

The Book of Job II: The Individual, God and their relationship



By Dr. Derek Rivard
Contributing Writer

A common reading of the Book of Job is to see the story of Job, the righteous man afflicted with great suffering supposedly as a test of his faith in God, as a meditation upon two problems in theology: the problem of suffering (evil) or the philosophical question of how God's nature can be both absolutely powerful and absolutely good (theodicy) in a universe so permeated with suffering. Yet while the story of Job does struggle to come to terms with the reality of the suffering of the innocent, answering why this is reality is not the principle aim of the anonymous poet who composed the core of this book. Rather, the poet attacks a much deeper issue: what is the character of a person's relationship to God? Exploring this question is the subject of the present article.

To begin, the dialogue between Job and his friends (described in a previous article) is based around a very old doctrine in the wisdom literature of Israel. "According to this view, virtue was rewarded with prosperity, health and long life; and, conversely, sins were punished by poverty, sickness and untimely death." When Job laments his state at the beginning of the dialogue, he is not lamenting the existence of suffering or the injustice of his case, but the sense of emptiness that now pervades his life as he is estranged from a meaningful relationship with God (Job 9: 11, 13: 24). Without that relationship, life and death for the poet are empty of meaning

and purpose, something to be endured rather than embraced. It is only with Job's friends' insistence that the fault and cause of his suffering lies within him (as the doctrine of rewards and punishments states) that Job breaks from initial pious passivity, and embarks upon a more radical course, stubbornly insisting upon his innocence and becoming the nearly promethean figure of the later poem, challenging God to answer for the misery he has inflicted upon his innocent servant.

The three friends' self-righteous arrogance in their orthodoxy, however, has a note of desperation to it, as if they must have realized that Job's accusations of injustice on God's part was as much a threat to their own sense of security as it was a challenge to God. (This desperate antagonism, I suspect, is also a major motivating factor in the fundamentalist critique of all traditions and views differing from their own rigid dogmas.) Indeed, by the end of the dialogue, the three men sound more pathetic than Job in all his misery, in that they are at the mercy of their desperate need to believe that they have the answers to all life's enigmas, that God was bound by their logic and sense. Job in contrast to them embodies the true prophetic spirit, that of the heretic who questions orthodoxy if that orthodoxy leads to a smug indifference to the sufferings of our fellow human beings.

Job must have seemed wildly heretical to orthodox Jews of the day, which may explain why the third cycle of poems shows evidence of re-arrangement to include the speeches of the third friend, Elihu, which are amongst the most hostile towards Job. But Job goes further in his accusations than even the radical prophet Jeremiah's boldest questioning, for he accuses god of being like a capricious tyrant (Job 9: 18-19), a savage beast (16: 7, 9), and a treacherous assailant (16: 12-14). He wishes to be left alone by God once and for all if only so as to suffer alone and die, and virtually sets himself up as a judge of God, claiming that, in a fair debate as an equal to God, he would be vindicated as a man of integrity (Job 27: 6, 31: 36, 37). Ultimately, what drives Job's questions and defiance of God is the desire to find the meaning of his life in his own terms, the solution to (in the words of one commentator) "the existential problem [of] whether a person can find, in the midst of the brief interim of existence, an ultimate meaning which sancti-

fies birth and glorifies death."

The response of God to Job's questions comes in the form of a voice from out of a whirlwind, but the response (or rather, the rebuke) is hardly satisfying. Indeed, it almost seems God was not listening to Job at all. "What God says does not answer the charge; it does not even touch upon it." Basically, the response has two dimensions: God is the creator who originated the cosmos, when no human was present, and so it is presumptuous for a created being such as Job to challenge God (Job 38: 4-7); and second, God the creator upholds the universe with divine power, powerfully reminding Job that the first religious obligation of a created being is to acknowledge and worship the creator, without whom the universe would devolve into chaos. This rebuke demands questions of Job that he cannot answer, and thus, silenced, he admits he has no grounds to argue with God (Job 40: 1-3).

So what, then, can be said about the Book of Job's ultimate contribution to the theology of Israel and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and its conception of the individual's relationship to God? Perhaps the most important point is the challenge the book offers to the idea that catastrophes are to be seen as deserved punishment for human sin. This doctrine is simply insufficient to explain the horrifying suffering that falls regularly upon the innocent, be they infants, children, adults or the elderly. And on a very profound level, the book of Job challenges any attempt to provide a rational explanation for God and the presence of suffering in the world, for the mystery of that suffering is left unsolved. What matters in the end is that it is Israel's relationship with the divine, with the Yahweh of the whirlwind, that gives meaning and substance to life, and makes the travails of this world bearable. This comfort may be the greatest gift religious faith has to offer humanity, and it lies at the core of how we as a society have interpreted the sacred texts of our world, the subject of the next and final installment of this series.

¹ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 595.

² *Ibid.*, 597.

³ *Ibid.*, 598.

⁴ Martin Buber, *At the Turning: Three Addresses on Judaism*, 61.

Wrestling team teaches student about feminism

By Molly Refsland
Contributing Writer

Without even knowing it, I was a feminist at the age of 10. One word would describe how I eventually figured that out: wrestling. The day is quite vivid in my mind, the day my parents lied to me. O.K., so it wasn't actually a lie, but a clarification of the truth. The truth that boys and girls are different and sometimes we can't always do the same things.

I was in fourth grade and a definite tomboy. I was always the only girl playing basketball or football with the boys, so naturally, when our class was given information sheets to join youth wrestling, I grabbed one.

Wrestling seemed like it would be fun, even though I really had no idea what it entailed. But since all of the boys took a sheet, I had to. I brought the sheet home that afternoon and showed it to my mom. She told me I would have to ask my dad about it when he got home.

That was never a good sign. Mom never wanted me to do anything that boys did; she would rather have me in ballet slippers than tennis shoes, and she hated it when I played in the mud instead of playing with my Barbie Dream House. I was her little girl and she often told me that if she were meant to have a boy, she would have.

When my dad came home I gave him the sheet and told him, with a huge smile on my face, that I was going to join the wrestling team.

He uttered the only words I hated, "No," followed by "Absolutely not." The answer out of his mouth came as a surprise to me because he was always the one backing my decisions to do un-girly things, and I didn't see how wrestling was any different.

So, when I asked my dad how wrestling was different I was offered this explanation: "Molly, wrestling is a boy's sport. Girls just shouldn't wrestle."

I still didn't understand. My parents totally contradicted themselves. Even though I was not permitted to be an all-star wrestler, I did gain something from the experience. I realized that I would just have to try harder for it to be acceptable for a girl to be a wrestler, but when I went to my first wrestling match as a sophomore in high school, I realized I definitely did not want to be doing that.

Sweaty bodies trying to take each other down in awkward positions is not my definition of fun. I still shudder when I see wrestling.

However, even with my non-wrestling experience I managed to still defy my parents and play a boy's sport.

So, the truth about boys and girls being able to do the same things is a lie. Sort of. I have accepted the fact that I couldn't wrestle, but I know I can still be on an equal playing field with men.

Four years after my encounter with wrestling, I joined the football team. In eighth grade, when all of my friends were playing volleyball and I was sort of looked at as weird. I didn't care; I had a ton of fun on the football field. Seriously, I could have the worst day ever, and in eighth grade they came quite frequently, but I would be able to tackle the crap out of someone at practice.

I could take my anger out on a person instead of a stupid volleyball and not get in trouble for it; in fact, I was rewarded for hard tackles. What could have been better? I don't want to brag, but I was the best girl on my team.

Both of the experiences I had didn't really mean anything or make any sense at the time, but now, with my accelerated wisdom, they make sense.

So, the truth about boys and girls being able to do the same things is a lie. Sort of. I have accepted the fact that I couldn't wrestle, but I know I can still be on an equal playing field with men.

My feminist values are still intact and growing even stronger. I attribute that to my experience at Cottey and I have come to this conclusion: Girls and boys can't always do the same things, but women and men can.

E-mails should promote tolerance, not hatred



By Gienah Harris
Staff Writer

Throughout the Cottey school year, the campus e-mail has been put to many good uses; however, recent use of this system brings to light the ways in which this system is abused. Recently, a first-year student sent a hate e-mail to

all students about Muslim evangelizing; the e-mail contained rhetoric accusing the Muslim religion of dictating that all Muslims kill infidels. If one were to believe this e-mail, an infidel would be classified as a non-believer of the "true faith." At the top of the e-mail, the student apologized since the e-mail might possibly offend others.

This shines a disturbing light on the open mindedness of Cottey students. The Muslim religion does not encourage the practitioners of the religion to kill others. It is doubtful that those who choose to judge have ever read any Muslim holy book or attended a Muslim religious service. People read things and consider them facts simply because they know and trust the person who sent it to them. With the sudden and misplaced fear of the Muslim religion brought on due to the Sept. 11 attacks, people are jump-

ing to conclusions about a topic on which they truly know very little.

Many students I have talked to have been horrified by this e-mail, which is not the first of its kind. Students with more open minds have questioned the truthfulness of this e-mail. Simply because someone is a good Christian does not mean he or she needs to become intolerant of other religions.

Believe it or not, Christianity is not the only religion, nor is it the best choice for some. Looking back at history, Christianity has if not a bloodier history than the Muslim religion at least an equal record when it comes to atrocities. The Christian church ordered the crusades against the Muslims which caused one of the bloodiest times in history for Europe. Granted, the Muslims of the time responded to this threat by defending themselves, but let's

not forget that originally, the two religions were willing to work together.

Religions preach similar things; in fact, most world religions have the same basic tenants, and they are built on the same foundations. Why is it then that people from a religion that is supposedly based on love and turning the other cheek are suddenly so eager to hate others based on incomplete facts? Before circulating such e-mails in the future, please take the feelings of others into consideration, especially those who may be of a different religion. If you have to apologize for something before you send it, it shouldn't be sent at all. Hate e-mails are unnecessary and do not belong on college campuses. They do not help the situation—they simply aggravate it. Instead of turning on each other, practice what you preach, whatever religion, or lack thereof, you practice.

Why are Cottey students treated the way they are?



By Barbora Batokova
Staff Writer

After seven months of living in Nevada, I have experienced two different attitudes directed at me because I am a Cottey girl.

On one hand, I am treated in a very nice fashion whenever I go

to places like Bank of America or Dollar General. The employees are very polite and more than willing to go out of their way to help me. I always receive respect from them.

On the other hand, many times I am looked down upon because of the simple fact that I am a Cottey girl, especially by local young people who have finished high school and didn't seek any further education. I have received and witnessed verbal and even sexual harassment directed towards Cottey students. Whether it is as simple as the hooting and hollering when crossing Austin, the honking of a passing car, name-calling or even being punched in the face, if the behavior is intimidating, degrading, offensive or makes the person uncomfortable in any way, it can be classified as verbal abuse, sexual harassment or even battery.

I feel Cottey students are often discriminated against for no valid reason. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to defend ourselves against behaviors like these because the levels of communication and maturity differ. How can you talk to somebody if they are not willing to listen or cannot comprehend what you are saying?

Rumor has it that Cottey girls are out there to steal Nevada girls' boyfriends. I have even heard of Cottey girls being called "lesbian boyfriend stealers" by some Nevada girls. Didn't we all learn the term "oxymoron" in our high school English classes?

Respect is another term that is foreign to the people who target Cottey girls with offensive remarks. It is not only respect for other people, but also for one's self. What kind of person shakes your hand and says everything

is "cool" and then hits you in the face two minutes later? It is too bad that some people cannot stand up and say their opinion directly to your face. Is it because they are afraid of confrontation? Or is it because they don't know any better? My guess is that it is both.

I don't understand why Cottey girls are often so disrespected by certain members of the Nevada community. Faculty, staff and students of Cottey College definitely bring a lot of life to the community and should be perceived as doing so. Young female Nevada residents should see Cottey as the source of a promising future and a chance to meet a variety of new people from across the world—not as a reason for rivalry and hostility. Instead of jealousy and resentment, I wish there could be more friendships between Nevada and Cottey girls.

★ Spectrum ★

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