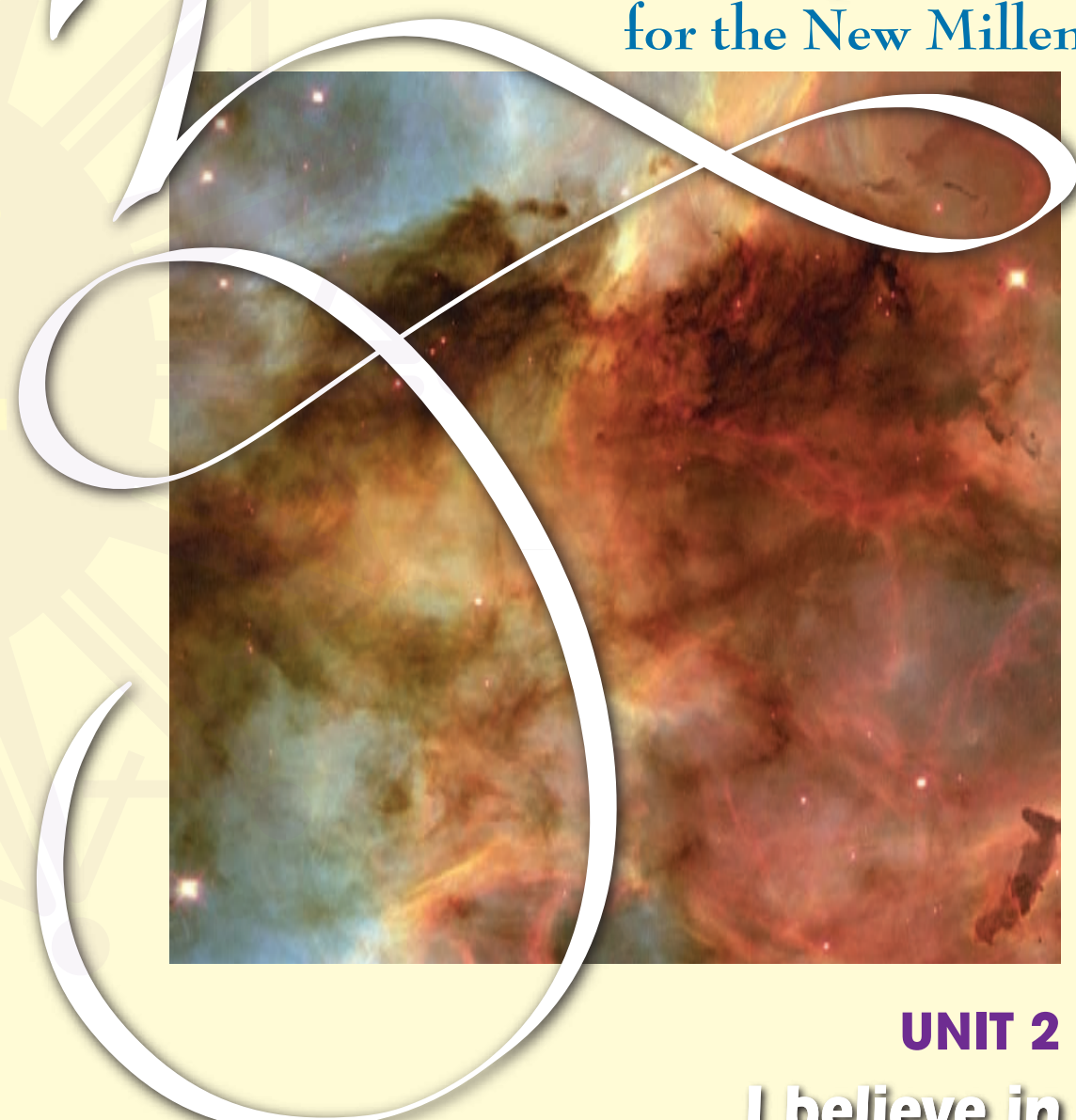


An Apostles' Creed

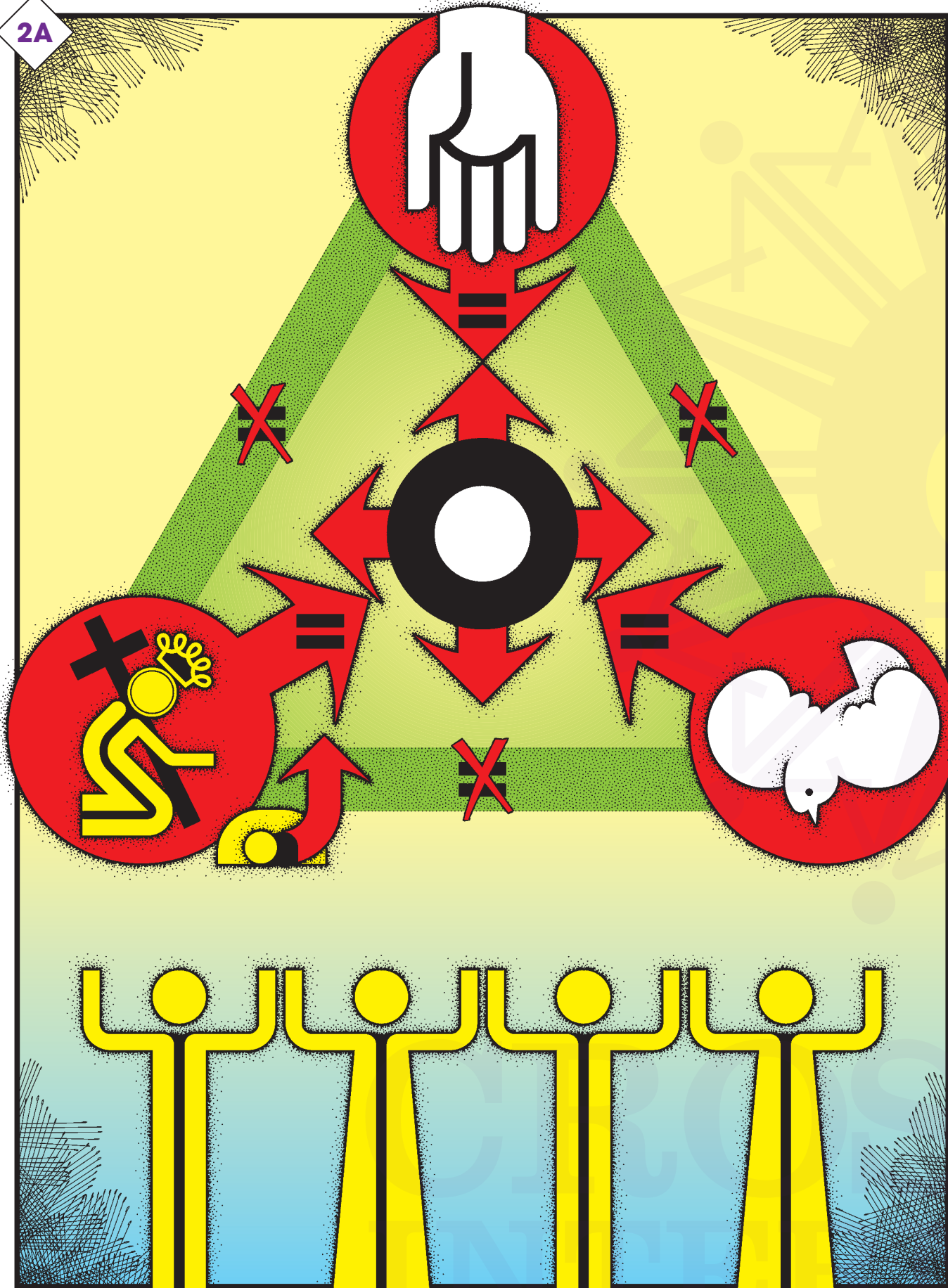
for the New Millennium



UNIT 2

I believe in
God the Father Almighty

CROSSWAYS
INTERNATIONAL



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The Holy Trinity

Upper section

THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLY TRINITY

- 1 There is only *one God*, Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 42:8 (*symbol for God*).
- 2 There are *three Persons* in that one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14. **ILLUSTRATION 2A** depicts the three Persons of the Trinity by symbols traditionally assigned to them—*Father: creative hand; Son: Servant-King, cross, open tomb, ascending arrow; Holy Spirit: dove*.
- 3 Although each Person is fully God (*equal sign*), each Person is distinct (*equal sign canceled out*) from the other two Persons, Matthew 25:34; John 16:12–15.
- 4 In the New Testament, we read that the Father “begat” the Son (Hebrews 1:5; 5:5) and that the Father and the Son “sent” the Spirit, John 14:16; 16:7. These terms do not mean that one Person existed before another. They point to distinctions between the Persons, not to events in the sweep of time. (The term “begat” denotes that God the Father caused the Virgin Mary to conceive—miraculously.)

THE WORKS OF THE HOLY TRINITY

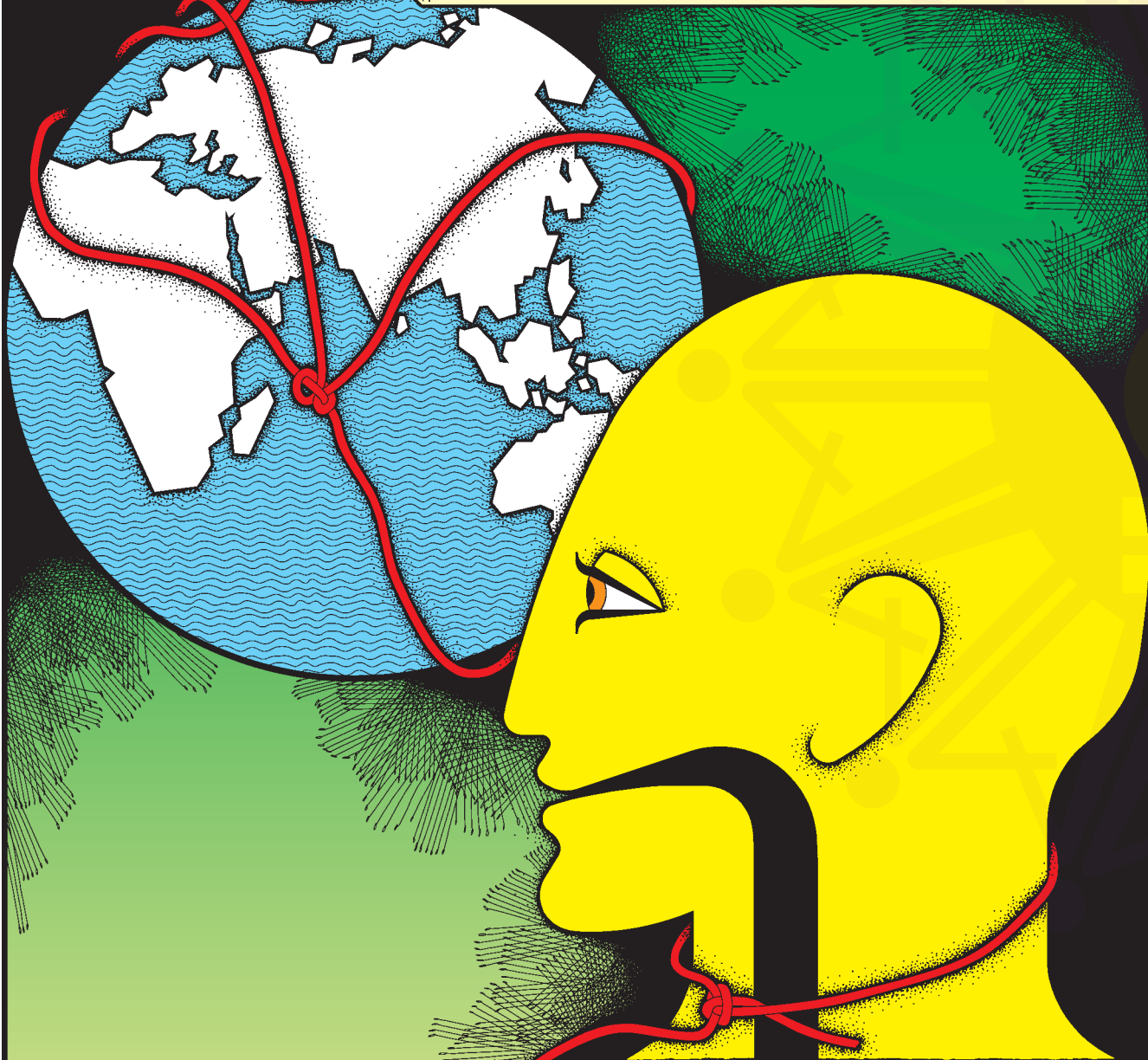
- 1 **Creation (*Hand of God*)**: God the Father created all things, still owns them, and sustains what He has made and owns.
- 2 **Redemption** (buy back, save, rescue): The work of God’s Son, Jesus the Messiah, is designated by a *Servant-King* (complete with *halo*) carrying a *cross* to remind us that Jesus’ *life, death, resurrection, and ascension* was a serving, saving action, Matthew 1:21, Philippians 2:5–11. Jesus came to save us from slavery to sin and from the punishment we deserve in eternity, Romans 3:28.
- 3 **Sanctification** (make holy): The Holy Spirit leads people to believe in Jesus the Messiah as Savior and Lord, and inspires and empowers them to do the things Jesus would lead them to believe and do if Jesus were still present in human form and visibly active on earth, John 16:12–15. The Holy Spirit perpetuates Jesus’ completed mission and ministry.

The Bible does not distinguish sharply between the Persons of the Trinity. For example, Trinitarian terms overlap in Romans 8:9,10. Nor does the Bible divide the works of the Trinity into watertight compartments; it teaches that the Triune God creates, redeems, and sanctifies, 2 Corinthians 5:19.

Lower section

The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery we cannot understand. However, although we cannot fully understand the distinctions within of the Trinity, we are called to praise the three Persons of the one Triune God for their gracious works, or *functions*, on our behalf (*people in posture of praise*). For example, in Ephesians 1:3–14, Paul refers to the person and work of the Father in vv. 3–6, the Son in vv. 7–12, and the Spirit in vv. 13,14—and concludes each section with a summons to praise.

**MY PROPERTY!
HANDLE WITH CARE!**



**MY PROPERTY AND
INSTRUMENT FOR SERVICE.
DEVELOP,
CARE FOR AND
USE RESPONSIBLY.**



God the Father: Maker and Owner

ILLUSTRATION 2B shows *Planet Earth* and a *human being*, with *God's ownership label* attached to each.

Upper section

- 1 God made and owns the universe, including Planet Earth. Everything belongs to God. We humans create and own nothing. We merely use what belongs to God, and are to do so responsibly.
- 2 In the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), Jesus reminded the rich man that it was *the land*, not *the man*, that produced abundantly—and *God owns the land*.
- 3 There is no such thing as “Christian *giving*.” People cannot give what they do not own. God’s people are to see themselves as called, not to *give more*, but to *rob less*. They are to practice Christian *managing*, *caring*, and *sharing* in all they do.

Lower section

- 1 God made and owns *all people* on Planet Earth. Again in Luke 12:13–21, Jesus reminded the rich fool that *his very life was being lent to him by God*, and that very night *God would demand that the rich man’s life-on-loan be returned to its Owner. The rich man was about to die!*
- 2 God has endowed us with faculties and abilities. We are to view these with respect, develop them responsibly and wisely, and use them to glorify God by serving others.
- 3 Our actions toward others are to reflect God’s prior actions toward us, 1 John 4:19–21. We do not love others so that God may love us; we love others to reflect the wonderful truth that God already loves us.
- 4 **When we live according to God’s will reflected in the life of Jesus the Messiah, we find meaning and joy in life, and bring meaning and joy to others.**

We do well to consider the origin of the body in which we live. There was a day when millions of male sperm raced down a tunnel toward one female egg. One sperm won the race—and the end result became you or me. The question each of us must ask is: Who devised the process, and who owns the end result?

The *throat* descending from the *mouth* reminds us that, in the final analysis, God is the One who provides us with our daily needs, including our food.



Managers

ILLUSTRATION 2C depicts *God's* hands holding the things He lends to us beggarly mortals: body, food, money, family, home, and cattle (and whatever else we might like to call "ours"). All we humans can do in response is to thank and praise God for His goodness and mercy, and serve and obey Him.

GOD MADE, OWNS, AND CARES FOR CREATION

In **ILLUSTRATION 2A**, the *symbol for God* is superimposed on a depiction of *God's hands* holding *Planet Earth*. On Planet Earth are symbols of things God creates and provides to make a meaningful life possible for us. God places these things into our frail human hands (*hands, lower center*).

These details remind us that:

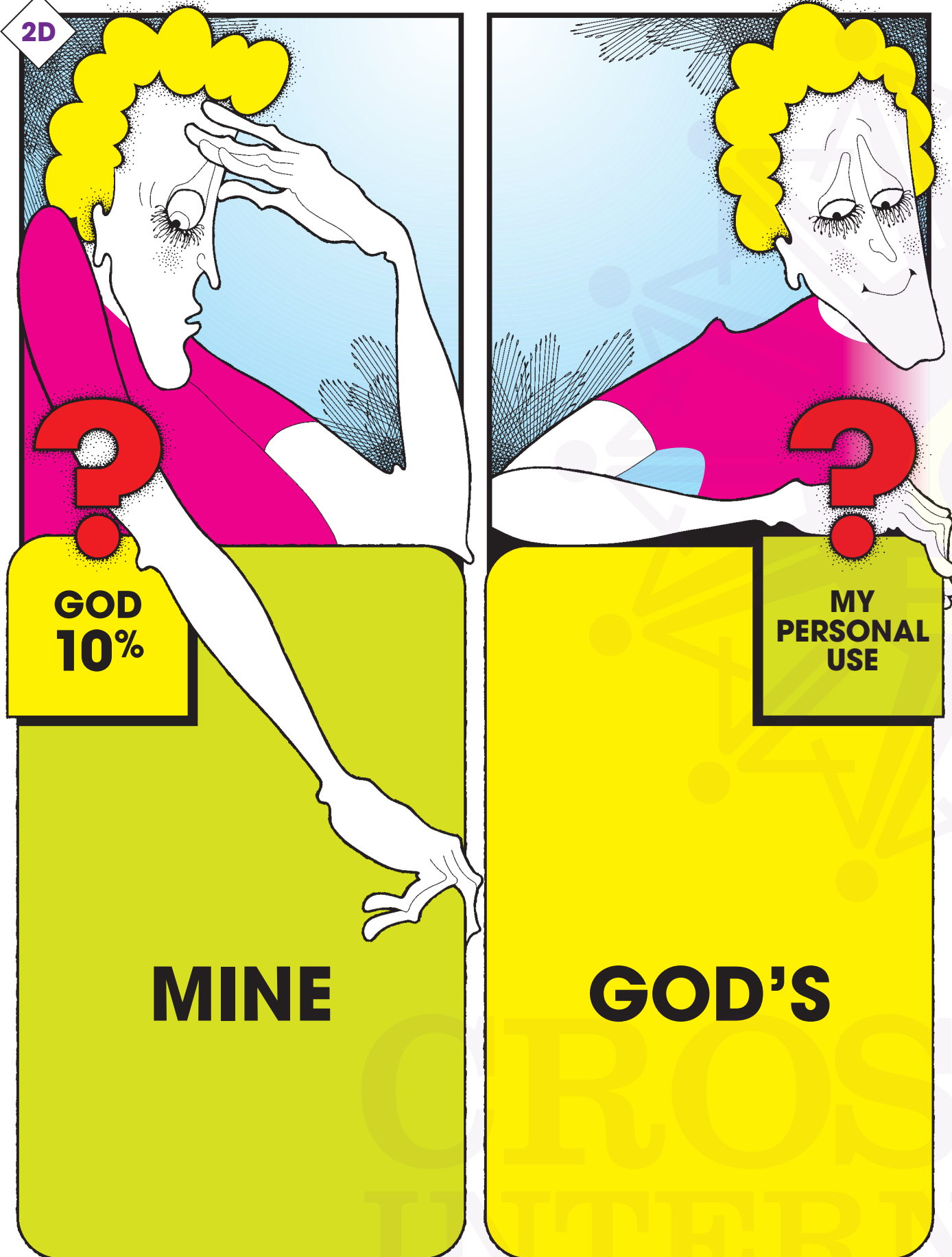
- God *made* the universe, and all within it, Genesis 1; Job 38:1–21.
- God *continues to own* the universe, and all within it. In Genesis 1:26, God gives Adam and Eve *dominion over*, not *ownership of*, the created order. See also Deuteronomy 8.
- God *supplies our needs* (but not *greeds!*) on a personal, family, community, and vocational level, Psalm 104, 145:16.

GOD SEEKS A RESPONSE FROM US

- We are to thank and praise God, Psalm 103:1–5, 118:1 (*person with hands raised in praise, lower left*). The issue at stake is not *God's ego*, but *our welfare—our sense of trust and peace*.
- God wants us to serve and obey Him, Psalm 100:1,2; Deuteronomy 6:4,5; Matthew 4:10; 22:34–40 (*servant figure, lower right*). When we trust and obey God—and when we care and share with our local, national, and world communities—peace and harmony prevail.

In the first Beatitude, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 5:3. These words might well be translated, "Blessed are those who know they are beggars before God." Everything beggars receive comes from outside themselves as a result of someone else's kindness. In kindness, God places into our hands all we need to support life. We merely receive. What beggars we are!

The Bible teaches that God made and owns creation and us. More people would understand this if two words were added to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker *and Owner* of heaven and earth." The problem in our needy world is not God's *providing*; the problem is *human dividing*. People prefer to *keep for themselves* rather than *share with others*.



Tithing for Christians: Yes or No?

ILLUSTRATION 2D speaks to the traditional “stewardship campaign” that encourages people to declare how much they will “give” to the church during the coming year. On occasion, the people are reminded that they have been blessed, and that if they contribute generously, God will continue to bless them. Reference is often made to Malachi 3:8–10, where the prophet exhorts God’s people to give their tithes and offerings.

Jesus’ teachings go beyond those found in the Old Testament. God merely entrusts us with the use of creation and life to glorify Him by serving humanity-at-large, Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:1–27. The question is not, “How much should I give to God of that which is mine?” but “How much need I keep for myself of that which is God’s?”

There is no such thing as Christian “giving.” There is merely Christian “management.” When we place something on an offering plate in a church, or contribute to a charity, we give God nothing. We merely get our hands off some of what *always has belonged* to God, and *always will belong* to God. Problems relating to the funding of Christian projects have to do with *un-Christian keeping*, not with *Christian giving*.

Furthermore, although the Old Testament links the term “blessed” to the acquisition and enjoyment of material goods (Deuteronomy 28:1–14), Jesus links it only to developing and manifesting qualities that reflect Him, Matthew 5:1–12; Luke 6:20–26.

Left section

The Wrong Question

These days many people are bombarded with requests to give of their *time*, *talents*, and *treasure* to help needy causes. They are sometimes challenged to think how much they should *give and use of their three T’s* to the glory of God in the service of others.

ILLUSTRATION 2D depicts Sylvester assuming that those *three T’s* are all his, and that he must decide what percentage he will *give* to God of what is his (*MINE*). No doubt, he assumes that after he has given his fair share to God (*perhaps 10%*), *the rest is his to do with as he pleases*.

Right section

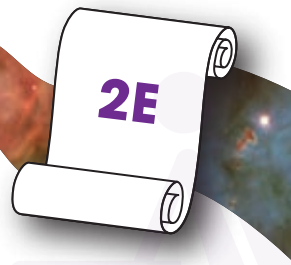
The Right Question

Sylvester must change his question to, “How much of what belongs to God should I keep for *MY PERSONAL USE*?” We make and own nothing. God made and owns everything, including the body we refer to as “mine,” Exodus 19:5; Haggai 2:8; 1 Corinthians 4:7; Psalm 100; Deuteronomy 8. We humans are merely managers of Another’s property. There is no such thing as *Christian giving*, for we cannot give what does not belong to us.

God’s people are called to practice *Christian management and distribution*. When some of those among whom St. Paul had worked were thinking about what they might contribute toward the support of the needy in Jerusalem, they “*gave themselves* first to the Lord,” 2 Corinthians 8:5. This enabled them to adopt God-pleasing attitudes. Their example preaches a powerful sermon to people in today’s world.

An Apostles' Creed

for the New Millennium



FIRST ARTICLE

We believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker and Owner of Heaven and Earth.
*We believe that we do not and cannot give God anything,
but merely manage what belongs to God,
including the body and life God is lending us.*

1 We believe in God...

The Bible never tries to prove God's existence. Those who wrote it took God's existence for granted. Their goal was to reveal God's heart and actions, and God's plan for humanity in time and eternity.

2 We believe...

Although we are called to *personal* faith, we are never called to *private* faith. There is no such thing as private Christianity. Either the privacy destroys the Christianity, or the Christianity destroys the privacy. Christianity is always a full-time community affair.

Jesus' teachings stress the importance of life in community. When teaching His disciples how to pray His way, Jesus taught them to address God as "*Our Father*"; to pray, "*give us this day our daily bread; forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*" In confessing the creeds, we do two things. *First*, we confess what *we ourselves* are to believe and do, and *second*, we express our desire to help *others* grow in faith and discipleship.

3 We believe...

To believe in God, to be involved in the Christian community, is more than knowing a few truths about God. What begins in our head must move to our heart, and direct our lips, hands, and feet. We are never done with learning about God. God calls us to be lifelong students of His Word, and full-time apprentices in the community of His Son, Jesus the Messiah.

4 We believe in God the Father...

When the Bible speaks of God as "Father," it is not ascribing "maleness" to God. Rather, it reveals God as the Person who *began the processes* of creation and history, who *remains intimately involved* in both, and *who loves and cares for* humanity in particular. Furthermore, although human parents do not always know what is best for their children, God invariably knows what is best for His creation and creatures.

5 We believe in God the Father Almighty...

Although parents are limited in terms of what they can do for their children, there is no limit to what God can do within creation and for humanity. Although we "specks of mortal" are limited in power, God looks on each of us with a loving eye, and rejoices in what He empowers us to believe and do in relation to His good and gracious will.

6 We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker...

The universe is not an accident of atoms. Behind it, and involved in it, is the almighty God revealed in Scripture who "in the beginning" spoke, and creation and history began. Genesis chs. 1, 2 focus on the "who" and the "why" of creation, rather than on the "how" and "when."

7 We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker and Owner...

Although Genesis chs. 1,2 speak of God creating the universe and humanity, they do not speak of God handing over ownership of anything to anyone. The term "dominion" (1:26,28) does not imply *ownership* but *management*. God remains the Owner as well as the Maker of all things, and calls us mere mortals to manage responsibly what He continues to own, Psalm 24:1; 89:11.

8 We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker and Owner of Heaven and Earth.

As we saw in Unit 1, to peer through a telescope is to be reminded that we live on a speck of a planet in a huge solar system in a vast galaxy within an incredibly grand universe. To look through a microscope is to see another grand, but infinitesimally small, universe.

9 We believe that we do not and cannot give God anything, but merely manage what belongs to God, including the body and life He is lending us.

In his explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, Martin Luther wrote, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He *has given* me my body and soul..." Although Luther understood very well that God is both the Maker and Owner of all things, the wording of the explanation might be improved if "has given" were replaced with "is lending."

In the parable Jesus tells in Luke 12:13-21 (especially v. 20), God reminds the "rich fool" that he does not even own the life he is using. God has been lending it to him, and is demanding the return of the loan that very night!

Applying the Truth

2

1

When people are asked, “How much do you pay for a loaf of bread?” (or bowl of rice, or whatever the staple food might be), various answers are offered. The biblical answer is, “Nothing.” Why?

- a. No one on Planet Earth has ever made a grain of wheat. Only God can do that.
- b. A farmer takes a grain of wheat that God has made, and places it into the ground that God has made and owns. God’s sun and God’s rain cause the grain to germinate and multiply.
- c. When we hand over money for a loaf of bread, we pay the farmer for planting and reaping, the trucker for transporting, the miller for grinding, the baker for baking, the storekeeper for placing it on a shelf. We do not pay for the bread itself. God gives us that.
- d. Furthermore, when we hand over money we are merely handing over stored servanthood, stored effort, in a transferable, exchangeable form. The amount we hand over transfers our servanthood to the farmer, trucker, miller, baker, and storekeeper for the servanthood they put into producing the item we “purchased.”

Consider then, how much did you pay for your house, furniture, car, clothes, farm, machinery, etc.?

2

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

- a. Does “bread” really come to me as a gift of God, or as a result of my effort? What is the relationship between the two?

- b. Do I thank God for daily bread every time I receive it?

- c. If I never again thank God for daily bread, will I receive it?

- d. If I will receive it, whether I thank God or not, why bother to thank Him?

- e. Why does Jesus want me to pray “us” and “our”? Won’t it do if I pray “me” and “my”?

3

On occasion, some say:

We are a very fortunate people. God has given us a wonderful land in which to live. We are so blessed!

How would you respond to comments like these?

4

Some ask, “If God provides all things, why are so many around the world in need?” How do you respond to that statement?
