

Spirit of the Law

By Rev. Thomas Janssen

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I will begin where I always begin; *We are Spiritual Beings having a human experience*. The first time I heard those words was in a Unity Church in St. Petersburg, Florida. It caused a shift within me that brought much into focus. My Roman Catholic training provided a model of life which had me understanding that I was a human being with a soul that would one day go on to be with God in Heaven as a spirit. That is, providing I did not commit any mortal sin in which case my soul would spend eternity without God and with horrific punishments in Hell. And if I was less than perfect I would spend time in Purgatory without God, where my soul would make amends for my sins and eventually emerge perfected into Heaven. Since then I have found many Christian practices to foster similar beliefs but without the Purgatory idea. Many seem to have a very black and white prescription for accepting Salvation which is an automatic ticket into Heaven. Those who do not accept Salvation in the way prescribed by these teachings are condemned to the eternal damnation in the lake of fire – Hell.

My interest and curiosity with my Spiritual self goes back to my childhood. While I was far from a model Catholic boy I seemed to be intensely interested in having an experience as I prayed in church or praying the rosary with my family at home. By the 6th grade I was entertaining life as a priest. Puberty brought me my first real challenge with the church. I fought and failed again and again to stop myself from self satisfying the urges which rage through a boy in puberty. With great shame and the fear of an eternity in Hell I confessed my failings to the Priest in confession week after week. My relationship with the Catholic church was never the same after this. Eternal damnation seemed a steep punishment for such a simple failing. Since then there has been an avalanche of *what ifs* which had me questioning things you were not supposed to question.

A few weeks after my 20th birthday I had graduated with an Associates Degree in Electronics and was on my way to working in another state for Collins Radio along with my wife and child. Yes, I started adult life early, at 18, and with my plate full. By this time I was clearly agnostic. I could not put the pieces together to form a complete picture of God that answered all my questions. The *Loving God* title simply was at odds with the rules I found in Christian churches. I would search the next few years in various Christian denominations to find a complete answer, but I would fail. The glaring paradoxes I found seemed to be easily passed over by others who seemed more than willing to accept whatever others told them was the *Truth* about God. I could not reconcile how a *Loving God* could condemn such a high percentage of His creation without a fair chance to know the secret to Salvation. I thought of all the stillborns like my youngest sister. I wondered of the millions who lived and died in far off places where no Christian missionary had yet traveled. I wondered of those born with defects, both mental and physical. Where was the fair playing field? Where was the equal opportunity? And what of devout Hindu, Muslim or Native Americans? What of those who lived good lives faithful to their own beliefs about God? Lots of questions I had. Since then I have come to know a God that is truly Loving and Universal.

A Bigger God

The first time I heard the expression “*you need a bigger God*” I was taken aback. After all there is only one God. In 12 step programs this advice is often presented to those whose personal view of God is not big enough to solve their problems. The years have allowed the wisdom of this advice to grow within me as I have come to understand it more broadly.

Religion usually provides a limited view of God that simply does not encompass all possibilities. Most religious practice tends to become exclusive presenting a very narrow formula to win the big prize – Heaven. The practice of Christianity today is widely varied and divided. In most Christian denominations it is discouraged or even forbidden to read or study outside of the approved literature. And many forbid experiential practices which might provide a direct connection such as meditation or yoga citing the passage about avoiding “unfamiliar spirits” and the Devil as reasons. Further more it is not allowed to question and find conclusions that differ from the approved conclusion. The literal interpretation of the Bible seems to provide the most grounds for contention. Once the original context is lost the result is a mixed bag of edicts from God which do not form a complete or cohesive picture. Usually a conclusion is presented first and then passages are interpreted to reach that conclusion, rather than the other way around.

If one begins to search with an open mind one soon finds a great gap between Bible historians and the teachings of any given denomination. Rather than searching to find a *greater Truth* than one now embraces, the general response is war-like. Us against them. Believers against atheists. Believers against science. This defensive response is not required once one finds a *bigger God*. A description and understanding of God that is bigger than the differences. If your God is big enough then both paths will lead to a greater understanding of the Creator and our relationship with It. If our understanding of God is broad enough then we will find the progress of our sciences to reveal more about the wonders of Creation rather than holding to a creation myth as factual science. If our pursuit of God is through personal experience then it becomes easy to move past old perceptions and dogma which often have more to do with perpetuating an institution. It is difficult for a large religious institution or even a single church to embrace a broader Truth since doing so may lose its base of support.

If we cannot look at our religious practice with eyes willing to separate what is mythology from social practice and spiritual practice. For all churches have a combination of these. We cling to our favorite Bible stories and defend them like our children. One of my favorite new testament stories of Jesus defending the adulteress where He said, “let he who is without sin cast the first stone” was added over 300 years later. It was personally disappointing to learn this may not be an actual happening but I can embrace the *Spirit of the message* which does convey a powerful Truth. After all the parables were not true stories yet they are ingenious vehicles for communicating important concepts that are Truths. All Christians know that the first five books of the Bible are attributed to Moses. However, he lived 500 years before the Hebrews had a written language. Sumarian and Egyptian hieroglyphics were the only written languages

known to exist at that time. Perhaps the stone tablets were clay tablets as used by the Sumarians. Dried clay is certainly stone-like. And Egyptian Hieroglyphics were most often carved in stone. To illiterate people any writing is awe inspiring. For most of man's history the literate have used this advantage over illiterate people, most often used by governments and religious institutions.

The birth of the collection of writings we call the Bible should be understood by all who study this document in good faith. Many Christian denominations have a dim view of Roman Catholicism, to put it mildly. Yet all Bibles are based on the selection of texts, with only minor exceptions, by a council of Christian Bishops that formed the Roman Catholic Church.

The first council of Nicea was called by the Roman Emperor Constantine in 325AD to provide a united belief and practice and to provide a governing structure. About 218-315 Bishops participated of the 1800 or so which were invited. The practice of Christianity was widely varied at this time. All of the beliefs and practices are not represented by what emerged from the final consensus of that council. I came to question these things and to search for the *Spirit of the Law* within the teachings of Yeshu (Jesus). This quest has led me to conclusions which are heretical. Heresy being that which disagrees with church dogma. Let's look back at the history of attacks on church dogma and the practices by true believers who have missed the Spirit of the Law.

Galileo had to publicly disclaim his findings that the Earth revolved around the Sun.

Columbus was a heretic for trying to prove the world was round.

Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning rod to prevent building fires from lightning strikes which hit church steeples most often. It was 100 years before religious leaders in America would allow their use since it *interfered with the will of God*

If you sneezed with your eyes open in Salem 300 years ago you were thought to be a witch. Witches were dunked to determine the truth. If after being held underwater for five or ten minutes you survived, you were definitely a witch to be burned at the stake. Another test was simply to be thrown into a lake or pond since a witch would float. If you drowned you were innocent.

Mary Magdeline was not considered a prostitute until about 400? years later by a bishop who could not accept the thought of a woman having any place in religious practice. This is very similar to the cultural thinking about women in the Middle East still today.

If you want to have a sense of the cultural atmosphere in which the bible was written and the books selected you have only to look at modern practices in much of the Muslim world. Like the father in Texas who killed his daughter who defiled herself and her families reputation by planning to go on an innocent date with a boy.

What kind of God do we want to believe in? I can no longer embrace the God of the old testament. This God of war. This jealous God. This God who demands obedience at the threat of damnation. This God who demands tribute. This God who demands worship. This God who plays favorites, who has *chosen* people. This God who sanctions the

slaughter of those who are not chosen. This very old idea is embraced today by extreme Muslims who feel they serve the will of God by killing infidels and will be rewarded in Heaven for it.

God has not chosen us, rather it is us that choose God, not which god, but which definition of God. How big is your God? Big enough to Love all of Creation?