

A person in a dark jacket and blue jeans is walking away from the viewer down a dirt path in a misty forest. The trees are tall and thin, with bare branches, and the fog is thick, creating a somber and mysterious atmosphere. The path is slightly overgrown with moss and small plants.

The Humanist God

by Dr. D. Michael Hentrich

A unique critical look at god from common-sensical, principled and Biblical perspectives

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The Humanist God

Debunking both the god humanists have hated as well as
the god religionists have loved

With deepest appreciation to...

my parents and my ancestors, who guided me in my life to have the many experiences which allowed me to be who I am and think the way I do; and, to the late Dr. Sun Myung Moon for revealing and laying open the real living God for all to see and experience, and for debunking many traditional concepts of God. Without his contribution, some of the insights within this volume would not have been possible.

Preface

While there are certainly many types of people who would refer to themselves as “humanists” we will not undertake an exhaustive survey of classical or contemporary humanism in this book. Rather, we will use a broad brush and speak generally about those contemporary humanists who reject the notion of a divine creator who is involved in people’s everyday lives. As such, a good humanist tends to define human and social life solely based on rational and empirical perspectives and dismiss any form of mysticism or spirituality.

We will scrutinize the god that is hated by so many people. We will dissect that god and analyze the findings. But, we will also scrutinize the god of “believers” and perform a sort of autopsy on the fictitious and ferocious god in whom many of them believe. The focus of this work is therefore on our common notions of god, rather than on all the various related and unrelated aspects of what constitutes humanism and/or what defines the faithful “believer”.

Are we advocating a new kind of god here? Are we attempting to redefine god? As you progress through this book, you will decide the answer to these questions for yourself. This discussion is long overdue.

Some contemporary humanists will find this book upsetting. Indeed, some believers in god will also find this book upsetting. That is because we will show that both perspectives are wrought with defects. Indeed, you will discover how our notions of god have been cancerous to both believers and non-believers alike.

You must drop your guard before reading this book. All of your defenses and pre-conceived notions will be under scrutiny. If you are inflexible, set in your ways, and absolutely sure that what you have always thought about god must needs be correct, whether you are a good humanist or a believer, then put this book down and find one that reinforces your way of thinking and makes you feel self-assured. If your boat cannot take some buffeting winds, then you have the wrong book in your hands. If you are still with me, then hold on and enjoy the ride. Let's go...

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CHAPTER I

The hated god

The god who saves a few people and lets everyone else suffer in eternal hell

It is the humanist's heartfelt cry to diss a god who is so cold-hearted and cruel that he somehow takes delight in watching his fiery hell fill up with his children while a handful get to enjoy happiness with him in heaven. Is it not how the Abrahamic God appears? The Greeks, Hindus and others have some pretty harsh gods, but the Old Testament God, especially, would appear to be able to hold his own with the worst of them.

Such behavior effectively makes God the author and creator of eternal suffering and misery. For what? For the sake of a handful of special people who passed his test? Who needs a god like that? Even deadbeat human fathers who visit their kids once-in-a-while or pay child support look more respectable.

If such a god were walking on the earth in a physical body, he might be shot, executed, tortured to death, or imprisoned for life. Who would worship him? If there is a devil, or a Satan, you might suspect him to be the brother of such a god. So, why do people

choose to believe in and worship a god who looks so cruel and heartless?

Does this perception of God come from the Bible? Yes and no. As I said, God looks pretty ferocious in the Old Testament writings. There are many fiery passages in which God warns people of the suffering that they will incur if they choose not to obey him. God sometimes says he will even inflict the punishment, himself...

The LORD will smite you with consumption, and with fever, inflammation, and fiery heat, and with drought, and with blasting, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish.¹

However, the New Testament stories of the lost sheep and the prodigal son seem to contradict such a notion of a mean and nasty god.² The very persona of Jesus seems to convey a totally different feeling.

Perhaps it's Paul's letter to the Romans, where he tries to say that God can do whatever he pleases and who are we to object?³ But these few passages are so completely out of sync with the caring, compassionate God conveyed throughout the rest of the New Testament, and even by Paul himself. The vivid contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament is a big reason many contemporary Bibles omit the Old Testament altogether.

¹ The Holy Bible, Deuteronomy 28:22

² Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:11-32

³ Romans 9:10-22

“But God is God,” people say. He is expected to be unchanging. Could the compassionate God of the New Testament be the same fearsome God who threatened and castigated the Hebrews in the Old Testament? Sounds impossible. But, we need to consider a major factor which could account for such a radical change of appearance.

The New Testament is built around a man who claimed to be different from anyone in the Old Testament. His said his frame of reference was different from all of them. He portrayed himself to be intimately related to this God. The others, even Moses and David, were allegedly far more distant. Their perceptions were relatively indirect and clouded.

Not only that, but as was pointed out by the late Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012) during a speech given in Denver years ago, before and after Jesus God spoke to man through angel intermediaries. A cursory search through the Bible bears this out. Even Moses’ encounters with the god of the burning bush were actually with an angel, according to the Bible.⁴

Let’s stop here for a short course on angels. As commonly reported by many spiritual mystics, angels exist and are wonderful creatures, but they do not experience life the way humans do. They do not experience marriage, family, parenthood, siblings, grandparents, etc. They are individual, task-oriented creatures, and they are happy that way. They are not always superior, or even equal, to humans in the realm of compassion since they lack these kinds of experiences. In addition, they do not live in the molasses of slowed-

⁴ Exodus 3:2-4

down time and space, as we humans do. Therefore, character traits such as a sense of deferred gratification, patience and tolerance, which are taken for granted in human life, are not so easily developed in their environment where they need not wait for or tolerate anything. In addition, they were created as servants and messengers in relation to God. They are not in a parent-child relationship with God.

Against that backdrop, Moon said the angels' interpretations of God's instructions to man often came across as stern, harsh and punishing to humans. In other words, he was saying that God didn't change but the messenger changed. The feeling and flavor of the messages from God changed with the messengers. He was saying God was loving and compassionate in Moses' day, too, but through the filter of his emissaries, the angels, he came across as a tough and tyrannical law-giver. Perhaps the angels felt that was the kind of god the people of that era needed to perceive, and perhaps to fear, in order for them to surrender to this God and obey.

In this perspective, God's warnings took on the appearance of judgments and threats. God's disappointment took on the flavor of anger. Obedience became the fear of punishment. The angel said to Abraham, "Now I know that you *fear* God."⁵ Case in point. It would be interesting to ponder how Jesus might have expressed it.

Could this perspective be true? What if the tyrannical Old Testament God is a misrepresentation of a god who is, in reality, compassionate? Could we have been operating on a false premise all

⁵ Genesis 22:12

these millenia? What if we have been directing our disdain at a god who never existed? The potential historical and personal consequences are staggering. If nothing else, it is put on the table as food for thought.

The god who decides your destiny (even before you were born)

Many people can't stand to be told what to do, especially without their permission. If they wanted to be ordered around, they would join the army. But, how much worse can it be than to be under the thumb of a god who somehow decides our eternal destiny for us, without any consultation with us, and even before we were conceived or born? What happened to free choice? What happened to free will? What happened to opportunity?

What this concept effectively means is that, no matter how saintly a life you might lead, if this god who pegged you for hell before you were conceived or born has his way, you will be going there no matter how good of a life you try to live. You could be another Mother Theresa, but it doesn't matter. Your efforts to be good were in vain. You might as well have indulged in every vice you could think of, because when it's all said and done, you're going south. Too bad.

Likewise, no matter how bad of a life you might have lived; no matter how many women you raped, or children you cut up and put

in your refrigerator, or banks you robbed, if this god decided you were bound for heaven before you were even conceived or born, then when you check out, you're bound for heaven to be with him. Or, let's be more generous, at least he knew you would repent of your dastardly deeds on your deathbed and accept his eternal salvation.

A rational person must wonder how a being that created the order and logic of this universe could possibly be so unprincipled. If god were really like this, then why would we have need for religions? Why prophets and Bibles? Why bother. Is it like a game and we are the only players who don't know the outcome? After all, it's all scripted out. The life we live loses all meaning and value.

One would think God might find this pastime somewhat boring. No surprises in God's life. He already knows the outcome of every life that will ever be lived, and every step of every person as they live their life. Do people really believe in this kind of god? Someone may need to suggest to him to get a life. Where in the world do we get such a preposterous idea?

We might lay the blame at the feet of Paul for writing a few paragraphs⁶ that John Calvin and some other misguided people could construct an entire belief system upon, in total contradiction to the rest of the Bible. What happened to the huge two-letter word "IF" that permeates the Old and New Testaments, from beginning to end? "If you do this, you'll be blessed, but if you don't, you will suffer."⁷ This kind of expression shows up all throughout the Bible.

⁶ Romans 9:10-21

⁷ Deuteronomy 28

But no! That would make us responsible for our actions and our eternal destiny. We don't want that! The lazy, irresponsible mind of man chooses to believe the irrational, the illogical, the non-sensical. It's more comfortable. But the bottom line is, it looks suspiciously like people created a monster-god who doesn't even exist, and we choose to either live in terror or self-righteous assurance and comfort in his tyrannical shadows.

Perhaps it is *us* who seem to be somehow content if everyone else suffers in fear and misery, even our parents, spouse and children, as long as "I" can be "saved" and happy. There appears to be no rational or Biblical reason to believe that God ever thought or felt like this. It may have just been us.

The god who is *not* an advocate of the "common good"

Religious people are quick to say that we are all God's children and God cares about everybody. We have heard it from Muslims, Christians, and others. But, the practice of the various faiths seems to bring that into question. Christian people say "He gives everyone a chance to be saved. He gave his son for them." But, if and when people suffer, especially those who don't believe that, then they are sometimes told they are suffering because they are not living within God's graces. He can't or won't help them because they didn't surrender to him.

The evidence in the Bible seems to carry a strong discriminatory message. It looks like this god loved the Jews but hated the philistines and the other peoples who lived near them or got in their way. The Hebrews were told to slaughter them all when they entered Canaan. People today are told that if they just accept Jesus, they will be blessed and saved. Catholics have requisite sacraments. If they just do the right rituals, they will be rewarded, at least in heaven. If not, too bad for them. But that would not seem to describe a god who was living for the common good. That would be the epitome of conditional love.

Even many human fathers would treat their own children better than that. Granted, there are a few parents who would cut off a child and even disown them if they failed to live up to their expectations. There are even such unbelievable things as “honor killings” in Islamic culture, for children who stray from the path. But, how does the rest of the world regard such parents? To say that they need parenting classes would be an understatement. Then should we deduce that God needs a parenting class, too, taught by humans. After all, it would seem that he doesn’t really care about anyone if they don’t bow down to him.

You say, “Not at all! He’s just withholding his love from them so they will come back home to his bosom. If he didn’t do that, they would never bow down and submit to him, or come home.” Well, it all sounds somewhat logical, but how far does it go? Where’s the love?

This whole perspective seems like a contradiction even to what the faithful preach. Wasn't the love we were supposed to learn from Jesus one of loving even those who don't deserve to be loved? Wasn't that the whole point? Again, what were the stories of the lost sheep and the prodigal son all about? What about the sun rising both on the good and the evil, and the rain falling on both the just and the unjust?⁸ Is God really living for the common good, or not? Are we missing something here? Is he just telling us to do it, but not doing it himself? Is he a hypocrite?

If we are really serious to want to find a resolution to this problem, then perhaps the key to this conflicted situation lies in the authors of the faiths. They dance around on both sides of the fence on this issue. God loves everyone and cares about everyone, but not really. Could the answer possibly lay in unperceived love? When a human parent withholds the expression of his love from his disobedient child, does his inner feeling of love for the child diminish? Hopefully not. The child can run to his parent for reassurance and receive a big hug. We can confirm or reconfirm that our parent still loves us, even when we are on "time out" or grounded.

But, in terms of an invisible, intangible god, it is undeniably a different situation. Humans cannot perceive a god's love if and when it is not being expressed. We can't see his face. We can't run and get a hug of reassurance. We can't see if he's actually crying over our mischief or in an angry rage. What if he feels more pain than we do? In a sense, humans are somewhat autistic in their relationship with a god.

⁸ Matthew 5:45

There are so many stories of people who were living a reckless life, but who changed their perspective 180 degrees and later testified that when they looked back, they could see how the hand of God had protected and guided them, even when they were most defiant and rebellious. They could see, in hindsight, how God was calling and reaching out to them in many ways, but they just were in no frame of mind to perceive it at the time.

Could we have been too quick to judge? Who knows if the “unsaved” person might have had an even rougher road in life if the love of God were not quietly operating all around them? Who knows? We might do well to make room in our minds and hearts for all the possibilities and reboot ourselves in the remote chance that our perspectives may need adjusting.

The god who is happy, indifferent, and peaceful while we suffer

I recently met a passionate atheist who declared “It’s much easier to believe there is no god than to believe one exists. How could there be a good god when there is so much pain and suffering in the world?” Sounds like a good argument, on the surface of it. The observation is that there is a huge contradiction between the existence of a good and loving god, and this hurtful, selfish and suffering world. His premise is the belief that if there is a god, he

must be involved in what is going on in our everyday lives in this world.

But on the other hand, people also say, “God is God. How could he get his hands soiled in all the mean and nasty, dirty, ugly things of this world? He’s God. God can’t be bothered. He must be happy and peaceful, unaffected by our suffering, and sipping martinis on a beach somewhere in heaven.” Our traditional thinking has offered us these two primary options to pick from. Where did such notions of a god come from? That’s a good question. Let’s look at the atheist’s premise that if a god exists, he must surely be involved in our everyday lives.

In spite of how common-sensical it might seem to a believer, there is actually no basis for it in the Bible. Jesus said God knows every hair on our head. That is awareness. He said how could a sparrow fall from its nest and God not know it?⁹ Again, that is awareness. He said God is aware. That does not mean God is actively involved and responsible for what happens. He will not comb your hair when he sees it is out-of-place, nor rescue the bird who fell from the nest. Then, if God exists and is aware but does not get involved, why not? Our kneejerk reaction may be that he just doesn’t care.

Well, we don’t like the idea that a god exists but doesn’t care about us. That would contradict our concept of a god of deepest compassion and love. So, we choose the second option; God has deepest love but is too holy and good to get involved. Unfortunately, that would imply that being holy and good is more important to God

⁹ Matthew 10:29,30 NIV

than loving his children. Don't tell that to parents while they are changing their baby's dirty diapers. Or, perhaps God is a slave to his perfection and cannot violate or compromise it and step down off his regal throne. Then love must not be the most important thing to him.

Neither of these two options seems fully satisfying. How frustrating. Could it be that both scenarios are wrong? Could there be a third option that we may have failed to consider?

What if, in spite of the wretched state of human affairs, a god does exist and is fully aware of our situations. What if this god cares desperately about us and is not happy and carefree, sipping martinis on a beach in heaven? What if he is suffering his heart out and full of tears over our suffering and we just don't see it or feel it?

The stories of the lost sheep and the prodigal son in the Bible seem to point us in that direction. What about the scripture that says God wills that no one should perish?¹⁰ What about this God's relentless historical efforts to save people? What about the "grief" God allegedly felt after the fall?¹¹ These pieces of Biblical evidence would suggest that this God could be experiencing more pain over our plight than even we are? What if he was hurting while flooding the earth in Noah's day because it was something unpleasant he had to do?

Choosing this third option would be very discomfoting for self-centered humans because it would mean that we would have been

¹⁰ Matthew 18:14

¹¹ Genesis 6:6

causing God to suffer, and therefore we also hold the key to his happiness and fulfillment by mending our ways and living happy, good lives. Well, that's a big order. No thanks. We'll choose to believe in a god who is just too good and holy, living in his own world and carefree. It's easier, even though such a paradigm is wrought with logical problems and contradictions.

But if the third option were somehow true, and this god's love were so great, then why does it seem he is not involved in our problematic everyday lives? The missing piece to this puzzle could be human responsibility. What if we have grossly underestimated the responsibility that we have for our own lives? What if we have long been assuming that it was all up to this god when it wasn't? What if this god planned for humans to naturally grow up to fully embody his love and heart and create a beautiful society and world? What if he gave man everything he needed to do that but refuses to do it for us? What if our humanity depends on us doing it ourselves? What if he refuses manage the everyday affairs of our lives because he refuses to undermine our humanity and cripple our ability to become the awesome object of his love? What if it is this god's love for us that limits his involvement, rather than a cold heart? Could it be possible?

One consequence of option number three is that it would make each one of us critically important and vital to the future happiness of God, himself. Perhaps he's working for our happiness knowing that his own happiness comes along with it. Perhaps rather than getting a suntan in the beaches of heaven, God has been quietly but deeply entangled in our wounded hearts and selfish greed, hoping

we can figure it all out and untangle this mess. Even though he may have given us lots of messages over the years, maybe we still don't really get it. Maybe we have just been suffering from a monumental communication problem. Could it be?

The god who has a problem with sex

While Paul said it was better to stay single than to marry,¹² and while priests, nuns and monks believe that the way to be closest to God is to remain celibate, some of the women in Jesus' lineage were either prostitutes or seemingly quite immoral women. Tamar posed as a prostitute to seduce her father in law.¹³ Sex can sometimes be problematic for the faithful. If there is a god, he certainly gave sex to all the animals and creatures, as well as to man. Then why would he make it so stimulating and attractive and yet bear the stigma of shame? Why? Why are we punished by this god. Doesn't he want us to be happy? Seems not. Go away!

Some people actually consider Jesus to be neuter, or a-sexual. Adam and Eve covered their sexual organs in the Garden,¹⁴ after they fell. Sex became a dirty word. If you want to be closest to god, don't marry. It's the same for Hindus and Buddhists, and others.

¹² 1/Corinthians 7:36-38

¹³ Genesis 38

¹⁴ Genesis 3:7

The meaning of the aprons of fig leaves in the garden seems obvious enough. Many thinkers in history have pointed out the sexual implications of this story. Clement of Alexandria in the second century wrote:

"... the first man of our race did not await the appropriate time, desiring the favor of marriage before the proper hour and he fell into sin by not waiting the time of God's will...they (Adam and Eve) were impelled to do it before the normal time because they were still young and were persuaded by deception." (On Marriage XIV:94, XVII:102-103).

Theophilus of Antioch (140-184 A.D.) and St. Irenaeus (120-202 A.D.) also believed Adam to have acted prematurely when he violated the rule of abstaining from a sexual union with Eve, his future wife. The idea of a premature sexual union was shared by Peter Lombard (1096-1160 A.D.), Hugo of St. Victor (1096-1141 A.D.), Alexander of Hales (1185-1245 a.d.), St. Bonaventura (1221-1274 A.D.), John Duns Scotus (1266-1308 A.D.) and others. Athenagoras (133-190 A.D.), St. Athanasius (296-373 a.d.), St. Ambrose (340-397 A.D.), St. Jerome (347-420 A.D.), and St. Justin (115-180 A.D.) held similar views.

But wait. The faithful also say God made them “in his image, male and female he created them.” God told the first man and woman to “multiply”.¹⁵ Then we must be missing something here. Have sex, but don’t have sex. God made it, but it is unclean. How can we understand this dilemma? If we look at sexual activity, itself, we may not find any answers. Perhaps the problem is not in the action, itself.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:28

Perhaps the problem lies in the qualitative side of it. What kind of sex? What is going on with sex?

Let's face it. Sometimes we do good things for all the wrong reasons. Sometimes sex is dutiful. Sometimes it is seductive and manipulative. Sometimes it is just a psychological power trip. Sometimes it is a hoped-for fix for the lack of emotional love. How often is sex an expression of deepest compassion for one's partner? Sometimes, for sure. But, how often? No one can say.

Sun Myung Moon claimed to be fulfilling the role of a new Adam and his wife a new Eve, and together they said that the unique blessing marriage that they offered was the antidote to the sexual and emotional love damage initiated by the original Adam and Eve in the garden. They called upon all monks, priests and nuns to end their single lives and receive this blessing marriage and begin living normal married lives expressing a new divine quality of sexuality and love in their relationships. Time will tell how that goes.

If there is a god who intended for people to have sex, then is there some possibility that perhaps there is something wrong with how we are expressing and experiencing it? Could we have been pointing the finger at God while the other three fingers point back at us. Maybe sex would be more of a divine experience of love if we focused more on our internals and less on our externals. Who knows?

The god of countless laws and rules

There are 613 laws in Judaism. These laws regulate virtually every thought and action a person makes in their life. What kind of dishes to use. What kind of meat to eat. How to dress. What days you can't do work, even to pick up the telephone or turn a doorknob. Christians have far fewer rules. Muslims are in between.

If these laws came from god, then he might make a good government bureaucrat. Maybe there is a lawmaking body of politicians in heaven. One has to wonder why all the rules and laws and commandments? It can be suffocating to our very humanity. And what could be the purpose of it all? Some would say it is to appease a micromanaging god and meet with his approval, or suffer the consequences. Are all these rules just to force people into servitude? Will they enable us to be happier, or to love more?

Religion is, at best, a remedial construct. The only institution in the Garden was the family. The prophets, temples and scriptures seem to have been created to help us repair our wayward selves after getting off to a bad start. That would mean that we should be living in a world without religion at all; without any of these artificial rules, laws and commandments. No other creature seems to have need for them.

Granted, people are self-centered and greedy and have many undesirable manifestations of these personality traits, such as racism, intolerance and jealousy, etc. But, while all the various rules can regulate behavior, they cannot really change the root cause of our

problems. Martin Luther King once said “...*the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me* .”¹⁶

Jesus seemed to be thinking the same way. Didn't he say that if we just loved God and one another, that we would be fulfilling all the laws?¹⁷ Maybe that's the point. Maybe it was never really about laws, rules and commandments. Maybe it was always about love. Even Paul shared a similar sentiment when he said even if we have all kinds of accomplishments in our spiritual life, but have not love, we have nothing.¹⁸ It's all about love. Unfortunately, laws, rules and commandments have become all the more necessary in the absence of love. We humans seem bent upon trying to force one another to imitate a person of genuine love through the application of laws.

The problem is, the imitation of genuine love is not satisfying.

The patriarchal god

Is god sexist, too? Where is the feminine? God is always “He”. “Our *Father* who art in heaven.”¹⁹ Angels are always referenced as “He”. What are women? Just lowly after-thoughts of God's creation? Are they inferior to men? Nature seems pretty evenly balanced between male and female. Then, what happened to religion and God?

¹⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., 08-20-2008

¹⁷ Matthew 22:37-39

¹⁸ 1Corinthians 13:1-3

¹⁹ Matthew 6:9

Many Christians believe that Jesus was God. Wasn't he a man, too? But God said "Let us make man in our image. Male and female he created them."²⁰ Paul likened Jesus to a new Adam.²¹ Adam had a wife. So, where is Jesus' wife? We can take some solace in the prophetic passage in the Book of Revelation which says Jesus will finally take his bride in the prophesied marriage supper of the lamb.²²

Why is a woman just supposed to "submit to" and "obey" her husband?²³ Is that all there is? Is that God's marriage advice? Of course, there are many other indirect instructions applicable to marriage and family to be found in the Bible. But, a woman's role in life seems clearly below the man. How can we apply that in our lives? How can we use that? It doesn't feel comfortable. Go away!

Maybe the Good Book has some bias in it. Maybe those who wrote the various books had a male bias. Maybe nature is a more authentic, unbiased expression of who and what this god really is. After all, nature is filled with pairs of male and female. Both are essentially important and indispensable. The mother is usually the one to nurture and protect the young when they need it. Inferiority is not generally seen as a characteristic of the female, in nature.

Shouldn't humanity share these same traits? Women are not only just as valuable, important and essential as men, but they are also the ones who typically nurture and raise the young in every generation. Their role is critical, not only to the perpetuation of the human species, but to the quality of life.

The union of a man and woman must be a more complete expression and representation of this god than just a single man alone

²⁰ Genesis 1:27

²¹ 1Corinthians 15:45

²² Revelations 19:9

²³ Ephesians 5:22-24; 1Peter 3:1

or a single woman, alone. Then why are most religions led and officiated by men? Perhaps someday we will see a more balanced representation of the masculine and feminine in the conceptualization and representation of God.

The god who leads to bigotry and prejudice

When humanists think of religion and religious people, especially fanatical religious people, they immediately think of bloodshed and terror. While it's not quite true, it's often been said that more people have died in the name of religion than otherwise. The argument sounds compelling. Consider Muslims killing Christians and burning Bibles, the Crusades, Isis, the Thirty-years war between the Catholics and Protestants, the wars surrounding Israel and Jerusalem, and the numerous religious wars throughout Europe, Africa and Asia.

Well, the stats are unimportant. Far too many millions have died on both sides of the fence, i.e., religious or non-religious. It's almost like the pot calling the kettle black. Why? Because self-centered, ego-centric and self-righteous people fill both sides of the camp. Is that what god and religion leads to, also? Who needs it? It can arguably look like religions have been more of a curse than a cure; or at least not any substantial improvement.

What's the premise of all the inhumanity? The thinking of too many of the faithful seems to be, "If I'm on God's side, I can reject, despise and even kill people I judge to be unholy; even if they are

devoutly religious but theirs does not fit my definition of a true religion.”

How can such a premise be correct? Some parts of the Bible teach love for one’s enemy. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”²⁴ Some parts of the Koran present a similar message. But, other parts are not so kind. Throughout much of the Bible, God appears to be an exclusivist god. He seems only out to save the chosen people, even at the expense of the rest.

It looks like one more convoluted contradiction. God tries to save all people; he sends Jesus and the many prophets, and we are told there is only one god and he wills that none perish. But, salvation is reserved only for “whoever believes in him.”²⁵ The exclusivist discrimination cannot be ignored, especially in the Old Testament. Could there be a plausible explanation that makes sense out of all this stuff? Is God really like this?

What’s the answer? Humanism says, if there is a god who is the root cause of all this prejudiced and bigoted religious stuff, forget him and love and care for people as a good Humanist. If God is really as invested in caring for humanity as much as a good humanist, the evidence needs to be made more clear and demonstrated. “Love one another as I have loved you,”²⁶ would be the right message. The question becomes, is it just a slogan? Is the apparent contradiction in God, or in man?

²⁴ Matthew 25:40

²⁵ John 3:16

²⁶ John 15:12

Is god really that way? That's the question. Jesus said the end of this corruption will not come until his gospel has been taught to the whole world.²⁷ He said love your enemy.²⁸ Muslims generally have a more forceful and even violent method by which they foresee the whole world being saved. But, an underlying desire for universal salvation can be found in both. It is there. But, the implementation is fraught with ugly hatred and bigotry and prejudice.

Could we be missing something here? Was Jesus showing us the real heart of God by giving his life even for those who hated and killed him. Are the Biblical expressions that don't align with that somehow distortions of the real god? Could we again be focusing on the wrong things, here? Could it be that God's personality has been so obscured by people's own self-righteous and prejudiced natures that his efforts look as bad or worse than those of the rest of society? How else can we make sense of all this?

The god who is all-powerful, but does not solve our problems

Who knows how powerful God is? What would be our frame of reference on this? Has anyone measured it? On the one hand, the faithful say, "Well, he made the whole universe. He must be awfully

²⁷ Matthew 24:14

²⁸ Matthew 5:44

powerful. There is certainly nothing he can't do." If that's the case, then it raises some serious questions.

For example, why doesn't this all-powerful god take action to fix this broken world we live in? Why doesn't he stop the wars? Why doesn't he make people happy and successful? Why doesn't he fix the environment? Why doesn't he seem to do *anything*? Is he really out there?

You say he *is* all-powerful, and that he *is* all-loving and all-caring. But, where's the evidence of that? You just can't have it both ways. Based on his very limited intervention into the deeply troubled everyday affairs of men, assuming he is good, then something must be lacking in his vast powers. Or, if he is really all-powerful, then based on his limited intervention into the everyday affairs of men, he must not care. Which way is it? Or is there a third alternative?

Unificationists believe that God is all powerful, and also totally good and loving, but that he *self-imposes* limits on his own intervention in the everyday affairs of men for a reason. The reason cited is man's intrinsic portion of responsibility. In other words, God's design for human beings is such that they must naturally grow their character and heart to full maturity. Therefore, God absolutely refuses to intervene in man's everyday affairs in any way that would usurp their portion of responsibility and undermine their learning and growing.

Thus, in this perspective, God created the universe and everything natural in it, and gave man lots of opportunity. But, the

rest was the responsibility of people. God will not violate their intrinsic responsibility and undermine their ability to learn and grow and complete themselves, thereby enabling them to take pride in becoming genuine owners of their own lives and accomplishments. He will not undermine their humanity. For man's own happiness and fulfillment, God refuses to interfere. Thus, he may be all powerful and all loving, but, he limited his relationship with man to empower man to become greater. Could it be? Food for thought.

The god of cheap grace

If you live a totally licentious and criminal life, full of all kinds of horrendous sins and wickedness, but you repent and accept Jesus on your death bed, you can go to heaven! What a deal. The ticket to heaven is free for anyone who accepts it. Sounds great! But what about the damage done? I know you repented for totaling my car yesterday, and I really do forgive you, but what about my car? With our fellow man we have to take responsibility for our mistakes, but with God we don't? Just confess and surrender?

Is forgiveness really all that we need? All we have to do is believe in Jesus and repent? God will do all the rest? Is God really taking responsibility for all of our mistakes and shortcomings? Is he shielding us from the consequences of our actions? Are we being set up to be the most incompetent of god's creation? Are we incapable of ever being a mature, civilized species? Will we always live in hell

on earth so God can comfort us with his forgiveness and mercy? Was that the original plan? Sounds somewhat half-baked.

There has to be more to it. If not, God's neighbors in heaven will include many immature and irresponsible people, all dressed up in clean white robes. What if we got it wrong and God *won't* take responsibility for our mistakes, after all? The Bible says the sins of the fathers will be visited upon the third and fourth generations.²⁹ That doesn't sound like God will be taking responsibility for them. It sounds a little like Karma to me, rather than cheap grace.

If James and the Book of Revelation are correct, the life you live will have everything to do with how you will end up after you die. You will be accountable for your actions, according to them. Sure, Jesus said "to believe in him"³⁰ was to do the will of God, but he taught and even commanded people to do a whole lot more than just believe in him. He instructed people on how to live a life of love, how to love their enemies, and commanded people to "love one another as I have loved you."³¹ Eastern religions also stress responsibility, human ethics and living a virtuous life. They offer no escape via cheap grace. That is the advantage of Christianity, and they will be quick to tell you.

The grace of forgiveness is actually desperately needed as a complement to the beliefs of the Eastern faiths. It is seriously crippled without it. That is one reason some Eastern countries have

²⁹ Exodus 20:5

³⁰ John 6:29

³¹ John 15:12

the highest suicide rates in the world. But, the question is, what kind of grace would be most beneficial; responsible grace or cheap grace? Is God the author of cheap grace, or are we?

If what those people are saying who question cheap grace has any merit, then many of them, including many good humanists, may be sitting in the front row of God's concerts in heaven. Sun Myung Moon said if you have God's love and express it, then it is not necessary to even know God. He will automatically be with you, whether you want him to be or not.

The god of “do your tricks and get your bone”

Let's see if I have this right. What are the minimums I need to do here so I won't go to hell? If I observe the required sacraments, go to Church at least on Easter and Christmas, take the Holy Communion, get my Last Rites, etc., then I will get my reward in heaven. Wow. It reminds one of a dog in front of his master, begging for a treat. The faithful may think of themselves as children of God, but could some people be relating more like his pets?

A similar dynamic can be seen in all the Abrahamic faith traditions. But, in reality, the Bible is again conflicted over this. Jesus harshly scolded those who externally and superficially tried

to live a ritualistic life but didn't cultivate the heart of it all.³² Paul said love was the goal, and without developing that, we have nothing.³³ He said we must be "transformed by the renewing of our minds."³⁴ That was Jesus and Paul. Some others may have thought it was good enough to just make the right moves.

To just superficially go through the motions of a spiritual life seems inconsistent with the principled design of this vast universe. There is no evidence of such a frivolous, superficial character infused into nature. It has meticulous detail and precision, requiring a fanatical investment of thought and concern.

For a god to expect nothing of humans beyond some ritualistic behavior designed to appease him just doesn't conform to the greater evidence. Anyone who can do a few tricks gets his eternal bone. Transformation and maturity not required. Step up, one and all and apply. If this rational line of thinking is correct, it makes one wonder if perhaps God's worst enemy might sometimes be his own religious people.

The god who's "in control" of this hurtful world

People today casually say, "God's in control!" If you think about it, how obscene is that? What you are saying, then, is that since

³² Matthew 7:21-23

³³ 1Corinthians 13:1

³⁴ Romans 12:2

my cat was run over by a truck yesterday, God must have either made it happen or allowed it to happen. Otherwise, it wouldn't have happened. Never mind that we live on a busy street and I let my stupid cat run loose out the front door.

Virtually every good and bad situation in life can be easily and casually dismissed or justified “with these three little words: “God’s in control.” Human trafficking, wars, genocide, domestic abuse, rape, you name it. “It’s certainly terrible. But hey, God’s in control.”

Where do we come off with this “God’s in control” stuff? Is there anything in the Bible that states such a belief? None, aside from the questionable page of Paul’s letter to the Romans which we have already dismissed as misleading, at best.³⁵ From there on, it seems to be just wishful thinking.

If God is “in control,” then perhaps dualism is true. Good and evil are both intrinsic to this world. Evil cannot disappear. Then, there is no need for religion and salvation. There can be no resolution to the evils of this world. There is no need to try to be good, aside from seeking to balance the forces of good and evil.

How convenient and pleasant if God were somehow “in control” of every aspect of our lives, or of even just the major events. It would again mean we are not responsible. It would mean that the mistakes and problems of this world are not our fault, after all. There is nothing we can do about it, so why try? It is all destiny. We have found another theological way to dump all of our problems on a god

³⁵ Romans 9

and salve our guilty consciences. Religion is really great stuff! It can be whatever we want it to be so we can find comfort in our wayward ways, and guarantee that the status quo never changes.

The hard reality is, as we all know, the mistakes and problems of this world are 99.999% our own doing. There is no need to dump them on a god except to escape from responsibility and consequences. Mature humanists don't like irresponsibility, especially when it is justified by lofty dogma. The god that has been made to look so repulsive through this would look a whole lot better if those who help make him look that way would take more responsibility for their lives and for this ugly world. It just may be that good humanists are actually more offended by the faithful than they are by the god who may be living in their long shadows.

The god everyone is waiting on

Heard of the end of the world? The apocalypse? Armageddon? How many times has it been predicted? A minister once told me, "I don't have to do anything. I'm just waiting for Jesus to return." Waiting for Superman. How convenient. The premise of this concept is that there is a god who has a plan, and the final accomplishment of that plan will be totally his own doing. He's going to snap his fingers and work some magic and make this ugly world go away as soon as he is good and ready; as soon as that last submissive soul bows down and walks through the doorway. It could unfold by way

of cataclysmic disasters or through mystical phenomena. Either way, it doesn't matter. God will do it all.

Well, if there is a god who designed and created this marvelous universe, then he very likely should have a plan of some kind. The visions and mystical experiences related in the Book of Revelation are totally subject to interpretation, and no one claims to know positively, without a doubt, what they really mean. If we trust the Bible to contain truth at all, the one thing we could be sure of is that it describes a god who seems to be unhappy with the way things turned out with mankind and who promises it will change. The ugly problems will ultimately be resolved. That would be great.

But how? How will it change? That's not clear at all. But, it must be one of three ways: Either there is a god will do it all, man will have to do it all, or it will be done as a partnership between this god and mankind.

If God is going to do it all, then the faithful are correct and we just have to keep waiting for him to do his thing. The good humanists should also keep on caring for one another and for the brethren, but the end game is decided; so they might relax a little.

But, one has to wonder just how much human suffering this god needs to see before he decides to do his magic? After thousands or millions of years, he is looking a little sadistic. He certainly wouldn't fit the parental role he is typecast in by Jesus. Some might say he must be "out to lunch" or napping. Can someone go wake him up, please? Quick.

If man will have to transform this world all by himself, either because there is no god or because this god will not help, then we might want to recruit all the good humanists. Stop waiting for Superman. Get busy. Get your face out of your books and put some elbow grease into this thing.

If this option is the answer, then perhaps the Deists had it right. They say there is a god who designed and created it all, but he has no active involvement in any of it. He just set it in motion, way back when, like a wind-up clock, and let it go on its own. Then did the Deist's god give all of his compassion and emotion to man and the other creatures and reserve none for himself? Can a parent just walk away from his beloved children forever and not look back? Is that the kind of God that the Bible describes? There certainly appears to be plenty of emotion in the Abrahamic God, both on the anger side and on the compassion side, depending on which passages you read.

If there is no god and man will have to do it all by himself, then the atheists have it right. But, modern science and quantum physics are not leaning in that direction any more these days. Both of these perspectives seem flawed; both the god who will do it all someday, and the no-god or a god who doesn't care perspective. What about the third option; a partnership between a god and mankind?

In the case of the third option, while we have been patiently waiting for God to do his magic and fix us, perhaps God has been just as patiently waiting for us to step up to the plate and fulfill our side of the bargain. The problem could be that we have had such a

minimalistic view of our side of the bargain, i.e., of our human responsibility. Maybe our responsibility is a lot greater than we have wanted to believe. Maybe this mess will only be fixed when we add our part to what God has already done, could do and will do.

Maybe our part will take a lot of work. It might take a long time. Well, from a pragmatic engineering point of view, that would be reasonable. A problem that has been millions of years in the making cannot be remedied overnight. And, as Einstein once said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when creating them.”³⁶ It just might be the case that since we are the ones who broke it in the first place, we may need to be heavily involved in the fixing of it, with God’s help, of course. Wouldn’t that be reasonable?

The god who needs blood

There can be no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood.³⁷ Wow. It almost sounds like God is a vampire or something. He needs blood! Usually animal blood, but even human blood in the case of Jesus. Of course, the blood of Jesus satisfied God’s need for blood sacrifices, so no more were required after that. But, lots of animal blood still flows in the Islamic faith. Aren’t the faithful quick to condemn as Satanic any lowly religion which believes in human sacrifice? Have the animal rights people heard about this god?

³⁶ Albert Einstein

³⁷ Hebrews 9:22

Some people even explain that Cain's offering was rejected by God because it was an offering of crops, and crops have no blood in them. Therefore, it was unacceptable to the blood-demanding God. Does it say that somewhere in the Bible? Nope. Jesus told his followers that they must "drink my blood and eat my flesh."³⁸ Did he mean that literally or figuratively? Even some of the faithful are not clear about this. Some Romans thought the early Christians were cannibals because of what they heard about the "body and blood."

Where do we get this stuff? People took one misunderstood statement by our friend Paul, again, and built a whole theological perspective around it. When Paul made this famous statement about the shedding of blood being necessary for the forgiveness of sins, he was looking in the rearview mirror at the sacrificial death of Jesus. In that context, unless Jesus had given his life as he did, and shed his blood on the cross, the faithful could not claim the grace of forgiveness. That is reasonable doctrine.

But, to apply that statement universally, past, present and future, becomes again contrary to even what the Bible says. It is stated elsewhere in the Good Book that God desires obedience over sacrifice.³⁹ Do we just take what we like and throw away the rest? Do we cherry pick the Bible to find what passages serve our theological agenda? What kind of a sick god are people being asked to worship?

³⁸ John 6:53

³⁹ 1Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 21:3

They will respond that it is not our place to define God. No matter how strange he may seem to us, we must worship him. Well, therein is the problem. We DO define God, whether we want to see it or not. We have no empirical evidence to go on to define God; nor will we ever have such evidence. We use vague and even conflicting “evidence” in the Bible, and with it we try to define God. Beyond that, we are left to logic and reason and subjective personal experiences and revelations, which are often subject to interpretation.

Then, wherein lies the balance between faith and reason? That is the bigger question. The universe seems pretty reasonable. Maybe the balance is closer to reason than the faithful would like to believe. Indeed, if our evidence were reliable and our perspectives were clear, then logic, reason and revelations should all be in total harmony and agreement about the nature of God.

The god who is just a heartless Force

There are many less dogmatic believers who think god is just an energy field or Force. “May the Force be with you.” There is no personality in the Force. There is no heart, concern, morality, empathy, vision, plan, or purpose, aside from seeking some kind of cosmic harmony and balance. So, in that case, we just need to find out how to get this Force to work *for* us instead of *against* us.

In this scenario, it would seem that man is the maker of his own destiny. Good and evil are intrinsic parts of the Force. The universe

is a dualism. There is no resolution to it. Balance is all we can hope for.

However, there is no evidence that such a dualistic universe exists outside the realm of humanity. Are there good minerals and bad ones? Are there good rabbits and evil ones? Our emotions must be just foolishness; our values, nonsense. We should all be like Data; stoic and calculating. Perhaps we really *are* living in the matrix. The love is all an illusion. No one really cares. The Force doesn't care. Why should we?

Well, all this quickly gets nonsensical. Both the controversial beliefs of the faithful, as well as the humanistic viewpoint, become arguably far superior to belief in a stoic Force. Humanists believe in the value of people and in the value of human relationships and reason, compassion, and virtue. The Force is just an empty, dehumanized shell of a god. Thus, while humans are viewed as just subservient to the ubiquitous and overpowering Force, qualitatively speaking, man should be far superior to such a Force. Then, the Force should be given the pink slip and replaced. Perhaps an exceptionally wise, virtuous and compassionate human can take its place. We would all be far better off. The Force just can't satisfy.

The god who is inconsistent and even contradictory

Our understanding of god seems burdened with contradictions. Each section of this book addresses one of them, and there are still

more. We addressed the apparent contradictions within the notions that this god is omniscient, “in-control,” moral, loving, omnipotent, etc., and the list goes on and on. How can this be?

There seem to be two possibilities. One, this god is two-faced, insincere and not someone to be trusted. He engages in situation ethics. He is the ultimate hypocrite. Or, this god is consistent and principled, deep red through-and-through like a tomato, but we have such a smoggy vantagepoint that we can’t see it through all the man-made smoke and distortion. Of course, we would prefer to believe the later, but we need to see some evidence that it may, in fact, be the case.

In the big picture, the overwhelming presence of inconsistencies and contradictions are seen, objectively speaking, within humanity. Looking beyond humanity at the marvelous universe, including nature and the biosphere, and perceiving the harmony and balance that is evident wherever we look, one cannot help but gravitate to the second of the two options. It would seem more likely that humanity hasn’t got a very clear picture of what this genuine, sincere god is really like than to throw it all to the wind and surmise that if there is a god who is the designer of it all, that he is just a flake. Thus, if one god designed it all, but the lion’s share of the problems show up in one particular area, namely humanity, the logical conclusion is that this area may be flawed or broken.

That happens to be what all major religions assert. They say there was some kind of deviation from God’s plan in the beginning of human history. Well, if that were proven to be the case, then it

would not be surprising to find that the author of inconsistency and contradiction is primarily us, rather than God. Even though we may not have empirical evidence to back it up, the possibility is certainly there. Knowing the many flaws of humanity, I would put my bets on us being the culprit. Science may offer our best evidence; far better than subjective religions.

CHAPTER II

The beloved god

The god of grace

We touched on this topic before, but from a different perspective. We're so lucky that God is a god of such amazing and unending grace. He gives us everything, whether we are grateful for it or not, whether we deem ourselves worthy of it or not, whether we live good lives or not. He just keeps on giving, never seeming to keep tabs on how much he has given, but only looking for more opportunities to give.

We have to admit, sometimes we may take it for granted. Sometimes we may grow to expect it. Sometimes we may even abuse the grace we are given. But, it just keeps coming. We can almost feel guilty to receive so much, knowing we have given so little.

However, it would be a problem if we were to take a one-sided view of this relationship we seem to have with the Creator. It is not the whole story, according to the Bible, and even according to common sense. Jesus told a story once about three servants who

were each given some of their master's money to take care of.⁴⁰ You know the rest. The servant who just received the money and did nothing to multiply it was not regarded as successful. It seems that this all-gracious God also expects some action on the ground. James⁴¹ and the Book of Revelation⁴² make clear that actions are a necessary expression of our faith. Jesus uplifted those who would give a glass of water to a thirsty child, saying they would receive their reward.⁴³ There are so many such teachings. We would do well to remember them as we formulate our understanding of the God of grace.

Thus, those faithful souls who think they can revel in their personal salvation and do little of anything to spread the love might take a lesson from a good humanist. As was mentioned before, according to Sun Myung Moon, if you don't know God but you have his love in your heart and express it, that will be good enough. God is love and if you experience it and express it, he will be with you whether you want him there or not, even if you try to chase him away.

From the teaching of the Bible, and others, the vertical faith relationship with the God of grace is fulfilled by its horizontal expression and experience with other people. Thus, a good humanist married to a good vertical-type believer might be a match made in heaven. We need both. The point is, what is the grace and love for? Is it just because God is so egotistical that he needs your

⁴⁰ Matthew 25

⁴¹ James 2:14, 17

⁴² Revelation 2:23

⁴³ Matthew 10:42

reverence to feel good? Or, might God be more interested in spreading his grace and love all around, through the faithful and through the humanist or whoever will spread it? Everything points to the later.

The god who knows everything

God is God. How could there be something he doesn't know? It's unthinkable, right? God is aware of every hair on our head, Jesus said. How could a sparrow fall from the nest and God doesn't know about it?⁴⁴ It is so comforting. God must even know the past, present and even the future. He must even know that you will sneeze at 2:34 in the afternoon, April 14th, 2057. After all, he is God. That is what some of our Biblical scholars and experts have told us through the ages. Such a concept leaves us awestruck. It doesn't sound very logical, but is it scriptural? Did we bother to ask?

Why did God express disappointment in Saul, saying he was sorry he made him the king?⁴⁵ Why did God express disappointment when he said he was sorry he made man on the face of the earth, and it grieved him in his heart?⁴⁶ Why did God repeatedly warn his people that they would suffer if they did not follow his word, leaving the choice to them? Why the huge two-letter word "IF" throughout the Old Testament. God said so many times that "if" they would obey

⁴⁴ Matthew 10:29, 30

⁴⁵ 1Samuel 15:11

⁴⁶ Genesis 6:6

him, they would be blessed, but “if” they did not obey him, they would suffer? It sounds like they really did have a choice; it’s called free will. There are literally hundreds of such instances. Do we ignore all of these? Was God being insincere when he expressed these things?

Some will respond, “Yes. God certainly did give us free choice and free will, but he already knows every choice we will make in our lives, and every choice that everyone else will make in their lives.” Well, I’m sorry, but can someone please show me that in the Bible? It is nowhere to be found, I assure you. Even the passage in the Book of Revelation which has been taken to mean that Jesus’ crucifixion was pre-determined “before the creation of the world”⁴⁷ was mistranslated and juxtaposed from the Hebrew. Scholars know that. The meaning has been manipulated.

In addition, if we follow this line of logic to its conclusion, we end up at a dead end. Everything becomes nonsensical. Good and evil become blended together and God once again becomes the author of it all, including all the pain and suffering. If God knows every decision you will make in your life, even before you are born, and you are bound for hell and will help fill this world with evil, then why did he make you? To suffer? To spread suffering? God effectively becomes the creator and supply chain for hell and suffering. It all becomes doublespeak and gibberish.

To craft such a theological perspective with such severe and consequential ramifications, without as much as a single scripture to

⁴⁷ Revelation 13:8

support it, sounds like madness. We need to be careful to let God be God and not try to fashion him to fit our, sometimes demented, fantasies.

The God who can do anything

Of course, God can do anything. He is God. He made the whole universe, didn't he? How could there be something that God couldn't do? He fashioned the laws of nature, the energy that expresses and manifests it, and breathed life into it. Case closed.

Then this begs the question, why does God beseech us to do things and if we don't do them, he laments our failure to act and the thing doesn't get done? He then looks for someone else who will do it. Why doesn't God just do it himself? He has all power. He can even do magic. There can be only two possibilities: either he can, but doesn't want to, or for some reason, he can't.

We've already discussed a god who can but doesn't want to; a heartless uncaring god. But, could it be possible that a god can't do something? At first glance, it seems unthinkable. But, we need to think more deeply about it. There may be a rational basis for considering this option.

God spoke to Moses in the burning bush through an angel. God interacted with Abraham through another angel. God spoke to Mohammad through an angel. God spoke to Joseph Smith through

an angel. Jesus consulted with Moses and Elijah, rather than with God directly. God interacted with man so many times through intermediaries. Why?

Sure, people can pray directly to god, but many times he even answers our prayers through an intermediary agent, like a friend or another person, or even through nature. Why? Could it be because those intermediaries have a body through which God can manifest himself? You say, well Jesus was God made flesh. That would just further prove the point. If you consider Jesus to be God, then you also believe that God came down and assumed a physical form and walked among us. Why? Maybe he needed to do that because, again, he needed to express himself to us through a substantial form.

Therefore, we may need to revisit the concept that God can do anything. He appears to need a body in order to do some things. He begs and pleads with human beings to carry out his wishes on earth. Why? Perhaps it is because he doesn't have a body with which to do it himself. If a deathly sick person needs help, God tries to inspire someone to help him, rather than just doing it by himself. The end result of this line of reasoning is that man may actually have a lot more responsibility before this God than he has yet realized. Maybe Jesus was not the only one whom God wanted and needed to express his heart and mind to this world. How about each one of us? How about me?

In addition, each person may have a lot more value before this God than we had ever thought. Maybe God actually needs us, each and every one of us, more than we ever thought or realized. Maybe

our lives, families and world are in such bad shape because we have not been a good enough expression of his own heart and mind? Do you think?

In any case, God created this enormous physical universe for a reason. Why? Maybe the answer will be found in this context. Maybe even God has been acknowledging that to us, but we just didn't notice. Could it be?

The god who need not be scientific or logical

As faithful believers, the thought of a god who need not be constrained within the mundane confines of science or logic is so comforting. After all, he made science and logic, so he must be beyond these constructs. He certainly must have to right to step outside of them whenever he wants to. He is God. Thus, miracles are no problem for him. And no one knows better than we do that we all need a miracle or two in our lives.

There are plenty of miracles in the Biblical narratives to satisfy all but the most skeptical person. But how were they made to happen? Did God really have to step outside the laws that he established from the beginning of time, or were they just manifestations of spiritual laws that fallen man just doesn't know about yet? Living in this physical realm, we may not be able to know, for sure. It may have to be left to our faith.

However, which is more marvelous; a god who needs to violate the natural laws he established because they do not accommodate the seemingly miraculous actions he needs or wants to perform, or a god who has created a completely perfect creation within which even what we call miracles are possible? A faithful believer should opt for the later. If God is God, then he would not make an incomplete, deficient or imperfect creation. He would not need to violate the rules he established. That would be an admission of weakness, limitation or even failure. That would not fit our concept of a god.

The idea that God does not always function within the physical and spiritual laws which he created might be man's own fantasy. There is no scripture to support it. We may have just made it up. It may have been a tantalizing and convenient idea. But, it may be wrong.

In fact, to claim that God doesn't have to make any sense -- that logic and reason are nothing for him to violate -- contradicts the very first page of the Bible, where it tells us that God made man in his image and likeness.⁴⁸ Likewise, the entire creation must be also in the image of its designer and maker. How else could it be? St. Paul said, "For his eternal power and deity are clearly perceived in the things that are made."⁴⁹ You might say, "You are using logic to say God must be logical." But, the entire universe God made is logical and rational. There is no escaping that.

⁴⁸ Genesis 1:27

⁴⁹ Romans 1:20

So, do we believe the Bible or not? Do we need to make excuses for God? Probably not. God has it covered. Don't you think? We may not recognize how a spiritual Jesus could appear and disappear from a locked upper room and even be touched by doubting Thomas. But, we had no trouble believing that a spiritual angel wrestled with Jacob through the night and dislocated his thigh bone.⁵⁰ We had no trouble believing that Lot served dinner to a pair of spiritual angels, and they ate it?⁵¹

There is simply no scriptural reason to believe that God is beyond logic and reason. If we knew all the spiritual laws that God created from the beginning, even the supernatural could be understood. There are likely many spiritual laws which God created that we are not familiar with. Maybe "miracle" is just a human word. Perhaps God just softly smiles whenever we say that word. Do you think?

The god who makes us perfect

It is so comforting to know that we, sorely imperfect and flawed people, will be "made whole" in the twinkling of an eye when we go to heaven.⁵² This is especially comforting since we seem to find it so nearly impossible to live a truly holy life here on earth.

⁵⁰ Genesis 32:22-25; Hosea 12:4

⁵¹ Genesis 19:3

⁵² 1Corinthians 15:52

The problem is, this idea smacks head-on with what Jesus said to us. He never gave us that kind of understanding. In contrast, Jesus admonished us as to how to live a virtuous and holy life in his Sermon on the Mount. He told us to turn the other cheek, to love our enemies, to not lust after women, etc. He concluded by admonishing us: “You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.”⁵³ That doesn’t sound like “Hey, no worries. God will make you perfect when you die, so don’t sweat it.” His brother, James, seemed to echo similar sentiments.

The point is, maybe we got this all wrong from the start. God initiated humanity with the admonition to “be fruitful and multiply, and have dominion.”⁵⁴ The ball was in man’s court to “become” fruitful. Then, this same God chased and scolded wayward man ever since to live a good life and follow his rules and laws, lest he suffer in hell. That again doesn’t sound like God is planning to take care of our imperfection by himself after we die. It sounds like we have always been responsible for it, ourselves.

Are we so desperate to live a life free from responsibility that we choose to create an entire theological perspective around a few scriptures that would seem to give us a free ride, rather than bite the bullet and find a way to reconcile those questionable passages with the bigger overall theme of the Bible, which is admonishing us to take responsibility for ourselves and our lives? What ever happened to “What you are born with is God’s gift to you, and what you make of yourself is your gift to God?” I know it’s not from the Bible, but

⁵³ Mathew 5:48

⁵⁴ Genesis 1:28

it fits Jesus' words and it makes a whole lot more sense. Our life, our faith, our sacred scriptures have little meaning if God is going to take care of the end result all by himself.

The god who accepts us the way we are

Who besides your mother can say they love you with absolutely unconditional love? Hopefully your spouse and children, but for some people, even that might be a stretch. It is certainly plausible to think that God loves us no matter what, since he made us in the first place. God's love is expected to be beyond question. It should and seems to be unconditional. He seems to have been persisting in his efforts to love us for all these thousands or millions of years, even though we arguably didn't deserve the undying effort. So, we feel safe to say God's love is unfathomable.

However, that is not the same as saying God "accepts us" just the way we are, no matter how wayward and unholy we might have become. We can still believe that God loves us no matter what, but will God "accept" us, too? It certainly makes us feel warm and fuzzy to think that way. But, where do we get such a notion. That's a very good question. It seems to be one more perspective that is nowhere to be found in the Bible or in the Koran; neither in the Old or New Testament. Really?

You tell me. Sounds like more wishful thinking. What it means is, "I don't have to change myself." But, someone needs to deal with

our flaws and shortcomings, overcome our wrong thinking and obnoxious attitudes, and give us hearts of compassion as mature human beings. Seems we are always on the lookout for a way to escape this responsibility and throw it on God. Do you think?

The god who needs nothing

We, who are always wanting, find God to be so amazing. Since he is God, and he created the entire universe, he can't possibly need anything. Right? If there could be anything this god might need, he could easily just speak it into existence. He can create a star made of diamonds. He can have an ocean of gold. What could it be that he could possibly want and not have? He is God.

As you have guessed by now, we have not thought deeply enough about this one, either. Surely such a great god can do anything he might want, all by himself with his own creative power, except one thing. He can have all the knowledge, power and love in the universe, but even God cannot experience his love without an object partner with which to share it.

In other words, even though God must have the essence of the masculinity and also the femininity we see expressed in the world, he needed to project those attributes out of himself into a masculine and feminine object so he could experience the full richness of their interaction. In the interaction of love between Adam and Eve, God

was able to experience the fullness of his divine love for the first time. Before that, it must have remained conceptual, even for God.

Love is such that even God cannot experience his own love without someone to give it to and receive it back from. God is one. He is a “oneness”; a singularity. Have you ever tried to tell yourself a joke? Talk to yourself? Express and receive love from yourself in the mirror? We are not used to analyzing God this way, but it may be high time we did.

You might say, “Well, he did.” He said, “Let US make man in OUR image.”⁵⁵ Thus, he was talking to someone. Some say it was Jesus; others that he was talking to the angels. Either way, he made someone to relate with. If you are a trinitarian, you believe that God can relate to himself through the persons of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Discussing this topic fully would be way beyond the scope of this little book. But, either way, that argument supports the idea that God indeed needed an object with which to share his love and relate, whether it be the angels or Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The point is, relationship requires at least two to tango, even for the Creator.

So, it turns out there actually IS something that God needs. He needs an object partner of his love. And, not only are angels and Jesus and the Holy Spirit able to fill that role, but you and I are also intended to be objects to God. That’s why he created people, unlike rabbits, as a “more complete expression of his image and likeness.” That means he created an object like himself with which to relate so

⁵⁵ Genesis 1:26

he could interrelate with all of his attributes. He needs us. He needs you. He needs each one of us. The Bible says he wills that none should perish, not even one.⁵⁶ We are important to him. How transformative it can be to realize that in the depth of our hearts.

What would be the consequence of such thinking? He made us and needs us for his own fulfillment and happiness. He made us as his children; not just to watch and test us; not just as a hobby because he had nothing better to do. He created us as a vital object partner of his incredible love. He needed us, and still does. That's why he can't stop trying to save us and restore us to wholeness and happiness. He wants to love us and wants our love, himself. Ponder that one. It might be helpful to consider it in relationship with our own children.

The god who will save those who believe correctly

It is widely believed that God will save a person as long as they just believe the right thing. But, why? Why do we need to believe the right thing? It seems so trite to think that just accepting that Jesus is Lord is all that God demands. Is that all that life is for? It just seems impossible that the God of love who created the entire universe demands such a simple thing from his children to allow them to avoid eternal suffering and damnation.

⁵⁶ Matthew 18:14

Could there be a deeper meaning in all this? What could be the consequence of believing in Jesus? We could say it confirms our submission and surrender, and it can open the door to the grace of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. But, Jesus and Paul beseeched us to transform ourselves. It seemed that Jesus was far more concerned with that than in our qualifying ourselves for a free ticket to heaven. Transform ourselves into what? Into people who resemble God. "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect."⁵⁷ Why? So that we may become a love object of God? What if this might be the whole purpose of our existence?

⁵⁷ Matthew 5:48

CHAPTER III

The real god

The humanist god

So, what kind of God is he, really? We have looked at him from rational, principled and Biblical perspectives and discovered that he cannot possibly be the kind of a god that many people have been taught to think he is. There is no empirical evidence to point to; there never will be any. These are all the tools we have with which to address the question, aside from personal, subjective revelation. So, here we are.

If we filter out the notion that God is involved in the everyday affairs of our lives, then we can be free to let go of our anger and resentment that he is somehow responsible for all the ugly mess we find ourselves in. And, we can begin to realize that we are in control and responsible, ourselves. If we filter out the notion that God is not connected to us and is carefree and happy while we suffer, then we can be free to empathetically let him into our hearts and share our pain with him.

If we filter out the notion that the only reason he is not helping us more and fixing our broken lives is because he just doesn't care, then we can be in a position to discover how much he may really care and bleed for each one of us. If we filter out the notion that he

is playing cruel and superficial games with us, and realize that he might only be interested in our growing up and transforming ourselves into happy and successful loving people, then we can step up from being his pets to being his children.

If we can filter out the false notion of the bigoted and prejudiced God we learned about, and open our minds to the possibility that he might really be trying to save all of us, and not just a few of us, then we can join arms with the good humanists and live for love, with confidence that God is doing the same. If we can filter out the false notion that God is just a patriarchal sexist dictator, and open our eyes and hearts to the rich and beautiful femininity of God, then we can create a world of beautiful marriages and families, which may have been the original plan, anyway.

If we can filter out the false notion that God has our lives and destinies all planned out and remove our leash, then we might finally be able to stand on our own two feet and become the mature human children that he might have always dreamed we would be, owning our own lives and destiny. If we can filter out the false notion of a god who thinks sex is dirty, and realize that he made it as the ultimate expression of His own divine love, from which new life is created, then we can allow ourselves to experience a richness of sexuality and love that we perhaps never dreamed of.

If we can filter out the false notion of a god who needs nothing except our affirmation of correct theological conviction, and realize that God might be all about love and compassion instead of doctrine, then we can allow ourselves to discover a real, living, loving, genuine God who is worthy of our making a deep relationship with, in our hearts.

The bottom line is, the real God may actually be far more concerned with loving and caring for people than He is of being

worshipped and adored while sitting on his pompous throne, in spite of what we have previously been taught to believe. All the logical, principled and even Biblical evidence points to that. Sun Myung Moon said you will not find God in the ivory towers of gold, but rather crying in hell, trying to embrace his suffering children and save them. When you stand back and look at the overall picture, one cannot help but feel that this loving and passionate God is more of a humanist, or at least a humanitarian, than he is a religionist. He may have never intended to create religions in the first place. It seems it was not part of the original plan. Maybe he was always a good humanist/humanitarian, at heart. Maybe he was the first. We just didn't know.