

Texas miracle

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [November 17, 1999](#) issue

A reader from Texas sent us a copy of a letter issued by a church summer camp: "Dear Parent(s): As you were aware, yesterday we went to the Mary T. Meager Aquatic Center. Sometime after we left the facility, some evidence of deification was located in the pool. The water was tested and found to be safe. I wanted you to be aware of this occurrence." The letter is signed by the "AfterSchool Program Director."

Too bad that I've lost the envelope with the return address, since many of you might wish to find the Mary T. Meager Aquatic Center, to see this thing which has come to pass. The author of the letter sensed what Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum et fascinas*: when one encounters the Holy, the Sacred, the Divine, the Deity, one feels frightened and unsafe. Therefore the need for reassurance: "The water was . . . found to be safe."

What was the nature of this deification? Texas is home to many Christians who baptize by immersion, but those baptized are adults, not preschoolers. Nor do the baptizers by immersion believe that deification results. So rule out baptism as the catalyst.

Texas is also home to many non-Christians. Did this event take us into the sphere of one of the other world religions? In the *Encyclopedia of Religion* Jean Rudhardt offers 15 long columns on water and religion. Rudhardt omits the Greek deities, such as the water-god Neptune and Venus—yes, Venus. Let us fantasize that the deification in those Texas waters had the luster of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. As you recall, the goddess emerges from the water on a halfshell, with hands covering her private parts to keep the painting in the PG range—which could account for the director's note of reassurance.

Rudhardt's references to deification occurring in water are less glamorous: water may represent unsubstantiality and confusion. The Muskogee—now we're getting close to Texas—myths endowed water with a spontaneous role in the creation of the world. In some Hindu myths water is the receptacle of a divine egg. Most of all, "the

image of a vivifying water that favors the birth of a god" represents the "fecund and procreative." That certainly sounds as if it needs a PG rating. Water is also "associated with sexuality." In which case the AfterSchool people have to learn about avoidance: "Just say no" when evidences of deification occur.

After our encyclopedic research, we came back to the hunch that since Christians are in the majority in Texas, we are on safer ground, or water, looking for evidences from the Bible. The kind reader who sent us the note wondered: "A whirlpool? The waters parting? Someone walking on water?"

Though none of those represent "deification," some involve deity. What mere mortal can walk on water? But now an American Christian group is building a platform in the shallows of the Sea of Galilee. Its top will be slightly submerged under the surface. So tourists can have a photo op: they will stand on the platform while friends take a picture of them *apparently* walking on the water.

"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt" that some miracle-hungry Christians today would contribute to such an illusion, such a fraud? Maybe the AfterSchool leaders discovered that such a platform was being built in the summer camp pool and had it removed. Hence "the water was found to be safe."