ONE BOTTLE:
The 2000 Zenato *Amarone Classico*

by JOSHUA BAER

People who worship money laugh at people who worship people. People who worship people have their doubts about people who worship God. People who worship God think that people who worship people and people who worship money are in for a big surprise. This may or may not be the best of all possible worlds, but it's our world and it's the only world we've got.

If you worship money, you point to the facts. We have always been a competitive species and money is the most benign way to keep track of who's winning. Using money as a weapon can be cruel, but as weapons go, money is less lethal than nuclear warheads, guns, or sharp swords. Capitalism is cleaner than cannibalism.
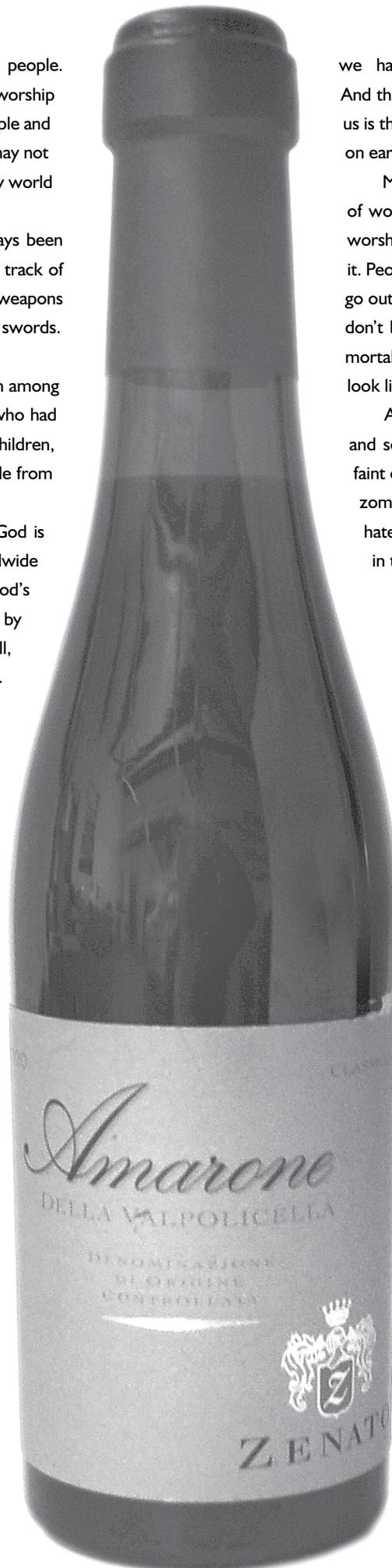
If you worship people, you point to the primary article of faith among secular humanists, that people are inherently good. It's the ones who had difficult childhoods who lie, cheat, steal, rape women, molest children, overthrow governments, torture first, and ask questions later. Aside from those misguided souls, people are the best.

If you worship God, you have a paradox on your hands. If God is the omnipotent Ur-dude who created the universe, then the worldwide disaster known in polite company as "the human condition" is God's doing. Some Christians take the scenic route around this paradox by saying, "Yes, God created the world, but He also gave us free will, which means human beings are at fault for the human condition. That's why we ask for God's help. So we can forgive each other."

Forgive me, but I've always thought of that rationalization as the ultimate line of crap. When a Christian talks to me about forgiveness, I refer the Christian in question to Luke 23:34. Jesus does *not* say to his killers, "Hey, look, I know you're under pressure from Rome, so I forgive you for nailing me to this cross and letting me die up here." No. Jesus does not waste prayers. He looks up, not down, and says, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

It's easy to hate. Somebody lies to you, cheats on you, steals from you, or makes fun of your God, the hate is there for you. Hate is like the bank account we all wish we had. The more you spend, the more there is in your account. And really, where would America be without hate? The Founding Fathers hated tyranny. Lincoln hated slavery. GI Joe hated Jerry and Tojo. Today, we have Osama and The Extremists. Or, if you think Osama and The Extremists had miserable childhoods, we have Condi, Rumsey, Dead-Eye Dick, and his fetch-dog Little George. How long could we survive without our enemies? Where would we put our hate?

As easy as it is to hate, it's that hard to forgive. You have to be perfect, or close to it, to forgive. Fortunately or unfortunately, none of us comes close. The only perfect thing about us is how imperfect we are. That's why it's a fool's errand for one human being to attempt to forgive another. Most of the time, when we say "I forgive you," what we're really doing is making a veiled accusation. If we want to forgive or be forgiven without engaging in a pretense,

we have to do what Jesus did. We have to ask God to forgive. And that's as it should be because, if you think about it, asking God to forgive us is the only way we can forgive God for creating the unholy mess we call life on earth.

Maybe the key to all this is to stop worshipping and start loving. Instead of worshipping God, just love Him (or Her, or It, if you prefer). Instead of worshipping people, just love them. Instead of worshipping money, just love it. People will tell you that the love of money is the root of all evil. I'm going to go out on a limb and disagree. The root of all evil is pretending to love. If you don't believe me, pretend to love anyone—female or male, gay or straight, mortal or immortal—for a month. By the end of the month, your world will look like hell.

A word of caution: Loving God, people, and money is hard work. Lovers and songwriters go on about how amazing love is, but love is not for the faint of heart. This is why you see so many people walking around acting like zombies. They tried love and love hurt their feelings. They tried hate and hate stole their feelings. Love is the greatest thing going. It's the only game in town. Just don't make the mistake of thinking that it's easy.

Which brings us to the 2000 Zenato Amarone.

In the ancient world, the Greeks and the Romans raisined their grapes, which is to say that they let their grapes ripen on straw palettes after the harvest. Grapes were harvested in October but crushed in February, yielding a wine that was simultaneously old and young. Today, in the Valpolicella region of northern Italy, the Zenato family uses a modern version of that ancient process to produce a timeless wine.

In the glass, the 2000 Zenato promises you everything. The color combines blood red with royal purple. The nose is as classic as it is romantic. On the palate, this Amarone is an ancient evening. By the middle of the second glass, your nostalgia for the middle of the first glass overwhelms you. Like all labors of love, this is a wine that keeps its promises. Drinking it makes you feel both lucky and good.

If you run into trouble learning to love money, people, and God, take some time off and learn to love wine. Loving wine will open your heart. Once your heart is open, the world becomes more lovable. Wine is the crossroads where God, people, and money converge. If you hang out at that crossroads, you will run into people who take wine too seriously. Ignore them. They're caught up in the maze of worship. The people you want to meet and get to know are the ones who came to the crossroads to learn how to love wine. Those people are your friends. Share your heart with them and they will share their hearts with you. ◆

One Bottle is dedicated to the appreciation of good wine and good times, one bottle at a time. The name *One Bottle*, and the contents of this column, are © 2006 by onebottle.com. If you need help finding a wine or building a cellar, write to Joshua Baer at jb@onebottle.com.