he was capable of humanizing the Messiah Yeshua; he says that he holds the Jew baby born in Bethlehem in just as much reverence as if he had been born a Christian baby (*Mark Twain's Notebook* #40, 48), which reminds me of my mom's sole religious teaching: "Remember that Jesus Christ was a good Jewish boy." Pragmatically, Twain could have been rooted in a world that glorified its physicality as a part of God's plan but not the whole plan.

Twain found the pre-scientific view of creation literally preposterous because it was. The need to reconcile it with science, subordinating God's law to man's logic and scientific fact, poisoned him. He easily posed the contrary argument himself: "The Biblical absurdity of the Almighty's being only six days building the universe and then fooling away 25 years building a towhead in the Mississippi" (*Mark Twain's Notebook* 161). The sardonic wit should have given him his own answer, but it did not. God loves the diversity of mankind; he has chosen and covenanted his messengers, and he has authorized freedom to man to bless others. The sandbar joke could have become to Twain an irrelevant paradigm in the face of the greater covenant to bless others by piloting a safe course, as Twain and the lightning pilots of his past had done on the Mississippi in empowered knowledge. Any other rock than this was just a sandbar, after all, whether made in twenty-

five years, or twenty-five million.

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