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*The Omega Seed, An Eschatological Hypothesis* By PAOLO SOLERI Garden City, N Y Anchor Books, 1981 286 pages \$9 95 (paper)

Charles Hartshorne once wrote that God is both the "supreme source" and the "supreme result" of the evolutionary and historical world process (*The Divine Relativity* [New Haven, Conn Yale University Press, 1964], p 59) Paolo Soleri proposes a God who is only the ultimate result, not the prime mover of the world Borrowing the cryptic eschatological symbol of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Soleri believes in an Omega God Teilhard, like Hartshorne, found God to be both Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, but Soleri praises only the Omega God, inveighing against the Alpha God Traditional theism is a misleading illusion, although it may have served a stage on the way Our present human challenge is to become what we are, the seed of God, and hence Soleri's title We are the *Omega Seed*

This is a radically critical and speculative hypothesis, at least if we take it in full-dress boldness Classical monotheism is wholly ill-conceived and must be transvalued God did not make us, we make God God is not our Father, rather we are the seed of God Augustine could say "In Him we live, move, and have our being" But Soleri says, in effect "He lives, moves, and has his being in us" Soleri's divine Advent is of a heterodox kind God is born in us, but this means that we give birth to God, not (what the Alpha Creed holds) that we are born and reborn in a God who pre-exists us, coexists with us, and transcends us The movement is to God, not from God Even *Zygon* readers, who may welcome revisions of classical theism, will find this a heady claim Muhammed could say, "There is no God but God, and Muhammed is his prophet" If we paraphrase him, perhaps oversimply, Soleri's creed is, "There is no God yet, and Soleri is his prophet"

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Soleri, an ex-Catholic, detests classical theism with something of the hostility of a lost love. God, the same yesterday, today, and forever, has never existed but is a projection unawares, a "simulation," a "deception" (p. 33). The Alpha God is not to be worshipped; rather the Omega God is to be built. Yet Soleri also wants to salvage something of the Biblical heritage, not as a revelation of God but rather as a blueprint for God. Many readers, theists and nontheists alike, will have doubts whether Soleri is entirely fair to the theism he has spurned.

On the positive side, Soleri conceives of the historical process as the making of God. Here there are both naturalistic and humanistic elements in his creed. In general, I find the naturalistic dimensions, though weakly developed, more credible than the humanistic proposals, although the latter are key axioms for his hypothesis. The world is a drama of matter evolving into spirit, seen in the development across primordial particles, atoms and molecules, microbes, plants, animals, and humans. The story is "an immense metamorphosis of matter into spirit" (p. 75). That much, of course, is a frequent theme in evolutionary theism. In various ways it can be accepted by naturalists, monists, pantheists, and even by neoclassical theists.

However, Soleri adds his distinctive twists. He wants to deny any divine transcendence over the process. Further, he removes and dilutes the divine immanence from the earlier stages, transferring God more and more into the future states following a pivotal passage through human endeavor. In the beginning there was no God, there were only  $10^{80}$  particles, which we can also think of as "particle-godlets" (p. 67). There were only fragments of god. Progressively these coalesce and complexify until after twenty billion years of evolutionary development we get as far as a seed of God—ourselves. Soleri's choice of words indicates, I think, something of his evaluation of what has so far happened in spontaneous nature. The passage from particle-fragment to seed is mostly prolegomena. The birth of God really lies ahead; it is exponentially forthcoming.

Soleri's vision onwards is unbounded. He seems to believe, if we look millions of years ahead, that humans will not only redesign earth but colonize space near and far, building ever more cities across the universe. This explosion will gradually convert all the matter-energy in the universe into the God-Spirit. In the beginning life and spirit are unknown in the physical universe, even now they are quite rare, but in the eschaton they will become more common and eventually pervasive. At the beginning physical matter was common, but it will progressively disappear and eventually be eliminated. "Godliness is achieved in toto if and when the cosmos in toto has rid itself of the constraints of mass-energy time and space" (p. 36). Space, time, mass, energy will be entirely consumed to create pure spirit (p. 67).

We have no divine origin, but we have a divine destiny. "Life, conscience, and spirit are not generated by other than themselves. They are a fatherless phenomenon powerfully and irreversibly urging the winding up of the cosmos into the synthesis of divinity" (p. 109). "The responsibility of life lies in the transfiguration of an immensely powerful physical phenomenon into an immensely loving spiritual one." This is our "eschatological imperative" (p. 146). The route to "theogenesis" passes necessarily and crucially through "homogenesis" (p. 116).

It is hard to know whether to take this hypothesis as a model, a metaphor, or a myth. Soleri seems to think he is predicting what is going to happen and prescribing what ought to happen. Most of us have learned to be half-

comfortable with the notion of a big bang at the start of the universe, although we do not really understand it. All matter-energy exploded out of a densely packed initial ball. Soleri claims that at the end the matter will be transubstantiated into spirit and gathered into one God. For the physical beginning we have a sort of a model, but Soleri's spiritual ending seems more a mystical vision, and it is not clear that he is making as much sense as he thinks. Like other apocalypticists he falls into rapture and incoherence.

A key concept enroute to the eschaton is what Soleri calls "the urban effect" (p. 162 and *passim*). To my mind, this is an ill-chosen phrase, suggesting urban blight and urban sprawl. But Soleri, who is even more critical of our modern cities than I might be, wants to reform the urban model. He does an enormous amount of constructive work with this unlikely term. To urbanize the earth, to urbanize indeed the universe is to spiritualize them: "urban" really refers to an integrated community which more and more approaches a kind of centered oneness. The underlying biological preface already shows the urban effect, which Soleri also calls, after Teilhard, complexification. But the phrase principally applies to the future. Humans will create even more dramatic exosomatic structures, a built environment. They will increase their know-how, instrumentation, data base, technology, and industry. This will not be for the gain of material goods but rather in the service of spirituality.

Thus Soleri is a high-order developmentalist. We are to build penultimately on earth and ultimately in space what earlier Alpha-theologians called the City of God. However, Soleri thinks that the City of God is God. Here Soleri trusts much in machines, although he always wants them as our servants. We need to learn "the mechanics of God-making" (p. 93). "The hope of the species, godliness, resides in refinement of the extrabiological servosystem" (p. 33). With the supposed Alpha God, scientists used to say that they thought God's thoughts after him, but Soleri's scientists and architects seem rather by technological inventiveness to think God's thoughts before him.

Reading Soleri is like swimming through wet sand. His language is flowery, dense, vague, pompous, and groping. He rambles dreadfully. There is little or no progress through the book; the chapters could be rearranged and read as easily. He is rather isolated from the mainstreams of both theology and science. He never uses or criticizes other thinkers in these fields but goes his own way in splendid, self-contained vision. This can, of course, result in prophecy, but it also can result in dreams and in riding a private hobby horse. Nevertheless, impossible maverick though he is, Soleri has an overall thesis which deserves a thoughtful response.

Although from a psychological point of view we do get an enormous challenge (we are called to build God!), from the logical point of view Soleri's system gives no explanation of origins or of the increase in meanings from physics to spirit. He gives us more out of less. There is no Prime Ground. The developing world is a kind of bizarre given. Once there was nothing but a swarm of particulate matter-energy fragments. These self-assemble into persons and persons build up into a terminating God. But surely what one wants in a religion is not merely an explanation of where we are going but also an explanation of where we have come from and by what power we travel. One needs to connect a supreme source with a supreme result. To give us Omega without Alpha is to increase the puzzle, not to solve it. Everything is explained in terms of the God who is not present until the end. That is teleological explanation with a vengeance! If Soleri is right, it seems truer to say that

humans form the explanation of God than that God is the explanation for humans.

I can suggest two ways of reading Soleri, somewhat analogous to the ways Sunni Muslims used to treat those Sufi enthusiasts who claimed too close an identity with God. The first is to take the claim at face value, in which case the heretic is judged to be incredible, blasphemous, and even comic. The Hebrew Scriptures portray foolish, proud earthlings who tried to build a tower of Babel merely to reach up to heaven, but here is an architect who wants to start making God himself! However, the second, more charitable way is to say that the extremist in his ecstasy misspoke himself. What he really meant, or should mean, is something less objectionable, indeed something commendable about the nearness of the divine to the human life. If we may use the traditional idiom, Soleri is yearning for the Kingdom of God and confusing this with the King. He can no longer separate being like God from being God. He presses so furiously toward the mark of destiny that he mistakes his goal for the rock from whence he was hewn.

Readers who can demythologize Soleri will find that much of what he wants for society they also want—in essence society with a spiritual focus rather than a materialistic one. But even when his inflated rhetoric is cashed out in common coin, I fear that in his urban enthusiasm Soleri has no thoughtful place for the spontaneously wild, an element of creation which others of us are concerned to appreciate and preserve. This is not incidental but is a logical byproduct of his incapacity to see much of the divine in those creative natural forces which precede the human coming. Soleri seems not to like matter; he wants it consumed into spirit, the Omega God. But at least the Alpha God created matter and pronounced it good.

There is here something of the City of God but something too of the stuttering confusion that followed the tower of Babel. There is something of the desire to image God, to which at our genesis we were called, but something too of the desire to usurp God and take things into our own hands, for which in Genesis the race becomes fallen. Perhaps the best tactic is to regard this book as what it proposes to be, a hypothesis, in the present stage only dreamed up in a context of discovery, not yet even tested, much less justified. We will wait to see what this hypothesis can explain, whether it can predict anything, and what conduct it can generate. *The Omega Seed* should be tested by its fruits.

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