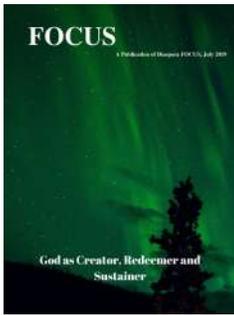


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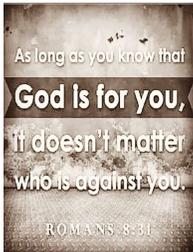
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**God as Creator, Sustainer  
and Redeemer**

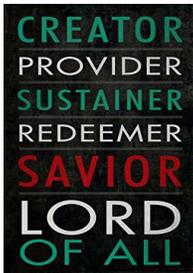


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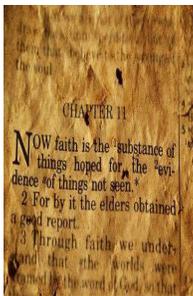
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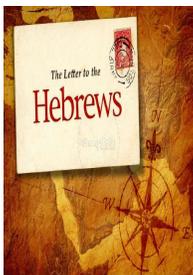
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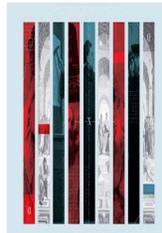
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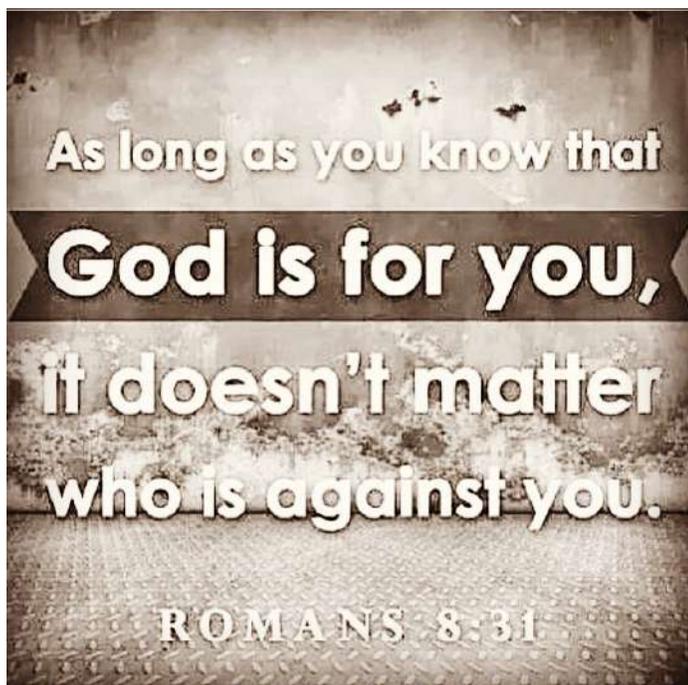


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## EDITORIAL

### God as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer

“Creator” is the first name that God reveals to us about Himself in the scripture. The first chapter and the first verse in the Bible (Gen.1.1) show us who God is. He is CREATOR. He is not just “a” creator or someone who simply “creates.” He is THE Creator, because “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). “*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son*” (Hebrews 1: 1-2). In the letter to the Hebrews, there is no attempt to prove God’s existence and the scripture assumes that we learn of God’s existence and some of His attributes from nature (Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:20). The writer of the Hebrews knew that God existed and that He spoke to man. According to Spurgeon “Deity is not to be explained, but to be adored; and the Sonship of Christ is to be accepted as a truth of revelation, to be apprehended by faith, though it cannot be comprehended by the understanding.”



*“Whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they”* (Hebrews 1: 1-4). The book begins a glorious section describing Jesus, first as the heir of all things. This is the idea that Jesus is preeminent. It is connected to Jesus’ standing as firstborn over all

creation (Colossians 1:15). He made the worlds, Jesus made more than the material world, He also made the very ages – history itself is the creation of the Son of God. Jesus is the brightness of the Father’s glory. (David Guzik commentary on Hebrews)

The book of Hebrews distinguishes between the glory of Christ and that of the highest creatures, the angels; in it the pre-eminence is justly given to the Lord Jesus Christ, the creator, and clearly demonstrated to belong to him. The Holy Spirit is the great minister of God and Christ in the application of this redemption. God has appointed him to be heir of all things. As God, he was equal to the Father; but, as God—man and Mediator, he was appointed by the Father to be the heir of all things, the sovereign Lord of all, the absolute disposer, director, and governor of all persons and of all things (Ps. 2:6, Ps. 2:7). All power in heaven and earth is given to him; all judgment is committed to him (Mt. 28:18; Jn. 5:22). He is the creator of the entire world and superior to all creatures even the angels (Mathew Henry’s Commentary on Hebrews).

The book of Colossians affirms that God is the Sustainer; it is God who sustains and upholds everything in existence. “All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16-17). If Jesus’ identity with the Creator is not enough to convince readers of Christ’s sufficiency, the apostle also explains that the Son of God is the great Sustainer. “In him all things hold together” (1:17): Christ, no other being or impersonal force, keeps the universe in order. Without Him, the cosmos would be in chaos, and if He has the power to hold everything together, how could anyone believe that he needs to turn anywhere else to find completion? C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “Let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His [Jesus] being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” The foolishness of humanity and false religion is seen in the willingness to accept Jesus as a good teacher, but nothing more. He is either the Lord, Creator, and Sustainer of all, or He is worthy of no more regard than we would give any other talented teacher.

In the book of Hebrews, the writer, in a serious exhortation that this great high priest, who was discovered to them, ought to be seriously considered by them and then adds many weighty counsels and cautions and confirms the privileges of those who believe, and the misery of those who continue in unbelief. The doctrine of the priestly office of Christ is so excellent in itself, and so essential a part of the Christian faith, that the author loves to dwell upon it. The Old Testament was never intended to be rested in, but to prepare for the institutions of the gospel, Jesus Christ as creator, sustainer and the redeemer of the whole world. Christ is to redeem persons from their transgressions committed against the law or

first testament, which makes every transgression a forfeiture of liberty, and makes men debtors, and slaves or prisoners. He is the sustainer of the faithful as written in Hebrews 7: 25 “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. “He is the sustainer of the faithful believers so that they may not be tempted. He intercedes for us with God and thus sustains us from falling into temptations since he himself was tempted several times. “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted”(Hebrews 2:18).

The writer of Hebrews raises and exalts the priesthood of Christ very high, that he might effectually recommend him and his gospel to the Hebrews. He shows to believers the honors and dignities of their state, and calls them to suitable duties to Lord, as his priesthood is superior to anything both in the Old Testament and New Testament. In Chapter 11, the ‘Hall of Faith’, the writer describes the nature of it, and reflects upon all who live in the exercise of it. The great examples we have in the Old Testament of those who lived by faith, and died and suffered extraordinary things by the strength of his grace. Finally summarizes, the advantages that we have in the gospel for the exercise of this grace above what those had who lived in the times of the Old Testament.



"Hebrews urges first-century readers to consider the prophets, laws, and temple worship only as a prelude to someone far greater (1:1–4). According to the letter's anonymous author, God's own Son (vs. 5–14) has suffered and "[tasted] death for everyone" (2:9) to provide a relationship with God that has replaced and made obsolete the law and covenant of Moses (3:1–6; 8:13). In layer after layer of detail, the letter describes how Jesus came to personify the Sabbath rest, high priest, sacrifice, and temple that foreshadowed Him. For these reasons, the thirteen chapters of Hebrews urge readers not to give in to fears, distraction, or discouragement (3:8). The message is clear: don't stop believing (10:19–11:40); don't stop loving (10:24–25; 13:1–3); don't stop following and relying on the Good and Great Shepherd (13:20) who gives us reason to believe that the best is yet to be ahead (9:28)."

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is our Redeemer who came to this world and shed His blood for us so that through faith alone in Him we can be saved. It is Jesus who has redeemed us for the Father. He has taken the full brunt of the wrath of God as our great substitute (Romans 3:21–26). Jesus paid the ultimate price to redeem us for the Father, and this price is not just physical death, but also for God's righteous wrath resulting from the infinite penalty for sins committed against an infinitely holy God. Apostle John tells us that we gain an understanding of true love when we see the redeeming authority of the Father. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The Father's redemptive authority is demonstrated by the fact that the plan of redemption, which is from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20). God's amazing redemptive authority displays the nature of His unlimited love: He did not spare His own Son from bearing the full wrath required for the sins we have committed (Romans 8:32; Isaiah 53:6). The very thought of redemption for humans so rich and deep is such that we could meditate upon it endlessly. As our great Redeemer, the Father displays His great authority in a plan that cannot be thwarted; it conquers evil, and exhibits faithfulness that gives confidence for eternal life with Him. The Father's gift of redemption through the Son is the most overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the Father's authority. The price was paid. The Son was raised. And it was never in question.

In addition to the letter to the Hebrews, there are several books in the Bible, which proclaim God as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer. Psalm 104 is a great doctrinal Psalm and the entire Psalm revolves around and supports the doctrine that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The key verse in my opinion is verse 24, which reads, "*O LORD, how manifold is thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.*" Similarly Job chapter 37 and the following chapters, it shows just how omnipotent our God is. There is nothing that He cannot do and no one who can prohibit what He wills to do. When you see the creation in all of its magnificence, you cannot deny the Creator, you can only suppress this truth (Rom 1:18), which is, sadly, what mankind attempts to do, but they are without excuse (Rom 1:20). Isaiah 42:5 "Thus says God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which comes out of it; he that gives breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein."

In Colossians 1:16-17 we find: "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." There is nothing that was not created. The universe could not have always existed because it had a finite starting point and it is expanding at an ever-

increasing speed. Everything that exists, whether visible or not, is being held together by the word of His power and all things hold together in Him so to deny God is deny the effect of the cause and that is the Creator. As Paul states “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom 1:19-20). There can be no excuse for denying God and Him as the Creator which is why only a fool would proclaim that there is no God (Psalm 14:10) for they cannot even prove what they claim, that He does not exist, and thus, they are without excuse.

In Psalm 19:1 we read: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Anyone that goes out on a starry night must stand amazed at the expanse or size of the universe. Since the universe cannot be measured by man, its Creator must be so much bigger. Indeed, “In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Psalm 102:25). Isaiah writes “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance” (Isaiah 40:12)? The answer of course is God is the creator and sustainer of this world.

Rom. 5:12 says: “*Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.*” Here was man—the crown of God’s creation, made in His image, and commissioned to rule over all that God had created, for God’s glory—in rebellion to God, enslaved to sin, and under the sentence of death, with his dominion ruined. Humanity is broken. Our domain is in shambles—all because of the sin and rebellion our first parents against the God who made them.

In Ephesians 2:4-6 we read: “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*” Bible speaks of another Adam—the last Adam—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He succeeds where the first Adam failed. He comes and does what the first Adam failed to do. He comes and rescues and renews our race from the ruin that resulted from the rebellion of the first Adam. The last Adam reclaims the earth and restores it. And He redeems us to rule over it. This is the work of New Creation, and it begins with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

To sum up: Jewish Christians were feeling the burden of Mosaic laws and the old covenant, and were at risk of giving up on Jesus Christ and relapsing turn back to their

old traditions and rituals. Therefore, the design of Hebrews was to persuade and press the believing Hebrews to a constant adherence to the Christian faith, and perseverance in it, notwithstanding all the sufferings they might meet with in so doing. In order to do this, the writer of the letter speaks much of the Excellency of the author of the gospel, the glorious Jesus, whose honor he advances, and whom he justly prefers before all others, showing him to be all in all and this in lofty strains of holy rhetoric. It must be acknowledged that there are many things in this epistle, which are hard to understand, but the sweetness we shall find therein will make abundant amends for all the pains we take to understand it. And indeed, if we compare all the epistles of the New Testament, we shall not find any of them more replenished with divine, heavenly matter than *Hebrews* (Mathew Henry’s Commentary on Hebrews). Finally, Hebrews 1: 10-14 sums up: “*You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.*”

**Lal Varghese, Esq., Dallas**  
**Member, FOCUS Editorial Board**

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(FOCUS online magazine published since April 2013)

# God is the Creator, so What?

Rev. Dr. Valson Thampu, Trivandrum

*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. (Deut. 6:5)*

A century and half ago, Soren Kierkegaard, one of the profoundest Christian philosophers known yet, cried out in anguish, “In the whole of Christendom there isn’t a single Christian.” It is a typical Kierkegaardian paradox. How can there be Christendom, unless there are Christians? But can there be Christians just because there is Christendom? Answering this latter question in the affirmative is like insisting that rock gardens abound in flowers just because they are ‘gardens’.

There is, admittedly, no dearth amongst us of creeds and their routine affirmations. The foremost poverty in Christendom, I believe, is that Christians do not think through articles of faith. We parrot that there is only one God; and there is no other god except the one and living God. But we never really examine what it means to believe in this profound spiritual truth.

At this stage, I need to resort to an aside. The July edition of FOCUS is shaped around the theme, “God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer”, with the *Letter to the Hebrews* as the matrix for reflection. I am sure that there will be several erudite and illuminating contributions by those more competent than me to address the theme in its specificity. To make a virtue of necessity, I avoid here the risk of aggravating repetitiveness and take my reflection, as below, along an illustrative, over-arching orbit. The burden of my song in this piece may be stated simply through an innocent question: *What does it mean to believe in the One Creator God?* Or, if God is indeed the Creator, what follows from it?

Let me state the essence of what I am going to argue below now itself so that the readers may decide if they should go on with my arguments or dodge it in good time. I argue below that if we are indeed monotheists –that is, believe that there is only one God- we are in a state of practical heresy. We violate in practice almost every implication of the belief that there is only one God.

To be clearer in our thinking, we need to make a distinction. Most people mistake monolatry for monotheism. Monolatry is the worship of a single God, but it is the preferential worship of one God out of many, deeming all the rest as inferior or as idols. Monotheism, in contrast, insists that there isn’t a menagerie of gods, from among whom you may choose a fancied one and hold the rest in aversion. A monotheist, for example, would not be disturbed –if he is indeed a monotheist- by the plenitude of religions and gods he sees in vogue in the world. He knows them to be fictions. He would not waste his time proving that his God is superior to all other gods.

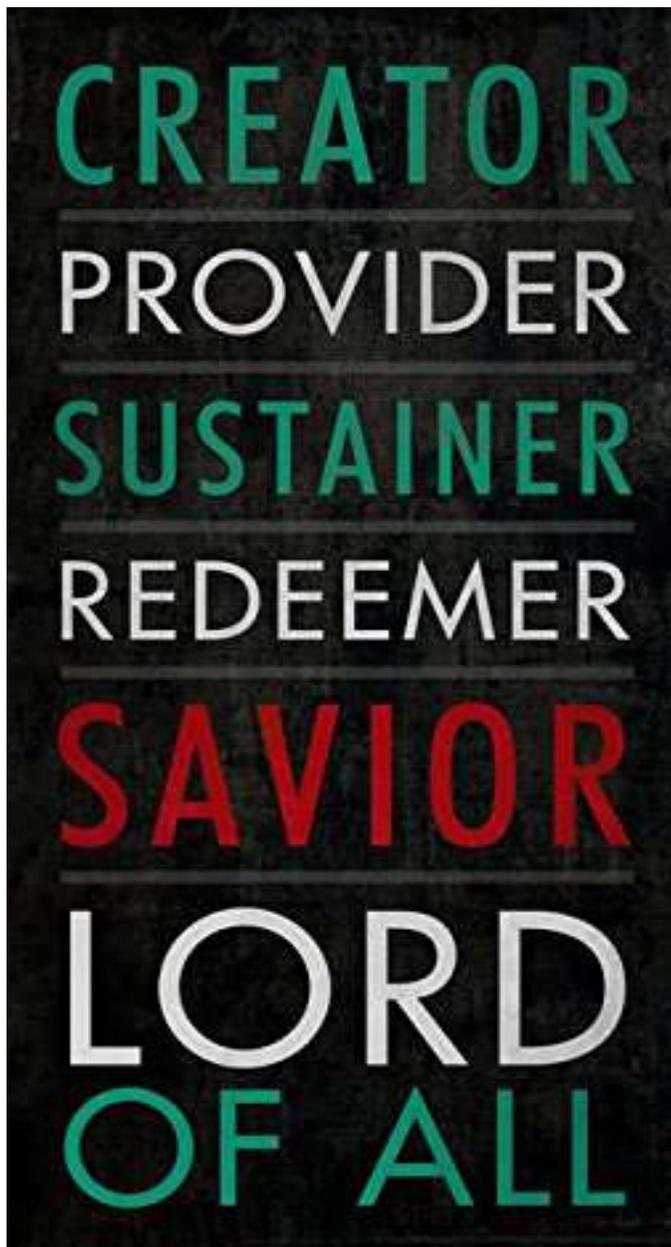
He certainly would not gloat over the prospect of all except birds of his own feather going to hell, there to be roasted everlastingly.

So, what does it mean to believe that there is only one true and living God as the book of Deuteronomy (6.5) insists?

Let’s begin at the beginning. Notice this very important thing: God does not create Abraham, but Adam; not a Jew, but a human being. So, the very first implication is that we are under obligation to see all human beings as God’s creation. Whether or not all are automatically children of God is a different matter. Going by St. John 1:11-12, the attainment of that identity is consequent, and contingent, on a free choice. But, of this there is no doubt. All are equally God’s creation. They are, moreover, created in the image and likeness of God. “Image and likeness” is an expression meant to indicate potential. The whole of humankind is created ‘in’ the image and likeness of God. The fullness of Godhead will be revealed, that is to say, only when humanity as a whole is constituted within the Being of God. A Christian, if he believes that God is the Creator, feels inwardly impelled to ‘reach out’ to the rest of creation. Jesus is the paragon of this outlook. He is the One anointed and sent. He is the living waters of outreach. He enunciated the radical vision of the Kingdom of God, not that Christians may use it as an identity label or an escutcheon of religio-cultural superiority, but that humanity as a whole may be re-constituted ‘in the image and likeness of God’.

Pause for a moment, beloved reader, and consider what we have done with this radical spiritual vision. We have made Kingdom of God a glorified ghetto, meant only for those who belong to church compounds and parochial pocket boroughs. Instead of reaching out to our fellow human beings in love and humility, Christendom set for itself the ungodly and triumphalist project of eradicating all other religions and ‘winning the globe for Christ’. It did not occur to us if Jesus was interested in this militaristic nonsense. When Jesus prescribed ‘self-denial’ as the basic discipline for discipleship, he did so keeping in mind the spirituality of universality as well. Why should we deny ourselves –individually and denominationally- if we are not to become one with the whole of God’s creation? The less I say about the mockery we have made of the idea of ‘self-denial’ –cf. self-denial covers- the better. The church squeezes money, as an improvement on Jerusalem Temple, even out of self-denial.

Let's be clear, therefore, of this one thing: we cannot be monotheists –that is to say, believe in the one Creator God- if we don't believe, without dilution and compromise, that humankind as a whole is God's creation and that we are 'creationally' linked to every particle of creation. That is why, in Jewish thinking, as also in much of enlightened Christian thinking, there is the clear awareness that 'there is no humanity without fellow humanity'. To the extent that I have an awareness of the Creator God, I cannot see people of other faiths as 'aliens and strangers', lost in darkness and error. I cannot think, except with a heart-break, of any of my fellow human being going to hell to suffer forever. If our "Heavenly Father" is at least as good as earthly fathers are, he cannot suffer the thought of even a single human being – his own handiwork- perishing so hopelessly. Yet, how lightly we think and talk about such things!



Writing this from within the Indian context, what I see rising like a dark and ominous cloud all around me is a mirror-image of the spectre we, as Christians, have raised over the centuries in the name of the one living God. If today Hindutva projects Lord Ram as the equivalent, at least politically, of a principal God, to create something analogous to the spurious monotheism of Christians have practised over centuries, it has to be acknowledged that we have schooled them in this diabolic theatre. I could see this coming at least from the '80s of the last century, when Hindutva strategists began to advocate the 'semiticisation' of Hinduism. They were saying even then that political unity is possible for Hindus only if there is a single god to whom all fragments of the so-called Hindu community are made to owe absolute allegiance. It is for this reason that I emphasized, at the outset, the distinction between monotheism and monolatry. The Ram-centred Hindu revivalism, like Trinity-centred Christian triumphalism, is not monotheistic but monolatric. Monolatry is, in all essentials, idolatry. It is the worship of a putative fragment in place of the Whole.

Secondly, the ethical core, as Raja Ram Mohan Roy saw clearly, is the insignia of monotheism. Polytheism is distinguished by the dominance of rites and rituals. Readers will recall the Sabarimala imbroglio and, hence, would need no further illustrations for it. The Sabarimala stand-off has no reference to any ethical principle or norm. It is all about the ultimacy of rituals and traditions. There is a spiritual logic to monotheism being ethics-centred, which needs to be understood clearly.

If there is only one God, and that God is the Creator of all, it follows by force of logic that all are akin to each other through him. Humanity is God's family, with God as the Father, as Jesus taught through the model prayer, which we mouth, but never seek the meaning of. The foremost reality in this vision of life is the fact of being related to one another. Ethics is all about relationship. If you are alien to me, between you and me what ethics? But if we are related in a deep sense, it matters how I treat you and what sort of a human being I reveal myself to be in my dealings with you. That is what ethics is about. In religion, whenever and wherever God-awareness declines, and rites and rituals gain ascendancy –as is clearly case with Christianity today- commitment to ethical conduct declines and ceases to matter. At the lowest nadir of this spiritual degradation stand Sodom and Gomorrah. I am aghast that most Christians remain indifferent to the manifestation of serious criminal and sexual aberrations in various churches globally, and stay obsessed with rites and rituals alone. Rites and rituals –the routine rigmarole of religion- are necessary and valuable; but can be so only if they are integrated with the ethical core of biblical spirituality. Is not the essence of all of Jesus' teaching, Count Leo Tolstoy would ask, entirely ethical? Where does Jesus put any emphasis on rites and rituals? On the

contrary, doesn't he ridicule, directly and indirectly, the priestly class of his days for their mechanical adherence to the nuts and bolts of religion, overlooking its soul?

Let me state this too in a nutshell. Those who reduce the biblical faith to a set of rites and rituals –what is sometimes referred to as 'Church-ianity', an infelicitous expression, I insist – become necessarily indifferent to its ethical dynamism and, when that happens to us, the message is clear: we are no longer monotheists but monolatras who say with our lips that we believe in God the Creator, but deny it, as the Psalmist says, with our hearts (cf. Hosea 6.6. Prov. 21.3). I am pretty sure heaven resounds with laughter, if at all our plight is within the range of the heavenly telescope. Look at our denominational animosities. Where open malice is absent, the smouldering mutual distrust and competition holds sway! And we say the church is the body of Jesus Christ; he being the head. A petty phenomenon this. Parkinson's is sheer felicity in comparison!

I was appreciated by the Orthodox Church when I expressed, in print, my appreciation for Parumala Thirumeni. I believe he was truly a saintly soul. Not long after the doors of this church were opened to me, I expressed my anguish in print at the unedifying public display of rancour and ill-will between the Orthodox and Jacobite factions, which is a byword of shame especially in Kerala. I became an anathema overnight. I am neither surprised nor aggrieved. I knew the outcome could be no different. I am almost sure that Parumala Thirumeni, if he were alive today, would have faced a similar predicament. No one shall convince me that the Orthodox zealots and the Jacobite hotheads worship the same God. My experiences with all other denominations are not generically different, though there are differences in degrees. I make a mention of this only to indicate that my reflections are rooted in lived realities, which are far too often swept under the carpet under the hypnotic spell of religiosity. We are so busy worshipping that we don't have time or energy to wonder which God, or gods, we are worshipping. But for his monotheistic vision of life and the world, Jesus could not have created any of his parables, especially the parable of the Good Samaritan.

There is yet another implication arising out of monotheistic spirituality. God created darkness and light! Contraries must, and shall forever, co-exist in the world that God created and 'found good'. If God is the Creator of everything –and this has been the theological dead-end of Christendom for long- he is also the creator of good and evil. Good and evil pre-existed the fall of man. The problem is not that good and evil have their origin in God's creative abundance; the problem is that our religious universe is too narrow to accommodate such challenging paradoxes. The Crucifixion of Jesus is not only an atonement but also an acceptance of the reality

of evil as relevant to the plan of God and the spiritual duty to deal with it in a godly way. We are used to thinking of evil as an invention of Satan, when the clear fact is that the satanic too is under the authority of God.

It is for this reason that those in authority in the church see red when there is the slightest disagreement with their views and ways. Since this is a perversion quite widespread in Christendom, I should be excused for saying a few more words about it in explanation. Evil, not good, is, paradoxically, the catalyst for tolerance. Tolerance has no relevance to a world free from evil. When the world is covered with a carpet of good, where is the need to tolerate anything? For the God that the church professes allegiance to, evil has no place in the religious scheme of things. Ironically, this gets those in authority obsessed with evil. As a result, everything, except what is commonplace and comfortable is evil for them. All forms of dissent certainly are. No wonder the history of the church is also the history of persecuting free thinkers as heretics, provoking someone like Bertrand Russell to say that there is faith only among heretics.

How are we to understand the ministry of Jesus Christ, if we assume that 'resistance' is evil? He was, as John Stott put very mildly, a quintessential controversialist. He resisted the aberrations of the Judaic religious establishment. How can reform be undertaken without the spirit of resistance? But, to the insecure authorities that lord over Christendom, every shade of difference of opinion is ungodly. It is downright heresy to question set practices, not to say anything about interrogating the ways of the ecclesial high and mighty. This is all right in a polytheistic vision of life, when the mores that appertain to one god can be contrary to the mores germane to another. But in a monotheistic spiritual worldview the spirituality of dissent is of a piece with the spirituality of obedience. As a matter of fact, there can be no authentic obedience to God without the spirit of resistance to the ways of man.

The shattering truth is this: blind obedience to man's authority is a greater hindrance to Christian unity than the spirituality of resistance based on obedience to God. We would have been religiously healthier if we were less obsequious, and more truthful, towards the Caiaphases and Pharaohs in our midst. Let me conclude on what, to me, is the foremost concern in the present theme. To illustrate this, I need to make a passing reference to the miracle of Jesus' stilling the storm. How can we face the world, in its many moods, challenges and terrors, if we don't believe that the Creator God is in control? To Peter and the disciples on the boat with Jesus, the raging sea was a setting of panic; but not to Jesus. Jesus knew that God was in control. The problem with monolatry and polytheism is that one does not know if one's god or

gods are in control in the given situation. There is always an element of doubt if the jurisdiction of one's god covers the issue in question. Not so, if one believes in the Creator God. Ultimate authority belongs to him, and him alone. Men may do their worst. But fear not, said Jesus. They have no authority over your soul. According to Victor Frankl many Jews entered the gas chamber chanting 'Shema Israel' (Hear, O Israel) together with Christian victims who went to their deaths with "Our Father" on their lips.

The mind-boggling paradox of the biblical faith is that it reveals God both as our 'Father in heaven' and as 'the Lord', deserving of our absolute reverence. To mere human intelligence, these categories are incompatible. But not, to one whose eyes are opened, as in the case of Bartimaeus. To know God as the Father in heaven is to feel a sense a deep kinship with all of God's children. To know him as the Lord is to be on the vigil against the infirmity of human nature, too apt to cast Gods either in one's own image or in the form of golden calves. Both are inherent rejections of monotheism. We cannot even begin to be Christians if we continue to be monolatric or unwittingly polytheistic, with different denominational gods keeping us in watertight compartments of neurotic inter-denominational distrust.

**Hear O Israel, (also ye Christians), the Lord you God is the only Lord.** Readers of the Letter to Hebrews will notice that the author – who it is, we don't know – does not emphasize the divinity of Jesus. I am inclined to believe that this could be on account of the theological difficulty that comes to the fore especially in the context of Judaism, which is uncompromisingly monotheistic. The doctrine of Trinity resulted, among other things, from an attempt to harmonize the Christian faith with the discipline of monotheism. Admittedly Trinity is the most difficult doctrine to preach on. It leaves most priests and preachers out of their depth.

The idea that three Persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – can be one is accepted as a matter of faith and never thought about or thought through. As a result, it has no bearing on our life, including faith life. It is there in the Creed, and the Creed is there in the Church; that's all. My own idea of the Trinity, which I offer with fear and trembling, is that it is analogous to water in its three dimensions – solid, liquid and gas. In Biblical history, the self-revelation of God is presented, clearly in three stages, with a sort of overlapping that is minimal and mystical rather than empirical and coeval. Water is one in all its three forms; though its impacts on life vary according to the forms it assumes in contexts. All material analogies are limited when they are applied to the mysteries of faith. That said, the idea I want to advance is this: abstract discussions on the nature of Trinity are silly and pointless. God is to be experienced in

the specificity of the given context. There are times when God seems like a block of ice and needs to be so. On other occasions, he may be the flowing, refreshing, living waters. He could also indwell us like steam in a steam engine. But if the engine only wants to be idle, then why steam?

I have difficulty in envisaging, unlike St. John, Jesus as the Creator, which Lal Varghese highlights in his solid editorial piece, which I have read prior to writing this piece. The Synoptic Gospels don't push this idea. It is not necessary that Jesus be the Creator for him to be the Redeemer. Yes, ice and water are both of the same stuff. But they don't need to serve the same function. But, but for water there will be neither ice nor steam. [Don't lose your way trying to make literal correlations between the three dimensions of the Trinity and the three forms of water. It doesn't matter whether God is ice; Jesus water; and the Holy Spirit, steam. These are differences in function. These differences disappear at the level of essence. In essence all three are one.]

I would want to emphasize the humanity of Jesus a great deal more than is fashionable in our midst. The more we deify Jesus – he doesn't need our special help, because he is God – the less we 'abide in' him. We are to accept and believe in him as the son of man. The possibilities and patterns revealed through him are practically relevant to our lives as well. Those who believe in him, Jesus said, would do not only what he has done, but greater things. I sense a tension between the over-deification of Jesus and the mandate to be one with him. God is, by definition, 'the mysterious other', categorically different from us. (Hence the 'ice' metaphor.) But Jesus is one of us. He calls us 'friends'. [He is like the water that flows in your veins and arteries.] He is the Good Shepherd who leads you to still waters. He is the Bread for our hunger; provided we are more than mere stomachs. But the problem is that, having consumed this 'Bread' of life, we are required to be the bread broken and distributed to the world at large. It is this vision that is lost in our neurotic eagerness to heighten the halo around Jesus, which he can well do without. Installing on a pedestal as an idol is hardly an improvement on crucifying him. Both amount to the same: de facto rejection.

Yet, Jesus is the Creator. He is the Creator of the New Creation. To me, it is extremely disappointing that in our eagerness to claim the First Creation for Jesus, we lose sight of who he actually is: the Creator of the new being. Recall Jesus' encounters with all who went to him, especially Nicodemus. Blown this way and that by theological fads and fashion, we have become too obsessed with the First Creation to be mindful of our duty to be part, as well as stewards, of the New Creation; as if Jesus didn't come at all. We could well be inferior clones of Jews in this respect.

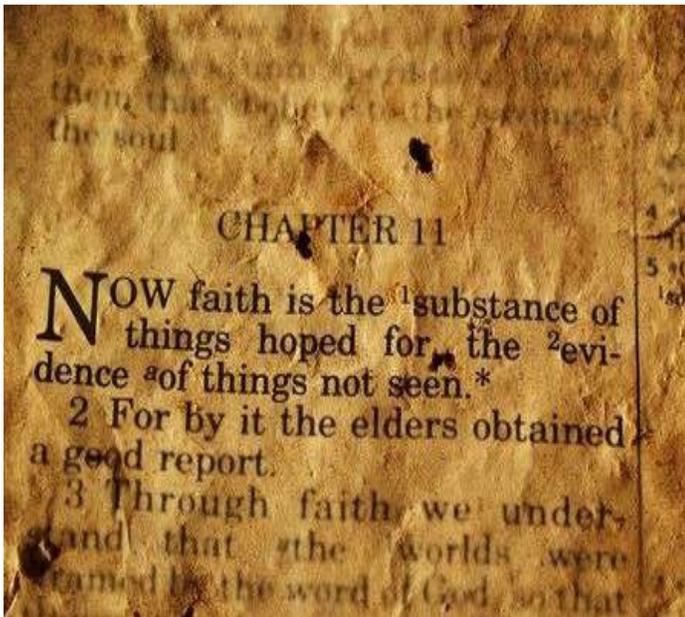
# Three Persons - Three Functions - One Purpose

Rev. Dr. Martin Alphonse, Portland

## Introduction:

In 1648 the Church of Scotland brought out the famous Westminster Catechism to teach Christian faith to the children in Sunday school. Catechism is a method of teaching by making the child ask a question and give the correct answer. It is learned by memorization. The Catechism contains 107 Questions and Answers. The first and most quoted Question is: "What is the chief end of man?"

And the answer is: "To glorify God and enjoy Him". The theme "God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer" is an obvious reference to the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Three Functions they perform. It is intriguing to note that the Three-in-One God performs three distinct functions for one single purpose. That purpose is for humans "To glorify God and enjoy Him".



The three-fold function of God aimed at one single purpose is meticulously woven into the fabric of the Scripture and are spread throughout its pages. It is described by various incidents, encounters and experiences of humans with God. One such passage is Jeremiah 18:1-10.

Jeremiah was a great moral prophet. As a young man, perhaps as a teenager, he was specially called of God to bring about spiritual renewal among the Israelites. He had been preaching to them for a few decades with little or no success. His repeated call to them for repentance from sin and for reconciliation with God continued to fall on blocked ears. He was deeply disappointed and felt dejected. It seemed as a situation beyond any hope. It was in that context of seeming hopelessness; the LORD directed him to go to a potter's house and taught him, by way of a visual

illustration, a few important lessons about His three-fold function as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

## 1. God as Creator.

Jeremiah 18:3 "*I saw him working at the wheel*". Just as the potter was busy working on the clay with his hands trying to create a pot, God is constantly busy working in the world, working on us with his hands. God says: v6 "*O house of Israel... Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand O house of Israel.*" Our God is working fulltime. In fact He is working overtime, round the clock, 24/7 and 365 days a year. He never stops working; never takes a break; never goes on vacation. God works with a purpose. What is God's purpose of our creation as well as our re-creation? It is a Comprehensive Purpose. It means involving all elements and aspects of life such as personal, professional, relational, marriage, family, church, community, national and global. Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1:15-16 that we have been created "by" him (Christ) and "for" him. What for? Revelation 4:11 (KJV) says: ". . . and for Thy pleasure they are, they were created." Created "For His pleasure" – what does that mean? That we are like little toys in God's hands, which bring great pleasure to Him like the children receive joy when they play with their toys? The only way by which we can please God is by fulfilling the purpose for which He has created us such as:

- a) Exalt the glory of God. By formal worship as spoken of in Psalm 19:1-2; Psalm 145:1-2 – *exalt . . . praise . . . extol . . . every day . . . forever and ever . . .*. And by daily living as Paul exhorts in 1 Corinthians 10:31 "*whether you eat or drink, do it all for the praise of God.*
- b) Exhibit the goodness of God. We read in Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25 that when God looked at the end of the day what he had created, "*God saw it was good*" And when he finished creating Man, v31: "*God saw it was very good*". Most people today exhibit their own wickedness daily more than exhibiting God's goodness. There is overwhelming evidence of the exhibition of human wickedness everywhere as reported by the media. Wickedness is relentlessly created, vigorously promoted, widely propagated and successfully marketed by the media. The post-Christian, post-modern culture of USA today has declared a culture war against cherished biblical values. Today's culture raises its fists against God. Even if it is not yet a completely "god-less" culture, it is increasingly becoming a "less-of -god" culture.
- c) Exercise or Execute the will of God. The "exercise" of God's will means doing everything God has commanded us to do, fulfilling every

responsibility that He has entrusted to us, and completing the task He has assigned to us. This was a great passion of the Lord Jesus Christ as we read in. John 4:34 *“My food . . . is to do the will of Him who sent and to finish His work.”* Also see John 12:27-28; John 17: 4.

## 2. God as Redeemer.

When we talk of the will of God, someone might ask: “What is the ultimate will of God for us?” The simple answer of course is: “Salvation – forgiveness of our sins – and entry into eternal life” as we read in John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:3 *“... God wants all humans to be saved and come to a saving knowledge of the truth.”* This redemptive function of God is seen vividly in Jeremiah 18:4 *“But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.”* The marred clay symbolizes fallen people of Israel . . . As the potter made the marred clay into another pot, God redeemed the marred house of Israel, reshaped it and re-made it into another marvelous pot as it seemed good to Him!



How does the clay get marred? The possibilities are: if the clay is in the hands of a clumsy potter, or of a rookie potter or a distracted potter. But the Potter here is our Heavenly Father Himself. V6 *“O house of Israel . . . Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand O house of Israel.”* Isaiah refers to God as our Father-Potter in Isaiah 64: 8 *“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand.”*

This being the case, how did we thwart God’s purposes while we are still in His hands. There are three possible factors that cause the damage:

- a) An unyielding spirit, especially by resisting God’s discipline. See Hebrews 12:6-11.
- b) An un-confessed sin as pointed out in Isaiah 64: 7-9.
- c) An un-surrendered self. Mark 8:34 *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”* Also see, Luke 9:23; Luke 15:27.

## 3. God as Sustainer.

The word ‘sustain’ means to give full support to something or to bear the weight of something. God asks in Jeremiah 18:6 *“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does? . . . Like clay in the hands of the potter, so are you in my hand O house of Israel,”* God sustains us by holding us in his hand as the potter holds the weight of the clay in his hands. It implies that if we are in His sustaining hand, we don’t have to continue to live with the painful memories of the past. We don’t have to continue to lament over the opportunities lost. We may have failed God many times and in many areas of our lives. Yet, God doesn’t call us a failure! We can start our life all over again, for God is more than willing to restore us and remake us and get the best yet out of us. He doesn’t easily give up on us. He eagerly picks us up again by His hands and enthusiastically works on us to get the best out of us!

God chose Abraham to be a man of great faith. Abraham failed God a few times by his lack of faith. But God would not give up on Abraham. He picked him up again, restored him and made him the Father of Nations! God sustained him.

God chose Jacob for a great purpose. Jacob failed God by his habitual acts of deception. But God would not give up on Jacob. He picked him up again, restored him and made him the Father of the 12 tribes of Israel! God sustained him.

God raised Moses in Egypt for a special purpose. Moses failed God by committing a murder presumptuously, and as a result had to waste his life for 40 years in the Sinai desert. But God would not give up on Moses. He picked him up again, restored him and made him the greatest prophet of Israel! God sustained him.

God anointed David to be the King of Israel. David failed God by his adultery and a pre-mediated murder. But God would not give up on David. He picked him up again, restored him and made him the greatest King of Israel! God sustained him.

Peter the fisherman denied the Lord 3 times. But Jesus would not give up on him. He picked him up again, restored him and made him the chief of the Apostles. God sustained him.

Paul the brilliant Pharisee persecuted the Christians. But Jesus would not give up on him. He picked him up again, restored him and made him the Architect and Builder of the Church. God sustained him.

The past 2000 years of church history bears painful witness to countless episodes of the churches’ repeated failures! Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ has not given up His church. Time and again, He picked the church up, restored it and remade it as seemed best to Him. Our God is the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. He is One-in-Three Persons. He performs three distinct Functions. He fulfills in One Single Purpose that we may glorify Him and enjoy Him.

# GOD – CREATOR . . . REDEEMER . . . SUSTAINER

Fr. Thomas Punnapadam

One of the most intriguing yet inspiring developments in the world of today is the profound integration of science and spirituality. Profound science is almost unconsciously affirming deep spiritual truths. The primary example probably is the acknowledgement of many modern scientists that the core of matter is not matter. The Higgs-Boson research team has come to the conclusion that the core of matter is dark energy, inaccessible to empirical science, often referred to as the God-particle. To most sincere researchers, it is now evident that the core of reality is beyond the ken of empirical science; honest scientists are the first to acknowledge a mysterious reality that is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of existence. The name given to it is of little or no significance. It is precisely the absolute mystery of this reality that has made all religions, schools of spirituality and spiritual seekers to try to grasp this reality or at least try to relate to it in some way by naming it.

God – The Creator

*In the beginning God created the universe* (Gen 1/1). This opening sentence of the Holy Bible reveals the most basic truth of existence. In fact the divine name Yahweh originally had a causative sense, as 'He who brings to be', therefore the creator. Melchizedek blesses Abraham *by God most high, who created heaven and earth* (Gen 14/19). Then Abraham took as his witness, *God most high, who created heaven and earth* (Gen 14/22).

The two complementary accounts of creation with which the Bible opens are presented as a preface to the Covenant with Noah, Abraham and Moses. From this perspective creation is the first act of the history of salvation, the dramatic interplay of God's various manifestations of goodness and man's infidelity. Therefore, the accounts of creation are not to be understood literally nor perceived as disproved by modern scientific explanations of the origins of the Universe. The immutable core truth of God as creator is the greatness of God who gives us glimpses of Himself through creation. *For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their creator* (Wis13/5).

So, in creation the Old Testament sees above all the starting point for the plan of God and the history of salvation. Creation as such is the first of the marvelous divine deeds, which continue throughout human history. So, creative power of God and mastery of history are

correlative. Hence creation is not a once-and-for all action, but a continuous act of the Supreme Being. So God as creator and sustainer are inseparable dimensions of the divine human relationship.

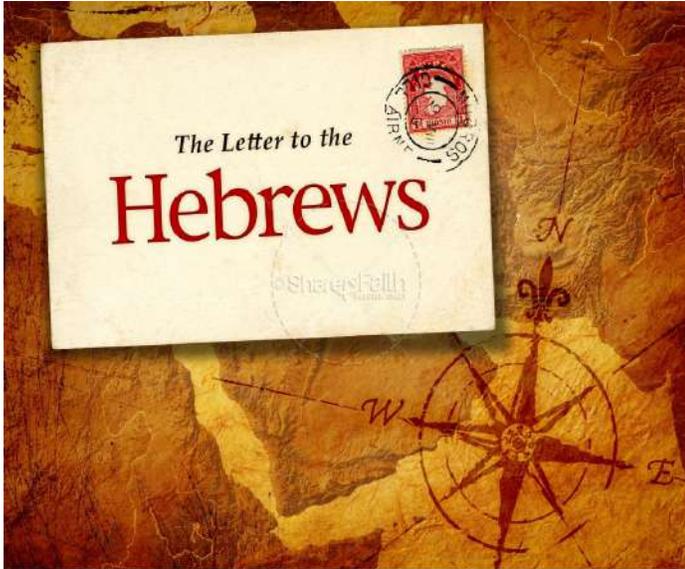
GOD - The Sustainer

So the Biblical doctrine of creation is a profoundly religious sentiment that calls forth a spiritual reaction. Through creation man discovers the creator (Wis 13/5) and is led to a deep-seated feeling of wonder and gratitude. The contemplation of beauty in creation leads the Psalmist to enthusiastic praise: *Bless the Lord my soul....How many are your works, O Lord. The earth is full of your riches* (Ps 104/ 1, 24; see also Ps 19/1-7; Ps 89/6-15). Man is overwhelmed by the divine majesty revealed in the universe. It is a futile effort to flee the divine presence; for at every moment man is in the creator's hands: *O where can I go from your Spirit, or where can I flee from your presence face?* (Ps 139/7).

GOD – The Redeemer

The New Testament is more aware of the ugly effects introduced into the perfection of creation as a consequence of sin. So the present world is destined to dissolve and disappear: *The form of this world is passing away* (I Cor 7/31). But in Christ a new creation has already begun as the oracles of the prophets had foretold. This new creation is primarily in man who is renewed interiorly in baptism according to the image of his creator (Col 3/10) who becomes in Christ *a new creation* (Gal 6/15bc). However this new creation extends to the whole universe because the plan of God is to bring all things under Christ as the one head. God has made known the mystery of his will as *a plan for the fullness of time to come, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth* (Edh 1/10). Thus in describing Christ's relation to the world, there is a progression from his action in the original creation to his action in the final recreation of his creatures. There is a striking parallel between the first and final creation. Creation and redemption thus merge. However it must not be forgotten that the new creation has definitely begun but not reached its completion. The surrounding world is now subjected to frustration yet lives in the hope that *the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God* (Rom 8/21). Human beings as part of creation, *who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies. In this hope we are saved* (Rom 8/23, 24a).

Redemption is often narrowly perceived as recovering or buying back human dignity forfeited by original and individual sin. The deeper reality is that redemption is even more wondrous than creation itself. Redemption is the potential of stepping beyond the limits of visible human nature, which had been there always as a possibility and an expectation in man.



#### Names for God:

Probably this is our greatest weakness to give the supreme reality of God a precise name and in a sense presume to comprehend or grasp this mystery. In fact the great Indian mystic Sankaracharya prayed: O God forgive us our three greatest sins: “You are beyond all forms and we have made idols of you; you are everywhere we have confined you to temples; you are beyond all names and yet we have given you numerous names”. Nevertheless giving names to God is a manifestation of innate human need to relate to God and hence cannot be laughed away. The Bible attributes numerous names for God like Shepherd, Rock, shield, fortress, particularly in the psalms.

It is most noteworthy that Jesus in his prayer to the Father at the Last Supper says; *I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them* (Jn 17/26). In the Bible name is far more than a mere word, a negligible label or a mere appellation. The name of God which is first revealed to Moses at the burning bush meant his immanence, his presence in the midst of the people, his entering into communion with the people and allowing himself to be invoked. *The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness* (Ex 34/6).

In the name God is entirely present, while at the same time surpassing everything human, everything visible and

impermanent in this world. It is said of the temple in Jerusalem that God made his name dwell there (Dt 12/11). Though God is infinite and embraces the whole world, he is fully present in the temple. So God’s name is God himself in so far as he gives himself to us. The revelation of a name is a mode of God’s presence among people, in creation. So, simply invoking a name of God is the simplest means to relate God. However among the numerous names of God, there is a name given by God himself to his incarnate son. So the most efficacious way to call on God by invoking the name of Jesus, the only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4/12). At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Phil 2/10).

By denying the ineffable reality of God or refusing to acknowledge the absolute mystery, we are denying and destroying ourselves. The being of God is not affected in anyway. Human relationship with God can waver or undulate or be totally denied, but not God’s relationship with human beings or the whole of creation. As St. Augustine says in his *Confessions*: “We can hide you from ourselves; but not ourselves from you”.

A profound distinction made among thinking people today is between religion and spirituality. The two are not synonymous nor are they mutually exclusive. All authentically spiritual people are not necessarily official members of an organised religion. All who professedly belong to a religion are not always spiritual. As it is often observed there are far more spiritual people in the world than there are religious people. Spirituality is a far a more profound need of human beings than organised religion. It would not be an exaggeration to aver that every human being is a uniquely spiritual being; has a unique relationship with the mystery of God and lives out, expresses and deepens this relationship through various means.

A couple of years ago I received a donation from a total stranger who had received my address from someone. He wrote” I know you are a very religious person; while I am not; However I believe in sharing the little I have with someone more in need. Please pass on this gift to whomever you think needs it”. Is not this authentic spirituality? An acknowledgement of a most compassionate being who created everyone in this world, has the same solicitude for every individual and wants all human beings to live in peace and harmony?

Genuine spirituality does not consist in dogmatic statements of some intellectual truths and condemnation of those who do not agree. No one can claim to possess the complete and infallible truth of the reality of God. We are all in the same boat and we are all seekers. In our understanding of and relationship to God, “we are all partially in the right, fully in the wrong” as the well-known

Indian legend of the six blind men of ancient Bharath who describe their own experience of the elephant.

Deep down in one's heart, everyone needs to live in the awareness that God is paradoxically the most transcendental reality and the most immanent reality. St. Augustine acknowledged: "You are more intimate to me than I am to myself". Mystics agree that all statements about God can also be denied. Nevertheless, the need to be reconciled ever more profoundly with this silent, mysterious, seemingly absent and omnipresent being is the real, primary focus of world history.

There is a basic instinct for survival in every form of life evident in the whole of creation. The longing for eternal life is innate in every human being. Eternal life is not, as many people assume, life after death, in contrast to this earthly life which will surely come to an end. That which is eternal has no beginning just it has no end. So eternal life is that which already exists and can be also be lived in this world. It is being aware of the indestructible, invisible, immutable, ever present life deep within each one of us. This is to really live and not just exist. In fact the early Christians called themselves *the living*. They had found what all were seeking, life in its fullness, indestructible life, the only source of which is the eternal, ever living God.

Eternal life is a relational event. Man does not acquire it but becomes truly alive through recognition of this eternal being. It is to be noted that in Biblical terminology, recognition is not intellectual grasping; recognition creates communion; it is intimate union with the one who is recognised, just as Adam knew his wife Eve (Gen 4/1). In his high-priestly prayer during the last Supper, Jesus makes this clear: *this is eternal life, to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent* (Jn 17/3).

These eternal and fundamental truths are indeed incomprehensible to the rational mind. They need to be prayed over with the heart so that their transforming power can be experienced in the deepest core of one's being. The following lines from different hymns used in the official prayer book of the Roman Catholic Church are indeed a source of great inspiration:

*O God creation's secret force,  
Yourself unmoved all motion's source,  
Who from morn till evening ray  
Through all its changes guide the day...*

*O God creator of us all,  
From whom we come, to whom we go.*

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art;  
Thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
Waking or sleeping, the presence my light.*

## (A Poetic Reflection on the Last Days of Jesus on Earth)

"Jesus fell on the ground and prayed..." (Mark.14: 35)  
Rev. Dr. M. J. Joseph, Kottayam



**Going a little farther, Jesus fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."**

**Mark 14:35-36**

**Lord,**  
Jesus, you are strong?  
Why did you fall on the ground?  
Yet your legs were not broken.  
There were tears in your eyes  
Yet you wiped out other's tears.  
You were stripped on the cross  
But you were covered by an eclipse.  
You committed your soul to the Divine care  
The heavenly Father clothed your soul with a celestial body.

**Lord,**  
The weak will fall and fail you by word and deed  
But I know you are always ready to raise them up.  
You shed tears at the tomb of your friend, Lazarus  
But there was none to wipe out your tears on the *Via Dolorosa*, except *Simon of Cyrene*.  
You were crucified on the cross half-naked  
But you have given a lesson to men of repute like Gandhi and the *Pujaris (priests)* in our temples.  
You fell on a dusty ground at Gethsemane  
But your clothes were not spoiled by dust.

**Lord,**  
There is so much mystery in your suffering and death  
*I praise your sacrifice during the Lenten season with a crowd.*  
*But I hesitate to take up the cross after the Holy Week*  
*I lament on my knees over your fall during the Lenten season.*  
*But I am not prepared to fall for your cause in the pilgrimage of life.*  
*I see your glittering face on the cross*  
*But I don't train myself to behold your face daily.*  
**FORGIVE ME, LORD!**

# Tolstoy's 'The Gospel in Brief'

David Brand, London

Have you ever woken up one morning with the following six challenging questions?

1. Who am I?
2. What am I?
3. Where am I?
4. Why am I here?
5. Where have I come from?
6. Where will I be going?

I can only assume that Tolstoy a wealthy Russian aristocrat wrestled with similar questions and looked for answers in the Gospels. Being highly intelligent and the famous author of "War and Peace, Anna Karenina and other popular books he decided to translate the early Greek texts of the Gospels into Russian after studying the Latin Vulgate, English, German and French translations. Jesus said, "Seek and you will find", "Ask and you will receive", Knock on the door and it will be opened to you". He did precisely as advised and this book is the result, but it is not for the faint hearted, as it challenges both intellectually and spiritually, however it is essential reading for those of you with enquiring minds and in my case has become a close companion to my Bible.

If your preference is for a cosy Garden of Eden religious relationship this book is not for you, should you venture out by reading Tolstoy and you will be matured spiritually and mentally with a stronger faith and understanding of Jesus Christ and his mission to our space and time. The Foreword and Preface should be read attentively as it prepares you for the main content. For example Tolstoy writes: "The problem that stands before historians to solve is the following: eighteen hundred years ago, some sort of a poor person showed up and said something. He was cut down and hung up and everyone forgot about him, just as millions of such instances have been forgotten and for two hundred years the world did not hear a thing about him. But then it turns out, somebody remembered him and what he had said and so he told it to another person and then to a third. And so on and so on, to the point that billions of people, smart and stupid, learned and illiterate, cling to the thought that this man, and only this man, was God. How can we explain these amazing phenomena? The task is not to prove that Jesus was not a God and that therefore his teachings were not divine, any more than it is to prove that he was a Catholic. The task must be to understand the essence of his teaching; this teaching became so high and precious for people that they recognised the messenger of it as a God. I have tried to do this very thing for myself at least. I have done it and now I am offering it to my brothers".

Tolstoy classifies Christians into three categories:

1. *"The enormous majority of the educated raised in the church faith, which have not strayed from that faith despite the its incongruity with good common sense and conscience for such a man, love and respect for the spirit of the Christian teaching must remain."*
2. *"A significant minority of educated people who cling to church faith, confessing it not for any external purpose but for inner peace."*
3. *"People who externally claim church faith and value it not because they believe in its truth but because of external considerations, since they consider its ritual and teaching appropriate to their lifestyle."*

He addresses all three groups separately with a convincing proposition, which will be revealed to those that read this superb and essential book. We next move on to the Introduction headed **KNOWLEDGE OF LIFE** with the statement, "Jesus Christ's proclamation replaced faith in an external God with a knowledge of life." It is only two pages long but this is the beginning of the answers to those six questions that I raised in the beginning.

Chapters one to twelve are devoted to the twelve statements made in the Lord's Prayer and required 50 pages of text to explain fully. I cannot begin to describe the exquisite language used, also the clarity and the mind broadening information imparted makes this superb read and is ideal for explaining to children and adults alike the meaning behind those twelve short but profound phrases. Praying the Lord's Prayer has now become a totally new and meaningful experience for me and I hope it will be the same for all those that read this book.

The final chapter is devoted to **The First Epistle of John the Evangelist**, in my humble opinion he was the only disciple to fully grasp who Jesus was and what he was required to achieve. He was the closest man to him and along with Mary Magdalene, supported him to the very end when others had failed him. May I leave the last word to Tolstoy as by the time you reach this point you will have all the information you need to answer those six questions. "Only he who recognizes his spirit as the son of the father, only he may unite with the father. And therefore, hold tight to this knowledge that in spirit you are the Son of God the Father. Having this surety, you will receive eternal life.

**Editor's Note:** Mr. David Brand is an elder and a Lay Reader of the All Saints' Church of England parish, Harrow Weald, where the Sinai MTC conducts worship services. He is a retired electronic engineer with a very deep interest in spirituality.

# New Humanity: God's Gift for Humankind

Revd Dr. M.J. Joseph, Kottayam

## Christ Event: A Divine Call to Celebrate New Humanity

The death and resurrection of Christ speaks of a new mode of existence for all creation. "The Risen Lord's Gospel is for the whole creation". As the theme chosen for the WCC Assembly 2021 puts it, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." The New humanity in Christ is not Christians' gift not only to people of other faiths, but also to all humankind and the whole creation. The power of love rooted in the High Priesthood of Christ speaks of the promise of inclusion. (See the deliberations of the World Parliament of Religions in Toronto – 2018). It is God's gift to all reflecting God's glory (Heb.1:1-4). It is imparted to us as **Peace on Earth** in the person of Jesus Christ. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth his peace for men on whom his favour rests" (Lk. 2: 14). This is the vision of the Kingdom of God in our midst.



Living in the realm of New Humanity in Christ is a call to put off the old man and to put on the new man. In the Pauline affirmation we find a call to transformative discipleship for all with the basic convergence of theology and ethics (cf. Heb.ch. 11&12). It is a divine imperative on us "not to get conformed to the world but to get transformed by the renewal of mind" (Rom.12: 3). St. Paul writes, "Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus be transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect." "God, in your grace transform the world", as the message of the 9<sup>th</sup> assembly of the WCC puts it; it is a mission mandate for all. Turning to God is a divine possibility inherent in all creation and it is a religious pilgrimage to justice and truth.

The last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the present, there are signs of people returning to the spirituality of religion and religious experience in different parts of the world. A true turning to God would involve as Mathai Zachariah puts it, "a willingness to face and grasp the

realities of suffering, conflicts, despair, and an ability to respond to them in faith and hope, knowing that God calls for our presence in the midst of them"(see Heb.11:24-27). This message of the gospel is addressed to all creation regardless of religious or secular affiliation. The theology of the Cross-and of the resurrection of Christ should help us to speak of a paradigm shift in the mission pursuits of the Church. The inherent necessity is to celebrate our common humanity with sincerity and truth for the glory of One Creator God. And Jesus Christ is to be understood as the mediator between God and man (1Tim.2: 5). In the opening verses of Hebrews, it is well stated that the whole creation owes its existence in Christ, the Word incarnate.

## The Outside and The Inside experience of Christ

What does it mean to live **outside** the realm of new humanity in Christ? One has to remember that God has his own way of dealing with people of all nations according to the divine plan revealed in the Economy of Salvation (*Oikonomia*). To live in conformity to the world means several things for the mortal man "sold under sin and death".

### i) Uncritical *acceptance of the immediate*

In I Thess. 5: 21-22, St. Paul asks us "to test everything and to hold fast to what is good." One should not be carried away by the philosophy of the market culture which is primarily concerned with "**having**" not "**being**". "*What you are* more important than *what you have*" in God's sight. We need to hold the flag of diversity and simplicity in life. Temptations are meant to be resisted with firm faith as Jesus did. The Bible speaks of 7 deadly sins in a classic way. They are **pride** (being pleased and satisfied with oneself); **anger** (the feeling that makes people to quarrel or fight); **envy** (feeling of resentment at another's better fortune); **impurity** (state of being impure); **gluttony** (habit of eating too much); **slothfulness** (laziness (incidentally, *Sloth is a South American mammal which lives in the branches of a tree and moves very slowly*) and **avarice** (greed for money and possessions). The other deadly sins of today could be listed as false formality, fibbing, procrastination, plagiarizing, keeping with the Joneses, double standards, bad manners, giving secretly and broadcasting publically! One has to examine himself or herself whether he or she lives "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*). The calling is to live "according to the Spirit" (*kata pneuma*). Dying and rising with Christ (Rom.6.1-4) is always a divine call to "aspire to the realm above" (Col.3.1). This is a universal call. In Heb.12:1, the faithful is exhorted to lead a life worthy of God's calling in

Christ who is called the perfecter of faith. The divine imperative is a call to go outside the camp, bearing abuse for Christ (Heb.13:13).

## ii) *In search of noble spiritual values*



The seven words of Jesus on the cross and his death reveal the depth of God's love for redemption and reconciliation. It also reminds us not to forget hospitality to all creatures on earth "as the compassion of the Lord is inclusive" (Sib.18: 13; Psalm. 145: 9). It is a fact that we are carried away by half-baked truths. One may hear a corrective voice in the words of Arundati Roy when she said, "There's really no such thing as the voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard." The search of the Risen Lord after his disciples' desertion speaks volumes to us. This is to make the Church aware that she exists in the midst of the world where brokenness and lack of harmony find their expressions not only in conflicts, but also in the marginalization and oppression which people may endure due to economic, racial, political, cultural and religious reasons. (See Heb. 11: 24-25). In entering into dialogue with people on the basis of *agape* (divine love) revealed on the cross, vindicated by God, the Father, the ladder of the Kingdom gets established in human hearts. This will lead us to ask several searching questions which may be uncomfortable to many. Dalai Lama is right when he said that "mutual respect is the foundation of genuine harmony." In the New Humanity of Christ, one may notice the convergence of the Hindu concept of *Sarvadharmasama Bhavana*, India's cultural slogan-*Loka Samastha Sujkino Bhavanthu*, the household concept of *Vasudaivakudumbakam*, and the ethical moral principle of

*Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* and above all the Seers' vision of *Satyam, Sivam, and Sundaram*.

## iii) *Moving with the currents of the times*

Conformity to the signs of the times is a sign of spiritual decay. The illegitimate trial of Jesus will testify to it. Remember. It is the dead fish which moves with the flow of water. The poverty of the rich and of the religious elites is a fact of the post- modern society. The world has set its own standards for living. To eat, drink and be merry" is the philosophy of several people. Food, music and movie have robbed the best of their life. . . . The temptation of Eve as recorded in Gen.3: 6 appears to people of all nations and races in different shapes and shades. The three temptations of Jesus in Lk. 4 and Matthew 4 are universal in their nature. The call of Christian discipleship is decisive: "Do not try to match your life with all the fashions of the world." The gospel of prosperity and the miracle crusades may appeal to Christians and others in umpteen ways. . . . In several quarters there is a conscious attempt to dilute the meaning of the Cross in ordinary life. There is no short cut to the Kingdom of God except through the way of the Cross. The whole humankind is around the Manger and the Cross; the observance of the Good Friday should not be a Christian event only. Its meaning is for all. **The passion of Christ** carries universal truth for all humankind. . . . The liturgical prayers during the Lent season always remind the faithful to seek divine forgiveness. God of all mercy is always at the door step of every human heart.

## iv) *Living with the renewal of mind for divine solidarity on earth*

One has to get trained in godliness (1Tim4:4-8). The garb of religion has to give its way to its spirituality. "Spirituality is the outbreak of truth" (Swami Agnivesh). Spirituality of religion is the need of the hour in a plural world. We need less of religiosity and more of spirituality. The trial of Jesus illustrates it. It is love that unites us with God, with our neighbors and with nature. "Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward in the same direction" (De Saint Exupery). The divine plan "to sum up all things in Christ" (Eph.1: 10) is the ultimate goal of history. In the Economy of salvation, plurality is celebrated as integral to reality. Let us not interfere with God's plan and to boast ourselves as holier than Jesus! Let us play our role as humble witnesses to the reality of the Kingdom in our midst. *Mission in Christ's way is not a slogan or a project but a way of life for all*. The routes people follow may be different. But there is a point of convergence at the Cross of Christ as well as at the Empty Tomb. What matters in God's sight is whether there is a shining space everywhere rooted in love, justice and peace. Let it be on a candle stand or lamp stand. Let us learn to *look above* the candle stand and the lamp and see the glowing flame of light.

# 'The Letter to the Hebrews for Today'

Lal Varghese, Esq., Dallas

Karl Barth, one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century and opponent of theological liberalism and fascism, when asked in 1962 on his visit to America how he would summarize the essence of the millions of words he had published, he replied: "Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so". "The gospel is not a truth among other truths. Rather, it sets a question mark against all truths." Karl Barth not only said this, he spent his life setting question marks, in the name of Christ, against all manner of "truths." In the process, he did nothing less than alters the course of modern theology. The book of Hebrews did the same thing depicting God as creator, sustainer and redeemer of the whole mankind, which is the essence of the truth and sets a question mark against all truths. He spoke dialectically, in paradox, to shock readers into seeing the radical nature of the gospel: "Faith is awe in the presence of the divine incognito; it is the love of God that is aware of the qualitative difference between God and man and God and the world." "Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is the way" (Christianity Today, Issue 65: Ten Influential Christians of the 20th Century).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews remains shrouded in mystery including for learned Origen, the church historian who has confessed his ignorance. Barnabas, Apollos, Silas, Philip, or Aquila and Priscilla and even Clement of Rome, who has written letters to Roman Church, have been considered as possible authors of Hebrews. The Apostle Paul has also been suggested as the author by some scholars. But one thing is to be admitted, Hebrews makes important theological contributions to the biblical canon. Since the late first century it has been considered as a sacred scripture and Christians for the past 2,000 years upheld the divine nature of the scripture of Hebrews. Chapter 11: 1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen", and the chapter is known as the "Hall of Faith", even for the believers of today.

Clement, who is considered as the early Church father quoted from the Book of Hebrews in AD 95. However, the absence of any evidence showing the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system that occurred with Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 points that the book was written around A.D. 65 – 67. The late Dr. Walter Martin, founder of the Christian Research Institute and writer of the best-selling book '*Kingdom of the Cults*', pointed out that the Book of Hebrews was written by a Hebrew to other Hebrews telling the Hebrews to stop acting like Hebrews. In truth, many of the early Jewish believers were slipping back into the rites and rituals of

Judaism in order to escape the mounting persecution and to avoid interactions with Gentile Christians. The book was written, and primarily addressed, to Jewish Christians who had very deep adherence to Old Covenant to explain to them how Christ now superseded all mosaic regulations, which they will have been accustomed to.

This letter, then, is an exhortation for those persecuted believers to continue in the grace of Jesus Christ. We live in a world, where faithful believers are persecuted for their belief in the living God and the book of Hebrew exhorts the believers of today to continue in the faith and grace of Lord Jesus Christ. Even among the so called Christians, the number of 'religious nones' is increasing, which results in several church buildings are forced to close or to sell to non-believers and for commercial developments.

God is not merely the sole *creator*, but also the sole *sustainer* of what he has created. The creator is also the redeemer of what He has created and sustained. When we consider the biblical narrative as a whole, we see that the Creator is also the Redeemer. God's work does not stop at Genesis. God who created the world has redeemed it; so that the creation, despite its present bondage to sin and decay, must ultimately become good. The hope is not of God rebuilding creation from scratch, or helping us escape into some kind of disembodied, immaterial state. Our final hope is for the transfiguring fulfillment of this present creation into all that it was originally destined to be. The Christian doctrine of Creation shows that humanity has the capacity for an intimate relationship with God, who is sustaining the creation. Bearing God's image is about *relationship* with God more than any specific human attribute or pattern of behavior. This relationship involves sharing in the creative, sustaining dominion of God, and thus acting as the visible representatives of his benevolent care for creation. In the biblical doctrine of Creation, we thus find a common theme. He is a personal God who wants relationships with human beings. To be human is to receive the gift of relationship, to love and be loved by the God who created us you. This is the simple message of Hebrews to Christians of today; being the creation of God, human beings need to be in close relationship with the creator, who can sustain us in any trials and tribulations.

Hebrews also lays out the priestly ministry of Christ in the life of the believers of today. It asserts that Jesus is both the divine Son of God and completely human. His priestly role clears the way for human beings to approach the Father in heaven through prayer (Hebrews 4:14-16). The

priesthood of Jesus is superior to the Old Testament priesthood of Aaron, because only through Jesus we receive eternal salvation (5:1–9). Furthermore, Jesus became the permanent and perfect High Priest, going beyond all other priests by offering Himself as a sinless sacrifice on behalf of the sins of human beings (7:24–26; 9:28).

Hebrews further makes clear that Jesus Christ exceeds all other people, pursuits, objects, or hopes to which human beings offer allegiance. Hebrews pictures Jesus as better than the angels, as bringing better lives to humanity through salvation, as offering a better hope than the Mosaic Law could promise, as a better sacrifice for our sins than a bull or a goat, and as providing a better inheritance in heaven for those who place their faith in Him (Hebrews 1:4; 6:9; 7:19; 9:23; 10:34). Jesus is indeed superior to all others, far more than material accomplishments of the present day market culture in which we live.



The Book of Hebrews addresses three separate groups: believers in Christ, unbelievers who had knowledge of and an intellectual acceptance of the facts of Christ, and

unbelievers who were attracted to Christ, but who rejected Him ultimately. We see these three groups in the modern society in which we live. The writer of Hebrews continually mentions the superiority of Christ in both His personage and in His ministering work. In the writings of the Old Testament, we understand the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism symbolically pointed to the coming of Messiah. Hebrews tells us that Christ Jesus is better than anything mere religion has to offer. It is the superiority of our Lord Jesus, and then, that remains the theme of this eloquently written letter not only to Hebrews but also to Christians of today.

Perhaps nowhere in the New Testament does the Old Testament come into focus more than in the Book of Hebrews, which has as its foundation the Levitical priesthood. The writer of the Hebrews constantly compares the inadequacies of the Old Testament sacrificial system to the perfection and completion in Christ. Where the Old Covenant required continual sacrifices and a once-a-year atonement for sin offered by a priest, the New Covenant provides a once-for-all sacrifice through Christ (Hebrews 10:10) and direct access to the throne of God for all who are in Him. Same way Hebrews focuses in the life of Christians to be faithful believers even today, where even the existence of God is questioned.

Rich in foundational Christian doctrine, the Epistle to the Hebrews also gives us encouraging examples of God's "faith heroes" who persevered in spite of great difficulties and adverse circumstances (Hebrews 11). These members of God's 'Hall of Faith' provide overwhelming evidence as to the unconditional surety and absolute reliability of God. Likewise, we can maintain perfect confidence in God's rich promises, regardless of our circumstances, by meditating upon the rock-solid faithfulness of God's workings in the lives of His Old Testament saints. The 'faith heroes' of Hebrews should lead and guide us today in our struggled lives. Today's 'faith heroes' should motivate the future generation to continue in faith of our Lord and savior

The writer of Hebrews gives ample encouragement to believers, but there are five solemn warnings we must heed even today. There is the danger of neglect (Hebrews 2:1-4), the danger of unbelief (Hebrews 3:7-4:13), the danger of spiritual immaturity (Hebrews 5:11-6:20), the danger of failing to endure (Hebrews 10:26-39), and the inherent danger of refusing God (Hebrews 12:25-29). And so we find in this crowning masterpiece a great wealth of doctrine, a refreshing spring of encouragement, and a source of sound, practical warnings against slothfulness in our Christian walk. But there is much more; in Hebrews we find a magnificently rendered portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ—the Author and Finisher of our great salvation (Hebrews 12:2). Hebrews gives us the strength to face the different challenges of today namely

challenges to the existence of God, challenges to the truth of the Bible.

We live in a world where the scripture is being neglected, the number of non-believers increase even among Christians; the different interpretations of the scripture to tune of the need of the market culture, which shows the spiritual immaturity, the danger of failing to endure the belief and finally the inherent danger of refusing God. The existence of God is being questioned and even the truth of the Bible is also questioned by the modernism and postmodern culture. Jesus Christ is the adornment of the world and He came to save the world, where the Old Testament prophets and the Mosaic Law failed. It is by God's grace that the world is saved.

In chapters 1-10:18, the author repeatedly demonstrates that Jesus Christ as preeminent over the angels, *"let all the angels of God worship Him"* (1:6); over Moses, *"He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses"* (3:3); over the Old Testament priesthood, *"being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek"* (5:10). The writer explains that the New Covenant is greater than the Old Covenant because Jesus was the perfect, permanent sacrifice, rather than the Old Testament sacrifices. The author also presents the power and authority of the Word of God, *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"* (4:12). In chapters 10:19-13, the writer explains that Faith is superior to the work of the Old Covenant. He writes, *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"* (11:1). Chapter 11 is Faith's Hall of Fame where all of the faithful individual's from the Old Testament are highlighted in this chapter. Faith in Jesus Christ is our source of salvation because He is *"the author and perfecter of faith"* (12:2). The Old Testament faith in God is now both faith and hope of seconding the coming of Jesus.

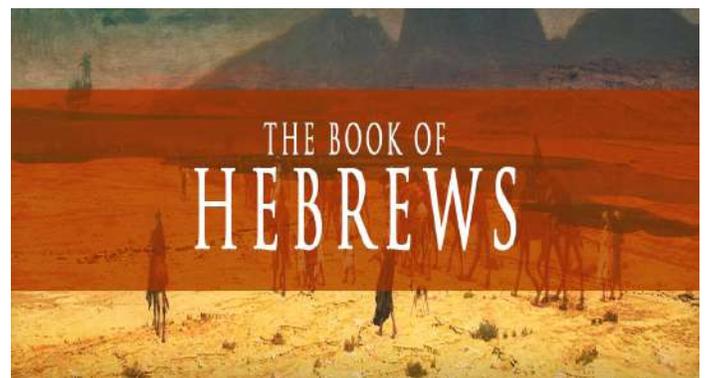
The book of Hebrews is the bridge that connects the Old Testament and the New Testament. The entire book is about Jesus and how He is the guarantor of a new and better covenant. The letter to the Hebrews makes clear that only one person deserves to hold the primary place in our lives. While we are busy idolizing our move up the corporate ladder or placing all our hopes in our kids, Jesus offers us a better position, a better priesthood, a better covenant, a better hope, and a better sacrifice. Only when we give Jesus His rightful place in our lives will everything else in life fall into its rightful place.

The book of Hebrews is a message to the present world too, not to give in to fears, distraction or discouragement. It is a message to the post-modern world not to stop

believing in the Bible and Jesus Christ, not to stop loving your neighbor, the one and the only command given by Jesus and not to stop following and relying on the Good and Great Shepherd. God is the creator of this universe and He is the one still in control of this entire universe. Without his knowledge, nothing is going to happen to each one of us. He sustains us in our lives by providing everything we need in our life. He is the radiance of Father's glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power When He made purification of the sins; He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:3)

To sum up: "Hebrews urges first-century readers to consider the prophets, laws, and temple worship only as a prelude to someone far greater (1:1-4). According to the letter's anonymous author, God's own Son (vv. 5-14) has suffered and "[tasted] death for everyone" (2:9) to provide a relationship with God that has replaced and made obsolete the law and covenant of Moses (3:1-6; 8:13). In layer after layer of detail, the letter describes how Jesus came to personify the Sabbath rest, high priesthood, sacrifice, and the temple that foreshadowed Him. For these reasons, the thirteen chapters of Hebrews urge readers not to give in to fears, distraction, or discouragement (3:8). The message is clear: don't stop believing in Jesus (10:19-11:40); don't stop loving (10:24-25; 13:1-3); don't stop following and relying on the Good and Great Shepherd (13:20) who gives us reason to believe that the best is yet ahead (9:28)."

This is the message of Hebrews to the Christians of today, "don't stop believing (10:19-11:40); don't stop loving (10:24-25; 13:1-3); don't stop following and relying on the Good and Great Shepherd (13:20) who gives us reason to believe that the best is yet ahead (9:28)." Therefore, Hebrews urges believers of today to persevere. Despite temptations, trials and backsliding believers are asked to endure. God is faithful and has prepared a heavenly abode for us. Believers have seen and tasted someone greater, who is the God's own son, suffered and died for our sins on the cross; thus redeeming us and sustaining us. We keep the hope and faith for His second coming to gather the faithful believers to be with Him for an eternal life with Him in heaven.



# Becoming like Him in His Generosity

P. John Samuel and Dr. C. P. Mathew

[The following is the 37<sup>th</sup> Lenten Meditation of Mr. John Samuel and Dr. C. P. Mathew; they have been writing these 'Lenten Meditations' over the last few years. Dr. C. P. Mathew\* is the director of 'Urban Ministries of India'. We are grateful to them for allowing us to publish this excerpt in the FOCUS.]

Freely you have received, freely give. (Mt 10:8). Jesus was sending his disciples to the lost sheep of Israel with these words to exercise the authority that Jesus had given. He wanted God's authority that He has given freely to his disciples to be given away freely as nothing belonged to them but to God.

The Godhead family gave us their "life giving Spirit" when they created us and they are the reason of our existence. We owe it all to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who planned to make us in their image. They also decided to give themselves by sending us Jesus as atonement for our sins. He never withheld anything but gave everything they had to prove their love to us human beings. This whole world is in God's ownership and complete control; you and I belong to God; in other words God owns our life; our birth through the Spirit while he owns the whole world. We are in every way indebted to Him and Him alone. So, is there anything that we can legitimately say in this world as belonging to us?

In reality we human beings are so calculative when we have to give to God and others? I think, there is a thought in the corner of our mind somewhere, which makes us feel that we have received it because we have worked for it or because we deserve it! When the people of Israel were about to take the land which God was providing for them, he warned them of a time, **when they would think it was because of their own power and strength they have got their wealth and possessions (Deut 8: 17, 18).** But God reminded them time and again, it is He who gave them the ability to produce wealth and not by their own strength. When we know the provider of our resources and when we make Him our entire possession, then there would be less hesitations to give away of what we have received. **But our struggle comes, when our possessions begin to possess us than Jesus possessing us.** There is nothing greater than having Jesus as our greatest treasure and possession.

I'm reminded of the day when the Lord asked me to step out for God's work. I had nothing to take with me to seminary except Rs 700/= (approx. 10 US). I did not know f

from where money would come for the coming month. Deciding not to ask anyone except my heavenly father, I left home as my parents were also struggling financially. Literally, I used to look up to the heavens with my purse open for God to fill it. The same day, I would receive a small amount towards my need from some unknown stranger or from an unexpected friend. This was happening for months, until one day the Lord spoke to a friend of mine to provide for my needs on a regular basis. I had no clue as to how he even got my postal address. This was much before the day of Internet. He faithfully kept sending me the needed resources to meet my need and beyond, that I could even give towards my sister's college hostel fee for 4 years. For me to give, I only need to remind myself of my beginning. What all have I today is gift that Lord has generously bestowed and given and I cannot make any claims on it before the Lord. But has this made me very generous? Not generous enough as I struggle to give as much as I have received. To become like Him, God must give me the grace to give in accordance to what I have received.

Jesus appreciated a poor widow offering of 2 cents and said that she gave more than the rest or she gave what all she possessed. This is how God measures generosity. For God, generosity is not measured by what we give, but by what we hold back. How generous are we with our time, with our money, with our forgiveness, with our love and care? Are we so calculative? Assuming that Jesus gave us only in calculated measure, we would never ever receive His Salvation. Therefore, **let us pray that God would make us generous enough so that Jesus will be visible in our living and giving.**

Prayer: Lord I confess that I have calculated much when it comes to giving of my time, treasure and talent. I have not really understood everything that I enjoy including my life is generously given by you as a gift. Help me to give more freely in the measure of what I have received. In Jesus Name, Amen.

May the Triune God give us the joy of imitating Him in every attribute we were looking in to these days.

Editor's Note: Dr. P. C. Mathew and his wife Mrs. Ciby Mathew have been engaged in mentoring and reaching many families in India. They are the co-founders and National Executive Directors of Urban India Ministries, an organization committed to transforming cities one home at a time. <https://urbanindia.org/about/>

## Pearls of Wisdom Series: No.11

**Behold, I shall save my people.**

**(A reading from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church –Lumen Gentium 2,16)**

By an utterly free and mysterious decree of his own wisdom and goodness, the eternal Father created the whole world. His plan was to dignify men (Human beings) with a participation in his own divine life. He did not abandon men (people) after they had fallen in Adam, but ceaselessly offered them helps to salvation. In anticipation of Christ the Redeemer, who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. All the elect before time happen; the Father foreknew and predestined to become conformed to the image of his son, so that he should be the firstborn among many brethren.

He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. Already from the beginning of the world the foreshadowing of the Church took place. She was prepared in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old covenant. Established in the present era of time, the Church was made manifest by the outpouring of the Spirit. At the end of time she will achieve her glorious fulfilment. Then, as may be read in the holy Fathers, all just men (people) from the time of Adam, from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect, will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church.

Those who have not yet received the gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place there is the people to whom covenants and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers, this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts that he makes nor the calls he issues.

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these are the Moslems, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God himself far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is he who gives all men (people) life and breath and every other gift, and who as Saviour wills that all men (people) will be saved.

Those all can attain everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through dictated of conscience. Nor does divine providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at

and explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the gospel. She regards such qualities as given by him who enlightens all men (People) so that they may finally have life.



# FOCUS

The Editorial Board of the FOCUS has decided to introduce a new initiative of 'Ask FOCUS' to enable its readers and well wishers to interact with issues-specificity with FOCUS about the biblical and theological themes addressed in this journal. We request your active participation in this new interactive feature focused especially, though not exclusively, on the youth.

You could begin with sending us your thoughts and queries about the themes and insights offered through the FOCUS issues. It would help if you would be brief and limit your queries to, ideally, about 50 to 100 words. We are, however, somewhat flexible about the word limit. Even so, brevity is the envisaged golden rule. You may send your thoughts by e-mail to Rev. Valson Thampu (you could address him as Valson) at his e-mail address [vthampu@gmail.com](mailto:vthampu@gmail.com). The editorial board reserves the freedom to edit the submissions and also to reject any which is contrary to the editorial policies and mission of FOCUS. You may access all the previous issues of FOCUS online magazine by visiting any of the two web sites below and reading the thematic articles in each issue.

**We guarantee that your privacy will be protected and that your name will be published only with your prior permission; otherwise, your views/statement will be published under the caption: A Reader's View. We hope that our readers and wellwishers would make use of this new initiative and take part actively in the mission and purpose of FOCUS.**

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**Editorial Board**

# Let there be. . .”

## (God as the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer)

Dr. Zac Varghese, London

The biblical teaching is centred on the fundamental tenets that God is the **Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer**. The creative activity of God started with the first recorded words of God: “Let there be light” (Gen. 1: 3; Jn 1: 1-5). We also know that God is love (1 Jn. 4: 16, Jn 3: 16) and love is the fundamental force of creation. At the beginning, “God saw all that he made and it was very good” Gen. 1: 31). Things begin to fall apart and the creation became fractured because of the activity of people and alienation of people, whom he created in love for an eternal relationship. Christianity is all about the love of God and how God continues to heal a ‘fractured-creation’ through his redeeming activity once for all in Christ’s salvific action on the Cross. The Bible gives us a graphic account of God’s redeeming and sustaining activity. Most of the time we expend our energy in understanding the ‘how of the mystery of creation’ rather than thinking in absolute humility and thankfulness why God created the world and all that is there in its fullness and beauty.

The ‘how’ of creation is the domain of theoreticians, astrophysicists, and evolutionary biologists. According to science, the universe is about 14 billion years old, but the biblical story of creation talks about a universe of 6,000 to 10,000 years old. In 1963, Bishop A. T. Robinson of Woolwich challenged the traditional orthodoxy in our thinking about God and the three decker universe in his book, ‘Honest to God’. He opens the introductory chapter with the statement: “The Bible speaks of a God ‘up there’. No doubts its picture of a three-decker universe, of the heaven above, the earth beneath and waters under the earth’, was once taken quite literally. No doubt also its more sophisticated writers, if pressed, would have been the first to regard this as symbolic language to convey spiritual realities.” Robinson found support in critically restating traditional orthodoxy in modern terms in the writings of Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In spite of this he thought that he failed in some way in not being ‘nearly radical enough’ in his writings. This is no longer the case for many because of the emerging evidence of an ‘expanding universe’ and the recent amazing pictures in the television and newspapers of a ‘Black Hole’ at the centre of a Galaxy. God as ‘an old man in the sky’ is still prevalent in the minds of some people; recently, I asked a church gathering, where do they think God is? One child quickly answered: ‘God is in the sky’. The first century view of the universe and the twenty-first century view are light-years apart. However, there is consensus among biblical scholars that the biblical story about creation is primarily about the

relationship between the creator and the creation. According St. Paul in Colossians, the creation was renewed in the new Adam (Jesus Christ), so that in Christ the image of God shines in its fullness and purity, and the purpose of God in creating human race has been fully realised.

### God’s Creative Activity:

Jurgen Moltmann<sup>1</sup> in his ‘Ethics of Hope’ has developed a doctrine of creation that emphasizes God’s continuous creativity throughout history. He argues that God’s creative activity did not stop on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of creation. According to Moltmann, God’s creative activity continues throughout the time to preserve and reorient the world through continuous creation, until God consummates a ‘perfect world’ in His eschatological time in new creation. Therefore, Moltmann sees creation as a tripartite process involving the original creation, continuous creation and new creation. In Isaiah we read about the continuous creation, “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things old. Behold I am doing new things; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it” (Isa. 43: 18-19). St. Paul wrote: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5: 17)!

Some see creation as a mechanistic process like crafting a cosmic watch and God as a cosmic watchmaker who simply winds it up and sets it going. This places God outside the created world, as the Deists do. For Deists, God exists but he is transcendent and does not intervene in the world, beyond what is necessary to create it. There is also the idea that God created the world out of nothing (*Creatio ex nihilo*)<sup>2</sup>. There is a thought that God created order to remove chaos. Swedenborg<sup>3</sup> thought differently, he wrote: “The universe as a whole and in every detail was created out of Divine Love, by means of Divine Wisdom.” Moltmann<sup>4</sup> says, “God’s creative love is grounded in his humble, self-humiliation. . . . God emptied himself of his all-plenishing omnipotence, and as a creator took upon himself the form of a servant.”

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<sup>1</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, First Fortress Press edition, 2012, P 121-128

<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, ‘God in Creation’, SCM Press, 1985, P 86

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Swedenborg, ‘Divine Providence’, The New Century edition, ISBN 10: 1- 60459-085-8

<sup>4</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, SCM Press, 1985, P88

Jonathan Sacks<sup>5</sup> writes: The God who created the world in love calls on us to create in love.” In this view, we are partners of continuing the creation and in ‘healing the fractured-world’. This partnership is emphasised in the ‘old’ and ‘new’ covenants. The covenant God established with the Israelites at Sinai and the new covenant that Christ established with the faith community are examples of this ever living partnership for establishing God’s kingdom values on earth. God’s intimacy with creation is an important theme throughout the Old Testament. God’s address to Job (chapters 38-41) reveals God’s intimate relationship with all his creation. Carl Barth<sup>6</sup> in his magnum opus, ‘Church Dogmatics’, had spent considerable time and effort in explaining the doctrine of creation. His Christocentric emphasis reveals God has taken mankind into partnership with himself. This is basis of covenants, promises and covenantal relationship. From the very beginning God determined to take man into partnership with himself on the basis of the salvific plan of the incarnation in Jesus Christ. The basis of this train of thought is the conviction that God’s dealing with humanity is mediated in and through the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is indeed the Trinitarian aspect an involvement in the creation.

#### **Partnership in the redeeming activity of God:**

Human beings are not just artefacts of God’s creation, God breathed life into human beings; we are image bearers of God; we are partners with him in his continuing creative activity for redeeming this beautiful world and its inhabitants. But in order to have man as his covenant partner, God has to first create him and endow him with responsibilities. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us of this partnership in Christ quoting from Psalm 8: “. . . What is man you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour and put everything under his feet” (Heb. 2: 6-8). In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus has given us the privilege to address our Creator God as ‘Our Father’. Again in the Hebrews we read Jesus is not ashamed to call human beings as brothers [and sisters] (Heb. 2: 11-14). Immanuel, the God who is with us, is our partner in rebuilding the world for creating the kingdom of God. As we are made in the image of God (*imago Dei*), our work and worship should always be for giving glory to God by mending broken relationships. We are indeed the image bearers of God; we should never ever tarnish that image by our self-centred activities.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Sacks, ‘To Heal a Fractured World’, Continuum, London, New York, , 2005, P3

<sup>6</sup> Carl Barth, ‘Church Dogmatics’, Volume III, the Doctrine of Creation, 4 Parts, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1958-1961.

The World is fractured because of the broken relationship with the creator God. Mending this relationship is the redeeming activity that we see in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Each day we experience the damage caused by our broken relationship with God (Sin). Greed, injustice, fake news, ecological destruction, and cruelty of all kinds can be traced back to our broken relationship with God (Gen 3). Without God’s redeeming act we would be in a hopeless situation. But Jesus overpowered sin through His cross and conquered death through His resurrection.

Mending relationship with our neighbour in love is the first step in mending relationship with God. Jonathan Sacks tells the following meaningful story in his book, ‘To Heal a Fractured World’<sup>7</sup>. An old man was walking on the beach very early in the morning and saw a young man picking up star fish stranded by retreating tide, and throwing them back into the sea one by one. The old man asked the young man, why he is doing this? The young man said that the star fish would die if it left exposed to the morning sun. ‘There are thousands and thousands of them, how can you save them all?’ asked the old man. The young man looked at the star fish in his hand and said, ‘to this one, it makes a difference.’ We are asked to be partners in this redeeming act of God and ‘we do it one day at a time, one person at a time, one act at a time. A single life, said sages, is like a universe. Save a life, and you save a world. Change a life you begin to change the world.’

#### **God as a Sustainer:**

In human situations sustainability is often in short supply and this is not so with our Creator God. Our Lord is a sustainer through and through. There are many verses in the Bible, which support the idea of God as a sustainer: “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall” (Ps 55: 22). “My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him” (Ps 89: 21). “. . . In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn 16: 33). The idea of God continually supporting His creation can also be found in various expressions in the Bible: such as support, carry, preserve, and uphold. The idea of sustainability is very common in our thinking these days with respect to economics, environment and ecological issues. We also need to think of partnership with God in sustaining the creation.

The concept that the natural resources we regularly use should have the capacity to regenerate and not become exhausted was the basis of Sabbath rest, fallow land and the jubilee year for the Israelites (Ex 23: 10-11; Lev25).

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Sacks, ‘To Heal a Fractured World’, Continuum, London, New York, , 2005, P 72

This concept implies the long term stewardship, management and maintenance of these resources by mankind so that they can continue to be used without damaging environmental and ecological side effects. We also have a God-given responsibility, as stewards of his created-world, to handover an un-damaged world to the generations to come. Moltmann wrote in his essay on 'Creating a Just World': We have to pass on land, air and water to the coming generations in the state in which we received them. Every order of possession must be related to the contract between the generations, because possession and property can only be used justly if there is also a concern for the generations to come." We are custodians of many valuable things of life, including our health and wellbeing, and have no right what so over to damage them. However, at the rate of our current consumption, would there be anything left to handover to the next generation? A deliberate act of conservation should be part of our spirituality.



There is programmed cell death known as apoptosis in human bodies and damaged cells are replaced systematically to maintain cellular homeostasis or balance for maintaining health and wellbeing. For ecological balance and sustainability, we are beginning to create sustainable forests by cutting old, damaged, trees and planting new ones. Our God of love is always sustaining creation out of his unconditional love. God is continually creating, recreating and sustaining; all that he preserves is to establish His kingdom on earth. The kingdom and its

values are entirely based on a longing for justice, relationships, spirituality, truth and love.

The prime reason for creation is the love of God and His desire for relationship with the created world. Vincent Brummer<sup>8</sup> in his book, *The Model of Love* explains God's love in creation as a 'Cosmic force'. This understanding of 'Cosmic Love' is capable of resolving some of the theological conundrums in our theological discussions of immanence and transcendence, unity and otherness, detached attachment, etc. 'Cosmic love' is freely expressed in creation. "Love that is not freely given is not love at all", says Brummer. We are partners in preserving and maintaining relationships with our neighbours and our God according to the Lord's Prayer: ". . . Let Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Neighbours should include the whole created world including non-human neighbours and nature. We shall no longer be able to separate or compartmentalise God and nature. During his nature walks Charles Kingsley wrote: "I am aware that I was immersed in the infinite ocean of God." This awareness should help us to resist the destruction of nature, tropical forests and such in the name of human progress.

May God help us to reintegrate ourselves into 'all embracing community of creation' from which we have detached ourselves. God was an essential part of everyday vocabulary in my childhood, but this language and God-centredness has now virtually ceased. Now God is not part and parcel of our conversations or activities; the name of God has disappeared from our everyday discourse. The creator, redeeming and sustaining God, invested his whole—his Son and the Spirit in the design of the universe and healing this fractured-world.

The least that we can do is be grateful and responsible stewards of his creation. Whatever our vocation or stations in life, we are to be creatively involved in God's mission – a mission that is not only intended to transform the lives of the individuals, but of communities and institutions and the world in its totality as well. The Nazareth manifesto (Lk. 4: 18-19) summons us to welcome strangers, to care for the widow and the orphan, and build relationship with those distant from us. The Trinitarian account of creation reveals to us a God of communion who makes room for otherness, who overcomes the hostility of the world and heals the fractured-world through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and who through the mediation of the Holy Spirit is creating a new community of love and hospitality. This indeed the task given to the Church and it is indeed our hope in Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> Vincent Brummer, *The Model of Love: A study in Philosophical Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, P 229.

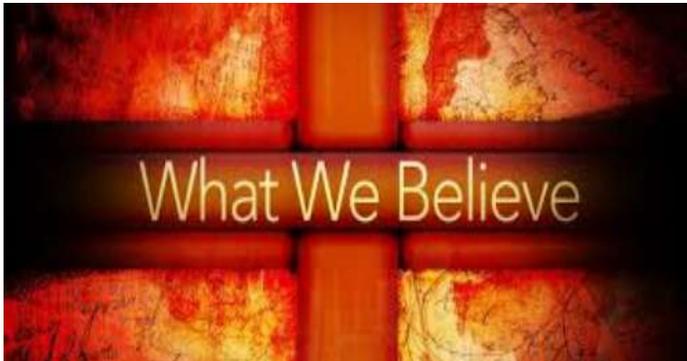
## The Holy Books: Part-2

# Authorship and Interpretation: For Better or Worse?

Dr. Ian Fry, Honorary Postdoctoral Associate, University of Divinity, Melbourne

*[This article is written for the 8th Holy Book Conference held at Kuala Lumpur in April 2019 under the auspices of the United Religious Initiative (URI). Part-1 of this paper appeared in the April issue of the FOCUS, 2019, Vol. 7 (2), page 25-28]*

### The Abrahamic Era to the Babylonian Exile.



In spite of the introduction of codes of conduct, whole cities were being destroyed and their people slaughtered in kingly battles for regional superiority at the time of the command to Abraham that marked the start of phase three of the evolution of religious understanding. The command that he received was precipitated by the chaotic and despotic state of governance in the regions of Mesopotamia and Babylon about the time of the Nordic invasion of the Indus valley. In that situation, in summary, Abraham, reputedly aged seventy-five, became the focus for the progressive revelation of the nature and implications of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity when he received a command that is widely recognized as the first direct communication from God, the Divine, to a human. He was told to leave his country, his father's house and kinsmen at Haran, and to go to a land that God would show him, with God's promise that "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing (and) I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The Hebrew biblical narrative then traces the birth of two sons to Abraham, various crises within Abraham's family; Jacob's failure to honour the covenant; his reconciliation with God; a famine that resulted in his descendants seeking help in Egypt and being subject to the foreshadowed period of oppression; God's command to Moses, a relative within an apostate tribe, to rescue the oppressed; their exodus from Egypt in extraordinary circumstances; their reversion to paganism, and the trauma of the re-imposition of a covenantal

relationship with God under the Mosaic Covenant of Sinai which marks the foundation of the Israelite religion. There are only a few references to Ishmael's family in the Hebrew Bible. One notes that Abraham took another wife, Keturah, who bore six sons including Midian, (whose community took his name as Midianites), and also concubines, all of whom were banished. There is no suggestion that Abraham relayed any divine covenantal instructions to Ishmael along the lines of those to Isaac that placed the Israelites under constant scrutiny for obedience, except, perhaps, that they must practice circumcision, not worship idols, and that Ishmael could expect to lead a great nation of twelve tribes. When the Israelites began to gather material for a history of their ancestors they were struggling to establish cohesion in the succession from Abraham to Moses and the Exodus, and to go back any further was impossible. The task only began with the establishment of the monarchy with Saul as king, c.1029 BCE<sup>9</sup> when written recording of Israel's history became possible. Writing systems had been developed in Mesopotamia between 3400 and 3300 BCE, and in Egypt c.3100, but the Israelites had not been influenced by them, and it was only when they came under the influence of the Sumerian, Akkadian and Canaanite cultures around them that the prospect of having written records became realistic<sup>10</sup>. This means that if the critical first stage of the Exodus took place c.1479 BCE<sup>11</sup> the date used in Chart One, the gathering of history for Genesis from oral tradition had been in progress for not less than 450 years before anything could be committed to writing. Segments were then collected and held, presumably in their original language and with very limited circulation, while a Hebrew alphabet and writing symbols were being developed. However, because the Israelites were the first people to attempt to record their history, and for very good reasons<sup>12</sup>, it can be accepted that they were scrupulous in careful interpretation and accuracy in the data and stories that were being gathered. It is therefore not surprising that the Hebrew

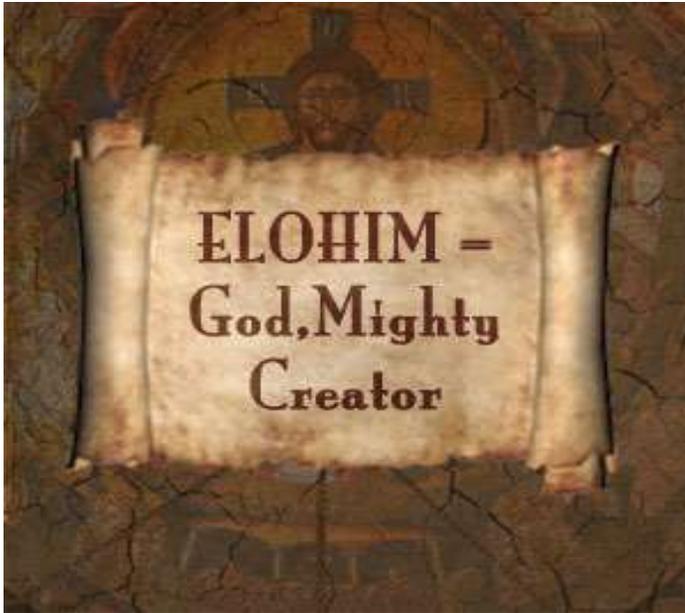
<sup>9</sup> Eli Barnavi, *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People* (New York, Schocken, 2002) p. 14-6. Perhaps the Greek nation sits parallel to the Israelites in this respect.

<sup>10</sup> Kendrick Grobel, *The Languages of the Bible* in Charles Laymon (Ed) *The Interpreter's one-volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1971)

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Eriksson, *Thera: Redating the Exodus* (Provisional) (Melbourne, LaTrobe University, 2006)

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the Greek nation sits parallel to the Israelites in this respect.

Bible includes a minimum of material relating to Abraham's descendants through Ishmael after the family disputes and division of responsibility between Isaac and Ishmael. Memory of events and the oral transmission of data, family details and the relationship between events from one generation to another may be quite good for many people, but consistency over eighteen generations of twenty five years, (the 450 year span), is very problematic, and over thirty generations, (the 750 year span), is certainly questionable without the aid of reminders such as sculptured figures, walls or clay tablets, none of which were available to the Hebrews prior to the establishment of the monarchy.



The chronology of that period must therefore be a complex mix including some critical facts instilled in people from generation to generation, a lot of hypothesis, reasoned estimates, and the emergence of myths. Passages collected from c. 950 BCE to the imposition of the Babylonian Exile in 586 BCE, were composed in Early Biblical Hebrew (EBH) while further linguistic development was taking place, and post-exilic writings were composed in Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH). That some of those passages were included in Genesis explains the different styles and content. Additions and variations were still being made between c.715 BCE and the late 5th century BCE. With final redaction of the Torah dated as c.458 BCE<sup>13</sup>, the redactors would have been very reluctant to decide which versions were more appropriate. When matters of great significance and sensitivity are involved it is reasonable to expect some embellishment, duplication, hypothetical presentation of circumstances in an effort to support expectations or firmly held conceptions,

<sup>13</sup> EW. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (New York, Oxford, 1998) p.21.

rearrangement of sequence, or the delayed insertion of retrieved information, especially when the selection of material to be included or excluded is being made. The dating of the composition or the addition of several key passages in Genesis is of particular interest and raises concerns about the validity of their placement, and even factuality because of their relationship to the whole schema of covenant and prophecy. Critical passages relate to God's advice to Abraham that his descendants would be exiles, enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. These were certainly not added until the eighth century and some scholars say after 722 BCE, which places their composition as more likely during the Babylonian Exile from 586 to 538 BCE and about 750 years after the Exodus. Others relate to the social commandments of the Decalogue, the first version of the creation story and Adam and Eve, the flood story, and the adoption of Zoroaster's concept of theism, none of which supported the Israelite belief that Yahweh was exclusively the God of Israel. On the basis of these circumstances, in chart one I show a broken line between Ishmael and the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH, with the notation 'Recorded history sparse: continuity of belief not established.' Of similar importance to an understanding of the chain of prophecy was the incorporation of the pre-Abrahamic Amorite Code of

Hammurabi in the Deuteronomic code when it was being redacted during the Exile, c.550 BCE. John van Seters<sup>14</sup> has shown that the Hammurabi Code was inserted into the Pentateuch as Exodus 20:23 -23:33 at the same time that redactors may have been integrating some sources of history, to enhance the presentation of the Hebrew law that had been in use prior to that time.

Another was the inclusion of myths during the fifth century BCE redaction of the Hebrew Bible to illustrate a hypothetical sequence of creation and the origins of humanity, and to impute historical continuity from Creation to the divine command to Abraham. They were never intended to be regarded as fact but to provide a means of illustrating the perceived capacity and intentions of the Divine. They could have remained that way until the seventeenth century CE and then been revised when the development of the telescope and archaeological and scientific discoveries, including the pattern of progressive biological evolution and the early stages of astrophysics, provided a basis for an understanding of creation and evolution. If changes had been made to the presentation of the creation myths at that time it would have alleviated the long-running and acrimonious debates about Biblical Inerrancy and church authority in historical, evolutionary and scientific matters. Those debates undermined confidence in the Christian Church, inhibited an appreciation of the relationship

<sup>14</sup> John Van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora*, First ed. (New York, OUP, 2002) 125-27, 172-75.

between the Divine and humanity, and provided the need and the justification for progressive reinterpretation and revision of creeds, doctrine and canon law. During that long period of biblical development the Hebrew prophets, as a cluster, provided insights that should have enabled Israel to understand and to act on the role that had been imposed on it – as a people – under the community-specific Mosaic Covenant. The Critical Issue: A Mature Hebrew Understanding of Divine Covenant a simple understanding of the nature of divine covenant developed slowly through prophetic revelations by a series of prophets during the period from the Exodus under Moses to the start of the Babylonian Exile. That understanding was not comprehensive. It was not until Israel's scholars and prophets came into contact with the influence of Zoroaster's teaching, the notion of Saoshyant and Avatar, and the myths and codes of Babylon and Mesopotamia during the exile from 586 to 538 BCE that they became more conscious of the heritage and beliefs of peoples other than their predecessors in Canaan, their experience of imperial rule and in Egypt, and the idol worshipers of the regions where their cousins, the Ishmaelites, had settled. Unfortunately their key religious and political leaders failed to fully appreciate and live according to their distinctive role when they became embroiled in regional power conflicts, and no effort was made to collect and record the piecemeal understanding of covenant systematically. However a consolidation of the mature Hebrew understanding of Divine Covenant is now available from my own work<sup>15</sup>. It can help in understanding how each Abrahamic faith currently approaches the application of the divine covenant that applies to itself, and how its actions relate to the manoeuvring and changes taking place in global relationships. In brief, a divine covenant is invoked or initiated by God through a call or command by which the covenant is identifiable. It is non-exclusive and the invocation or initiation of a covenant is entirely a matter for God. It is a means by which God reveals the divine will, intentions for humanity and all of creation, and a means of enabling humanity to gain a meaningful understanding of its relationship with God. It involves a relationship that is imposed on the second party. It is not an agreement. It is non-negotiable, inescapable, perpetual in application and operation, and thus will never be revoked or annulled, but it is cyclical, not static. A covenant involves a divine undertaking or promise that is conditional upon adherence to linked obligations that involve a role or roles that may be identified together with the call or command, or may be latent and recognizable circumstantially. The ongoing relationship between God

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<sup>15</sup> Ian R. Fry, "Dialogue between Christians, Jews and Muslims: The Concept of Covenant as Basis" (Practical Theology Research, MCD University of Divinity, 2012).

and the community, and the conduct of the people, are subject to divine guidance, and although misconduct may be proscribed their conduct is entirely determined by unrestricted free will, and they cannot avoid any adverse circumstance – the penalty – that results following failure to honour an obligation. A penalty is not necessarily invoked immediately upon the relevant inaction or misconduct of the second party. By the nature of Divine Will it may be applied and become apparent progressively, after a substantial circumstantial delay, or it might not become apparent until subsequent generations, and it is likely to involve a retaliatory reaction by a third party which has been adversely affected by the relevant inaction or misconduct. Failure to honour an obligation might involve either a penalty and temporary negation or withholding of a Divine undertaking that has been recognized as basic to the covenant, and which will be reinstated, subject to the second party returning to God's favour through repentance and recompense for the third party. Interaction between parties, whether they are subject to a community-specific covenant or the universal covenant, may exemplify either the outcome of obedience to a divine obligation or rejection of it. At that point a community-specific covenant might also involve either a new role or a variation in emphasis within the community's existing role that was not anticipated or announced in a previously understood manner, and that is invoked by God in relation to a Divine undertaking that is already understood and recognized as an aspect of either a community-specific or universally applicable covenantal relationship. In that case the cyclical pattern of repentance, recompense, adherence to the obligations of the new role and a return to God's favour will be entirely consistent with all aspects of the covenant to which the second party has been subject since its initiation. Thus the phase of the covenantal cycle that may be apparent from time to time will reflect the conduct and status of the community concerned. On the basis of prophetic experience to the end of the Babylonian Exile, this is the point that the people Israel would reach when they sought to displace the people of Palestine in order to secure a homeland of their own to escape persecution in Europe at the close of the Nineteenth Century CE, but only a few scholars and rabbis would acknowledge it. Subsequently, when the next point would be reached in the mid Twentieth Century CE, although it was critical, the situation was the same. It would neither be widely understood nor acknowledged, and only a few key Jewish leaders would be prepared to discuss any aspect of the Mosaic Covenant except the divine undertaking that a secure homeland was to be provided for their people. The Christian Church and its associated powers would accept much of the responsibility for the fateful situation of the Jewish people, but they should also have accepted responsibility to resolve that crisis without imposing oppression on the Palestinians or any other people.

# ASK FOCUS...

Dear Revd Dr. Valson Thampu,

*I thank the editorial board, Revd Valson Thampu and Mr. David Brand in inaugurating this much needed section of the FOCUS to find answers to certain questions, which would be of help to the readers. Last Issue (Vol 7/2, page 22-24) had a discussion on 'In Defense of Judas'.*

*May I ask the following question: How does a man endowed with conscience, morality, reason, faith and free will deals with divine providence?*

The query for this issue of FOCUS is: "How does a man, endowed with conscience, morality, reason, faith and free will, deals with divine providence?"

First of all, I wish to thank all who take a regular interest in FOCUS. Christian literature of the desired quality and depth is hard to come by. My delight in being associated with this timely and significant endeavour lies in my conviction that it tries to fill this vacuum. The readers will appreciate that it is no mean effort to sustain a publication of this kind over time. All of us owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who work tirelessly and sacrificially to make it happen. Personally, I am deeply grateful. I am associated with this publication, but am spared all of its logistic, financial and administrative burdens.

Let us begin by breaking down the question before us into its constituent parts.

First, it pertains to 'Providence'. Second, it qualifies (or identifies) the interjector for whom Providence is problematic. Third, the question implies or assumes - quite rightly- that there is a connection between any given person and the sort of perplexities and dilemmas he experiences. They cannot be considered part from each other.

First, therefor, what's Providence? Curiously for me, it was Shakespeare, not a hardcore theologian, who got me thinking on it. In *Hamlet*, I read: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends...." Providence is the idea that human affairs are ordered by a force higher than the wisdom or will of individuals.

The problem for the modern man is not in the idea of Providence per se. It is in the anti-rational, anti-intellectual outlook that total faith and total dependence on God could generate. The outcome of this outlook is that the faculties with which God has endowed humankind seem to become redundant like, in a biological context, the vermiform appendix. It is there, but it serves no purpose.

So, it makes sense that as centuries rolled by, the age of Enlightenment came, and man began to feel that 'he has come of age', he began to be increasingly eager to emerge from divine tutelage.

But there was a catch here. It was alright to emerge from the authority of God; but into what? The vacuum was filled, surprisingly, in the case of organized religion, not by individuals assuming full responsibility for their moral and spiritual welfare, but by their willingness to embrace the principle of *fides explicitas*, or a total willingness to put oneself under the authority of the church. This is more pronounced in the case of the Catholic Church, though it is not absent from any other denomination.

Of the handful of concepts against which providence is posited in our query here, conscience, morality and faith need not be in conflict with the idea of Providence. So, we may not, for the time being consider them, except in an incidental fashion, if at all. In the interest of brevity, we may focus almost entirely on the idea of free will, which is assumed to be in maximum tension with the idea of Providence. Of course, the idea of reason is closely associated with that of free will.

A cardinal issue is: Is faith incompatible with reason? Much depends on what we mean by faith. It lends itself to a variety of interpretations. We may classify these interpretations in two categories: the Abrahamic and the theological. Jesus points to Abraham as an exemplar of faith. He is the 'father of the faith'. What is the kind of 'faith' we find in him? It is the faith of implicit obedience to God. God singles him out of his people in Ur (Mesopotamia) and asks him to go to the land he had never seen before. He strikes out.

In other words, there is no intellectualizing, nor theologizing, no formation of doctrines and dogmas in this model. It is between the individual and his God. Ask Abraham if he sensed any conflict between Providence (God's plan for him) and his free will. He would look much surprised and say "Not at all!" Was it because Abraham was irrational? Or because he was truly free?

This raises a serious issue. Can reason become, in certain contexts, a constrictor of human freedom? Or, is reason, in all contexts, necessarily and compulsorily a magnifier of individual freedom? What is the necessary condition in which the exercise of freedom is in harmony with freedom?

I go back to St. Augustine, who insisted that every human being is incomparably and unrepeatably unique. Each person has his own God-appointed purpose, mission and

destiny. But at no point in time is he or she fully aware of it. Individuals are free to live their lives tangential to this divine intent. Can such a life be described as a life of freedom? Is freedom of this kind meaningful?

Or, is true and meaningful freedom a state in which a person lives teleologically; i.e., in harmony with the purpose of his existence? But that purpose is hidden in Providence! There is no other source of illusion in this respect. If this argument is valid, then we come to the conclusion that Providence is not constrictive of individual freedom, but a necessary matrix for its wholesome and purpose exercise. This explains why the Bible emphasizes that obedience to God is perfect freedom.

It is utterly wrong and spiritually irresponsible to let any other authority, including priestly authority, to take the place of Providence. Doing that is irrational. As Jesus insisted, the authority of man, including priestly authority, undermines freedom. Jesus sought to set people free also from under the yoke of religion.

We now consider the second part of our inquiry: can 'conscience, morality, reason, faith and free will' take the place of Providence? Are these faculties in any way incompatible with Providence?

Traditionally, conscience used to be defined as the voice of God speaking within us. Today, this idea is thoroughly secularized and conscience is deemed a by-product of the socialization process. One's conscience can vary according to the social context of one's formation. To me, this view overlooks the universal ingredients in human conscience. Whether you are formed within the oriental or occidental cultures, your conscience is troubled when you violate any of the universal values. But, in respect of 'norms' -or yardsticks for applying values- there are cultural variations and nuances.

To me, the perceived tension between Providence on the one hand and the other human faculties stems clearly from the way we understand Providence. If Providence is no more than pre-determination in a mechanical sort of way, the conflict is real and disturbing. If Providence is understood as the scope of the life of individuals being comprehended in God's will for them, the conflict is non-existent; or, if existent, is merely notional.

Do the celestial objects -put in their orbits by divine Providence- become less than themselves because they are so placed and governed? Or, do they become feasible only because they are so?

Jesus came to fulfil the plan of God? Did that compromise or glorify his freedom? Was his conscience, morality, free will, etc., constricted or fulfilled in this way?

Remember his last words on the Cross, "It is finished!" Generations, prior to the Renaissance did not perceive any tension of this kind? They too were human!

There is a relevant existential insight here. Almost all of the tensions we experience, including theological and philosophical ones, are the by-products of 'alienation'. Till Adam and Eve alienated themselves from God, they did not feel themselves 'naked'. Nakedness is a physical metaphor that is also a signpost to the spiritual state. Spiritual nakedness is experienced as unease, or tension. What shame is to the body, tension or perplexity is to the soul.

But what I have stated here should not be misunderstood as my arguing for only a simple faith. I can never overlook the fact that Jesus urged his disciples to 'seek' and find. He also insisted on 'fullness' of life. All our faculties are God-given and relevant. They are meant to be used, and used to the full extent. Reason is no less necessary and relevant than faith. Indeed, both are denatured when separated from each other. What we need is not reason or faith, but reasonable faith. It is such a faith that we find exemplified in Jesus.

Finally, we should not have to 'deal with' Providence. We only have to live in tune with Providence. The secret of this state is obedience; but 'obedience' issuing from love. If we love God as he deserves to be loved (with our whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, and whole body) all tensions disappear and our life becomes steadied on the twin turbines of faith and reason.

Obedying God implicitly could be unacceptable to the hubris of the modern man. He has no problem obeying implicitly the astrologer, the tarot card reader, the instructions of the physician, and even fetishistic stupidities like having unwavering faith in items of clothes (there are many who believe a particular pair of shoes, a certain dress, a certain pen etc. could bring them luck.)

As for me, I'd rather trust Providence than my secular confidence, based on material factors and presumptions. But I would not take Providence for granted. I would endeavour to be in harmony with Providence, by trying to be what I need to be, by the grace of God. I am mandated to be as active and dynamic as Providence is! [I believe that was what Bonhoeffer meant by sponsoring 'Death of God theology' following a hit from Nietzsche] For a secular man to be in alignment with Providence is like wearing the lifejacket while riding in a bus.

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? Jesus asked. Not one of them falls to the ground without your Father in heaven knowing it. Thank God, the sparrows are not enlightened enough to complain about it!

*(The name of the questioner is withheld as per request)*

# God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of Universe and Life

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*“Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and he who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth Myself.” (Isaiah 44:24). “He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8). “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:30).*

## Introduction

Much of what we know of the universe, its origin, expansion and the age has been brought to light by astrophysicists and cosmologists within the past two hundred years, while many have made speculations since the days of Socrates. While Nicholas Copernicus, was the one who famously proposed the heliocentric theory—the theory by which the sun was in the center of the solar system and the planets orbited it circularly, ancient sages in India about 8-9th Century BC proposed the notion that the earth is in motion around the Sun as recorded in ancient Sanskrit texts. However, while twentieth century scientists speculated, Moses wrote down the account of creation of the universe, life and the multitude of species on earth round 1440 BC.

There are several scriptures throughout the Bible about the universe and the magnificent creations that praise God revealing their majesty and beauty of creation. However, since 1859 when Charles Darwin published hastily the diary notes of his imagination as he sailed as a naturalist on HMS Beagle, things have changed in the academic and scientific world, who were searching for an answer to the origin of the universe, life and species. Those who have not experienced God, and do not systematically read the Bible took Darwin’s theory as answer to the most complex and serious question in the universe, and started teaching the theory of unguided evolution and *abiogenesis* (origin of life from nonliving matter) as the process by which everything evolved. Since then, not only the faiths of many have shattered, but also many rejected God as the *Creator*. There is not even a single iota of scientific evidence for evolution.

## Universe Created and Spread by God

While scientists speculated about the origin of cosmos throughout human history, God revealed to Isaiah around 681 BC that He spread the heavens (the universe) from one end to the other (Isa. 42:5; 44:24). This truth was affirmed by Job who lived more than, 4,000 years ago (Job 9:8), the oldest of the Biblical records. To add to the complexity, today scientists estimate that the diameter of the universe is 30 - 40 billion light years (1 light year = 9,460,730, 472,580.8 km or 5,878,625,373,183 miles), and still expanding.<sup>5</sup> This is what the Scriptures refer as “expanse.” By these facts and numbers, we can put to rest the impossibility of an unguided evolution spreading the universe but concentrate on the truth of who is able to spread such a vast galaxy, and sustain the planets and the billions of stars in emptiness.



**Photo of expanding universe after creation by God. Photo licensed by Creative Commons under CC-BY-SA. Accessed May 14, 2019**

While the Genesis account states that that Triune God created the heavens (the universe) and the earth when the Spirit of God was hovering upon the darkness of the deep (Gen. 1:1), Apostle John very clearly states Jesus was involved in the creative process of the universe “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:1-5). John further states that “He was in the world, and the world was made through him” (John 1:10). Apostle Paul further amplified the pre-eminence of Christ in creation of the universe and life (Col. 1:15-17).

Scientists since 2012 have found the source of dark matter from which the universe was created in the beginning, when the Spirit of God was hovering upon the face of the waters, when darkness was on the face of the deep.<sup>6</sup> This darkness that was upon the deep on which God’s Spirit worked was the pitch-dark matter scientists have described from which the universe was created as explained in the recently published book, “Origins of the Universe, Life and Species: New Perspectives from Science and Theology.” Almost all the entire scientific evidence of the last five hundred years only support the amazing facts of creation of the universes, the earth, the seas, the planets and stars. The systematic creation and how long it took for God to create everything before he rested has been scientifically explained with biblical reference in that book<sup>5</sup>

## God's Systematic Creation

The systematic creation of life of organisms and human race on six days is calculated to be six extensive periods and not six literal days is explained in chapter 3, pages 32-47 of the above referenced book. "Human race is not an evolutionary product, not to mention any life possessing organisms. The only difference being the millions or species and God's unique species, *humanity* is that while all other species from bacteria to behemoth were spoken into existence, God hand crafted human body from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils, the breath of life, God's Spirit into man whom he created in his own image. There are so-called theologians, and a group of clergies of different denominations supporting the theory of evolution in a compromise to please the evolutionists. By compromising, they reject God's creative power and the Spirit he breathed into the first man who became a living being. The problem is, they are unable to answer the question or to ascertain into which evolutionary organism God breathed his Spirit, a bacterium, an amoeba or a slime mould from which human being evolved? Darwinian evolution is a myth and hoax, has been affirmed by several cosmologists, astrophysicists and biological scientists. It was a systematic creation and humanity in the image of God was the last creation, after everything else was set ready for human life, propagation, and fellowship with the *Creator*.

## Challenging God's Creative Power

However, Darwin claimed in *Origin of Species* that human beings were evolved from ancestral primates. However, his primary conviction was the Biblical truth that a *Creator* exists, who breathed his life into man, which Darwin conveniently changed into "one or more organisms." This simply means that in the view of Darwinian evolutionists, humans are no more than any other animal. It is ironical that Darwin evidently overlooked to address whether human beings were a preordained goal of the *Creator* when he knew that God did not breathe life into a bacterium or any other organism but only into humanity he specially created. The human body made of dust (atoms) of the earth became a living being when God breathed his Spirit into (within) us (Gen. 2:7). Apostle Paul reminds humanity that because God breathed his Spirit into human race, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16).

Affirming that God's breath and Spirit made the living structure of human beings (Gen, 2:7), of course would have been detrimental to his theory of evolution based on natural selection. Scientific and Biblical revelations are not in conflict. In fact, all scientific facts that have been discovered are recorded in the Bible. I have to believe that since both the universe and everything within had originated with God, who set the physical laws of atomic interactions, they have to be more in harmony than discord. Only what separate them is the imperfect understanding of scientists about Biblical theology and the unwillingness of fundamentalists and pugnacious evolutionist to seek answers that are already recorded in the Bible for a coherent picture of scientific

revelations of the Biblical truths of life and origins of universe and species.

## God, the Great Redeemer and Saviour

When God created the physical universe with physical elements, set the universe in motion, and created all living things, man and woman, he gave them dominion over all creatures in the land, sea and air. Man's dominion on earth and elsewhere in the universe was expected to be in relation with the *Creator*. That relationship was broken in the Garden soon after when humans violated God's instruction (Gn. 2:16-17). Forbidding the fruit of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" was a simple restriction to trust God for the guidance of gaining true knowledge of what is good and what is evil through obedience. Consequently, humanity had been fallen from grace, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden and the earth was cursed. Because of the continuous rebellion, God felt sorry that he created humanity (Gen. 6:7).

The first promise of a Redeemer thus appears in Genesis 3:15, the Seed of Woman. Here begins the hereditary line of the Seed from Seth, Adam's third son (Gen. 5:3), Noah (Gen. 6:8-10), Shem (Gen. 9: 26-27), Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4), Isaac (Gen. 17:19-21), Jacob (Gen. 28:1-14), Judah (Gen. 49:10), David (2 Sam. 7:5-17), Immanuel—Jesus Christ, the Redeemer (Isa. 7:10-14; Mt. 1:1, 20-23; Jn. 12:31-33; 1 Jn. 3:8). There are many gaps between these patriarchs—Noah is the tenth generation from Adam; Abraham is the tenth generation from Noah; Abraham to David there were 14 generations; and 28 generations from David to Jesus, the Redeemer. Human race has been in rebellion always, but God's eternal plan was to adopt (redeem) us back as children through Jesus Christ that we should be holy and blameless (Eph. 1:4-5)

"For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, who is called the God of all the earth" (Isaiah 54:5). The verse quoted here illustrates few important words of relationship, such as husband, maker, redeemer, the Holy One, God of all the earth. Redeemer is one who buys back something that has been pawned, to free a person, to compensate for or cancel out the faults or debts, absolutely free for the redeemed. God uses metaphorically the word husband because in several Scriptures God says he is married to Israel. "Your husband is your Maker" (Isa. 54:5). "I was a husbandman to them" (Jer. 31:33). In that day, you will call me my husband (Hos. 2:16). Israel is the name of a person, a nation and all redeemed people who share in the faith of Abraham.

Bible throughout decries that humanity became very unfaithful to God, played harlotry by seeking other gods. But God in his great compassion bought us back with the promise of everlasting life. First Israel was in bondage in Egypt and God redeemed them by wonders and miracles and brought them to the land of promise. Before they entered Canaan, at Mount Sinai there was an exchange of vow between God and Israel, and Israel swore to be faithful to the Lord. (Exod.19:4-8). First Israel was the virgin bride keeping all her chastity and faithfulness to the living God, but humanity broke the Sinai Covenant, the first and foremost of the Ten Commandments "You shall not have other gods before me" (Exod. 20:1-3). They worshiped foreign gods since the days of Solomon until the birth of Messiah. Thus God allegorically says, "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of

divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries” (Jer. 3:8). This is in reference to the aggression, oppression, captivity and deportation by Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Roman Empire. Then at the appointed time Christ the Redeemer, entered the human history in flesh (John 1:14).

### Redemption is for All Humanity

Jacob is the progenitor of the generations of Israel. Israel means all redeemed people of earth who believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Redeemer. Jacob served Laban seven years before he could marry Rachael, and all together he spent twenty-one years’ serving Laban before he could go back to his father’s place in Canaan. Jacob’s return to his father’s homeland in Canaan with his wives, children, faithful servants and all his possessions is an allegory to one of the parables of Jesus. It was on his return to Canaan, he fully surrendered to God in a wrestling match all night, at the ford of River Jabbok, when his name was changed to ISRAEL. Jesus taught: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Mat. 13:44). The man Jesus refers here is none other than Christ himself, who paid all that he had, left heaven, looking for the field, the whole world, and the people to be redeemed which shall form his bride. Jacob spent good deal of his time and almost everything to gain Rachael, his bribe. It is through the generations of Jacob that the Old Testament church was formed, which Christ redeemed sanctified by his death on Calvary.

We were not redeemed with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Pet. 1:18-19). All redeemed people are “Bride in waiting” to enter the kingdom of heaven, symbolized by the earthly Canaan, to where Jacob brought his family and possession, and the Israelites were led by Moses to Mount Sinai, and then Joshua led them to the Promised Land. God redirected Jacob to Bethel where he met God for the very first time in his life, where he made an altar to God. The Gospels and the rest of the New Testament proclaim the redeeming purpose of God through Jesus Christ. Christ himself said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles taught that all believers are sanctified by the blood of Christ and belongs to him. “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2). The redeeming power of God in Christ is explained by Paul in Romans that we are buried with Christ in his death and resurrection through baptism and faith, so that we should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). Yahweh is the God of all earth, meaning his redeeming power is not for just one ethnic group, but to whole humanity of the entire earth, as well as the whole earth to redeemed from the pollution created by man.

### God, Our Great Sustainer

All religions agree that God is the sustainer of the universe and everything within it. “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; who makes lightning for the rain, who brings forth the wind from His treasures” (psalm 135: 6-7). “My Father is always at his work, even to this very day; and I am also working: (John 5:17). Through his Epistle to Colossians, Paul further provides

convincing proof to scientists and all who doubt that, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may have the pre-eminence” (Col. 1:15-17). “He” is here in reference to Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity.

It was all about Christ what Paul said in Colossians (Col. 1:15-20). The verses are records of celebration of Christ’s reign, first as the *Creator* and Sustainer of the cosmos, and second as the Redeemer and head of the Church, his Bride. The verses also confirm the reconciliation Christ made between God and humankind by what he accomplished on the cross. He upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3). And in him all things hold together (Col. 1:17). These authentic verses clearly convey that the *Creator* sustains everything in the universe. While non-believing physicists and evolutionary scientists will have their answers, the truth of the matter is God sustains everything he created. Apostle Paul, the greatest Jewish and Christian theologian, categorically praises God for the pre-eminence of Christ as the *Creator, Redeemer* and *Sustainer*.

As some people believe God does not retreat back after the creation of the universe. According to the first law of thermodynamics, matter and energy can neither be created nor destroyed. That means the entire matter and energy God created for the universe is recycled, transforming energy from one form to the other so that the quantity of original dark matter God used remain constant in the universe as living and nonliving things. Science has proved that nothing will continue to exist unless some force sustains it. That force is God, the *Creator*. To fully understand God as the *Creator, Redeemer* and *Sustainer*, we must first understand who we are; but to acquire that knowledge, we must first know to whom we belong. People who belong to God only can KNOW him, but many others know about him. It is amazing that Scripture proves unambiguously that the eternal God is the *Creator*, and that Christ the *Redeemer* is the *Saviour* of the world, in whose hands the universe rests, and the destiny of humanity hangs.

### Notes

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