

THE GOD WHO IS PART I

God is Unchanging; His Love is Too

For a long time, human history was divided into two eras: BC and AD—Before *Christ* and After *Christ*. More recently the BC has been jettisoned for BCE and AC for ACE—Before the Christian Era and After the Christian Era. It's just a way to remove the Person of Christ as the fulcrum of history and replace Him with an amorphous movement. Almost simultaneously American Culture can be dived without much forcing of the issue, into two eras: BSW and ASW—Before *Star Wars* and After *Star Wars*. George Lucas gave us American Graffiti, Indiana Jones and Star Wars and an interview to *Time Magazine* interviewed Mr. Lucas who said:

Well, I think there is a God. No question. What that God is, or what we know about that God I'm not sure.

It is not surprising given that Lucas names the late Joseph Campbell as his mentor who advocated finding your bliss in the power of Myth, NOT the power of Faith. And George Lucas has mentored an entire generation of young Americans, Japanese, Africans, Mexicans, and 191 other countries and the Holy See and the Palestinian Territories.

Bill Moyers did his best to convince George Lucas that the Christian Myth had lost its power with young people who found their inspiration (a distinctly religious idea) in Star Wars:

BILL MOYERS: The central epic of our culture has — has been the Bible. And it's about fall, wandering, redemption, return. But the Bible no longer occupies that central place in our culture today. More and more people today are — young people, in particular, are turning to the movies for their inspiration, not to organized religion.

GEORGE LUCAS: Uh-huh. Well, I hope that doesn't end up being the — the course that this whole thing takes because I think there's definitely a place for organized religion and it's a very important part of the social fabric. And I would hate to find ourselves in a completely secular world, where, you know, entertainment was passing for some kind of religious experience.

BILL MOYERS: One reason when critics said that "Star Wars" has been so popular with young people, it's religion without strings attached, that it becomes a very thin base for theology.

The overwhelming popularity of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* among young people is symptomatic of a generation that wants to believe in a god, a force not necessarily good or evil but certainly empowering and affirming. This generation seems wholly ignorant or dismissive of the God of Jesus Christ. Ignorance we can and must deal with: It's the purpose of The Church to go out to all the world and tell the Good News of God's love and His plan of Salvation through Jesus Christ, and tell it to every generation. More alarming is the vast number of young people who jettison the Faith of their Fathers and Mothers and opt-out of all organized religion where the Faith is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Since 1972 The General Social Survey has provided expert analysis on what Americans think and feel about such issues as national spending priorities, crime and punishment, intergroup relations, and confidence in institutions. This last one embraces organized religion,

and for the first time “No Religion” has topped a survey of Americans’ religious identity. 23.1% of Americans self-identify as having no religious affiliation. This is more than the total number of Evangelicals and Protestants combined. Catholics display the most precipitous decline of all. By the time our young people are Confirmed, they’re gone.

Bishop Robert Barron is the auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles and founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries when he was a priest in Chicago under the late Francis Cardinal George. Bishop Barron is also the chairman of the American Bishops’ Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, the theory and practice of teaching The Faith. In this capacity he addressed the recent Spring Assembly of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore (June 13, 2029):

"How many are leaving? The short answer is: a lot," the bishop said, noting the sobering statistic he said many in the room probably were aware of -- that 50% of Catholics 30 years old and younger have left the church.

"Half the kids that we baptized and confirmed in the last 30 years are now ex-Catholics or unaffiliated," he said, and "one out of six millennials in the U.S. is now a former Catholic."

Another statistic that particularly affects him is this:

"For every one person joining our church today, 6.45 are leaving" and most are leaving at young ages, primarily before age 23. The median age of those who leave is 13.

"Where are they going?" he asked, and in response to his own question, he again gave a short answer: They're "becoming nones" although some, in much smaller percentages, join other mainstream religions or evangelical churches.

This is a disaster unfolding before our eyes. Take no comfort in the idea that religion and faith are different. One need not belong to an organized religion to have faith in God, to have a belief system apart from organized religion is more of a philosophy or ideology than a Faith any of us would recognized as Christian. It is more like George Lucas' belief:

Well, I think there is a God. No question. What that God is, or what we know about that God I'm not sure.

Young people are looking for something! Just look at the evening news, at the assemblies in the streets, and tell me that youth are not searching for a code of life and a creed to live by, but they're not sure what they believe and who to follow. That's how many people feel today, especially young people who are more likely to identify *The Force* as God, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda as Apostles and Darth Vader at the redeemed come back to the light from the Dark Side.

We must tell them about God. The first verse in the Bible says: **In the Beginning God... Where did God come from? How could He just suddenly appear? What was before the Big Bang? How did the universe suddenly appear from an explosion? Do not think that this is a settled scientific fact!**

How was God **...in the beginning? I don't know, and neither do you or anyone else. It is the same about the End of Time? When will it be? Jesus, the Son of God, answered this same question from His disciples:**

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Matthew 24:35-36)

If the Son of God does not know, then neither do you or me.

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2)

The Bible says that God is from everlasting to everlasting. How can that be? I don't know. There's a mystery to it all, and yet by Faith we believe that God has no beginning and no end. I cannot prove to you the existence of God. No preacher, no scientist, no one can.

How do we know that God is? You cannot grow God in a petri dish. You cannot reduce God to a formula or recipe.

-A Small Detour-

[Strangely the same is not true of a human being or any other created thing, animate or inanimate. We grow babies in petri dishes and press diamonds out of carbon coal. Anything that has a beginning can be made, or remade. Think about this.]

You accept by Faith that God is the Creator of the whole universe. When Charles Lindbergh flew his Spirit of St. Louis first nonstop flight from New York City to Paris all the stars that he could see spread out across the visible sky were a mere fraction of our Milky Way Galaxy. We estimate that there are 250 Billion, + or = 150 Billion

Stars in our little galaxy. There are 1 Billion Trillion Stars in the “observable universe.” The error rate is unmeasurable as it the universe. On May 21, 2011 Nasa’s Swift satellite observed a short, extremely bright explosion of light called a Gamma-Ray Burst in the night sky at a distance of 13.14 BILLION LIGHT YEARS. The speed of light is accurately clocked at 670,616,629 miles per hour, and 1 Light-Year is the distance that a photon of light travels in one year. Now multiply that 13.14 Billion times. Here’s another mystery that will blow your mind: when you see the burst of light it’s at the END of its journey. You are looking backwards in time to when the universe was a baby, only 520 million years old! Don’t turn to science or philosophy for the answer. Man cannot decide whether our universe will keep growing, or reach equilibrium or crest that critical point where gravity will slow, stop and ultimately contract it down to a singularity, the condition that preceded the Big Bang. So you see, even the universe had a beginning and can be remade.

But The Bible Speaks of **in the beginning... The Psalmist sang:**

**When I behold Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which You have set in place—**

**what is man that You are mindful of him,
or the son of man that You care for him?
You made him a little lower than the angels;
You crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler of the works of Your hands;
You have placed everything under his feet:**

**all sheep and oxen,
and even the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.**

**O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is Your name in all the earth!**

The Bible Speaks of God as Spirit. God is a Spirit. God does not have a body like ours. He is not located in just one place. He's all over the world, all over the universe at the same time. He is not limited by the body. God is Spirit. How do we explain that? We don't, any more than we explain what a Trillion is. You hear how our government spends what you and I cannot begin to comprehend—a trillion! What an arrogant creature we have become to speak and spend in terms trillions. But such are men and women, arrogant in the knowledge that they cannot encompass or measure. This kind of arrogance is dangerous when men and women aspire to the knowledge of God.

The Bible Speaks that The Lord changes not. He is unchanging in all of the trillions of years, He has never changed one iota.

For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6)

There is no variableness, no shadow of turning in Him, The Holy Bible says. God does not change, you do, but God does not. You are not the same person you were yesterday, and neither is your mood. You are as variable

as the weather, and there is nothing but change and shadow in you. Do not place your trust in change and shadow. Would you really stake your life on a variable?

This ends Part 1 of the Reflection: **THE GOD WHO IS. Be sure to come back for the continuation of this series that may change your thinking and as importantly, the thinking of our children and our children's children, before it is too late.**

Pastor Julian Harris

THE GOD WHO IS
Part II

God is a Holy God. The Bible Speaks in this way:

The Lord is righteous in all of His ways and holy in all of His works (Psalm 145:17); There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides You; there is no Rock like our God (1 Samuel 2:2); What do You want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are -the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24); Who will not fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed (Revelation 15:4).

God is pure. The Bible Speaks thusly:

**Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil,
and You cannot tolerate wrongdoing.
So why do You tolerate the faithless?
Why are You silent
while the wicked swallow up?**

**those more righteous than themselves?
(Habakkuk 1:13)**

God is absolute purity. Growing up in South Carolina I seldom saw snow. We saw it in the movies like White Christmas, It's a Wonderful Life, The Bells of Saint Mary's for instance. I dreamed of a White Christmas. And when it came we were excited; we'd build a snowman and mother hung out sheets and towels and things on the line and when the sun came they'd dry. It was easy to see how dingy and stained they were against the purity of the snow. That's the way that we are. In comparison to God, we're dirty and stained, but we can't see it in the world because we look like the world. He is absolutely Holy and Pure.

The Bible teaches that God is a God of judgment.

Just as man is appointed to die once, and after that to face judgment, so also Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:27-28)

There is going to be a time of judgement, not as a group, not with your family or friends or Church, but individually.

**For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.
(Ecclesiastes 12:14)**

But I tell you that men will give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For

by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matthew 12:36-37)

The wages of sin, the Bible says, is death. You earn a wage; your work for pay. Your sin, my sin, has a payday someday and that is called the judgment. I know there seems to be no consequence to sin in this world; that's because the worldly rule here; but one day you and I shall stand before the One Who has overcome the world:

I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world! (John 16:33)

You and I may confess our sins, but we must also pay the consequences. When we abuse the environment, the streams and rivers, the air that we breath, the fish that we eat, the cattle of the fields and birds of heaven, we pay a price. We are living and breathing in a chemical soup! Is it any wonder that cancer, heart disease, COPD and other ailments are out of control? We are eating and drinking and breathing unto our own destruction. The same is true when we transgress and abuse God's moral, spiritual and ethical law we pay a price. The Bible says that God has appointed a day when He shall judge the world. There is a day already set aside in God's eternal plan of salvation: Judgement Day, and it has nothing to do with Arnold Swarzenegger or the Terminator or Mozart's Requiem, it is the **DIES IRAE, the terrible day of the wrath of Lord. To deny this, to conceal this truth or to dilute its horror is dangerous and serves no person but the Devil.**

The Bible also says that God is a God of love.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

**I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore I have drawn you with loving devotion.
(Jeremiah 31:3)**

A popular song years ago said **I don't care what they say I won't stay in a world without love.** You don't have to, because God loves you. And God does not say this to get something from you, or to trick you but to give you something that you need. Cowboy Country Star Johnny Lee sang *You've looked for love in all the wrong places:*

**Well, I've spent a lifetime lookin' for you;
singles bars and good time lovers were never true.
Playin' a fools game hopin' to win;
and tellin' those sweet lies and losin' again.**

Whatever your back ground, whoever you are, wherever you've been or are going—God loves you. How ever many your sins may have been—God loves you. How ever many mistakes you have made—God loves you. And it's an everlasting love. It's a supernatural love; God's love is not like ours and we don't understand it, but He loves us anyway. It's not romantic love, filial love or empathetic love, it's unconditional God-love. It's all of the loves that you know taken up, purified and made holy and purposeful in God's everlasting love. Only God has this kind of love, but He offers it freely to you and me when we come to His Son Jesus Christ.

That is what Jesus Christ was doing on the Cross, and is doing at every Mass, He is loving you. The Mass is Calvary, and your communion is a sharing in His love for you:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

(1 Corinthians 10:16)

Jesus is loving you and taking all of your sins and all of your failures on Himself at the Cross. Why you may ask? Because He made you and He knows that you cannot bear the weight of sin or escape the sickness it causes in your soul, your mind and yes, physically. But Why would Jesus do this? Because He loves you enough to die for you. Do you know anyone else who would do that, truly now, not theoretically, for you at your worst?

Have you ever thought why God created you or human beings in general? Many people are asking Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I doing here? What is the purpose, if any, of my life? Where am I going? God gives man and woman a choice. God created them, put them on this little planet, Earth, in a place called the Garden of Eden, and told them to live, be fruitful, multiply and be joyful. There were two trees there in the center of the Garden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God gave us all of this, but denied us one thing:

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

(Genesis 2:16-17)

Man and woman together rebelled against God. They aspired to the knowledge of God, and all who do this fall for merely knowing of evil, man and woman commit evil. We cannot resist its lure, its temptation. You may call this many things—pride, arrogance, folly—but in the end, call it what it is, the Human race.

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22-24)

There's one tree. You can have anything that you want, but don't eat of that one tree. God was testing man and woman because God gave them free will, the right and power to make his or her own choice. God does not make us robots, programmed to perform and do what He says. He gives you the freedom of choice. And in the Garden of Eden, God told them from the very beginning. But what did they do? What do you do, man and woman? They ate of the tree; you eat of the tree. They ate of the tree deliberately, it was no accident, not out of ignorance or under pressure—just like us today. They were deceived by the devil, because there is another mystery at that point that goes all the way through The Bible and comes into our world and into your life—the mystery of iniquity, the mystery of sin, the mystery of the Devil and demons. The Devil is very real. He works hard

and he can deceive. The Bible says that he can come in the appearance of an angel, as an angel of light, thus his name, *Lucifer*, which means “morning star,” or “light-bringer.” He’s very deceptive; he slips up on you. He looks like someone you know and trust and even love. He comes in your thoughts; he comes in your mind. We know that something is wrong. If you’re honest with yourself, you know it too. We watch the television, and follow the blogs and vlogs and twitter and all manner of social communications and see and sense that something is wrong in our world. The news will not name it, but I will: The Devil and the chaos and havoc that he inspires in us, the sin of it all. This is behind the race problems in our world. It’s sin. The deceiver stands behind every bigot, every racist, every misogynist, every crook, liar, thief, adulterer. Sin is the breaking of the moral law of God and breaking faith with those people inside and outside of your circle, because God made us all and loves us all. Why don’t you? I’ll tell you why, because sin limits love and justifies hatred. Sin is breaking the 10 Commandments given by God through Moses for the human race.

We have a desperate situation in the world today. The world is impoverished. The majority of the world is getting poorer every day while a few places experience vast and growing wealth. It causes many conflicts and clashes especially now that people can see it. When I was born into poverty I didn’t know that I was poor. I never thought about it until a rich kid pointed out my poverty as measured by what he had, or rather what his parents had. What wickedness that was! What cruelty to undermine me, and for what purpose? The sinner is like that—cruel, wicked, arrogant. Man has a terminal illness, because the mystery of iniquity is working hard:

For the mystery of iniquity is already at work, but the one who now restrains it will continue until he is taken out of the way. And then the Wicked will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and annihilate by the majesty of His arrival.

(1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

How many of the Ten Commandments have you broken? Do you even know the Ten Commandments? Can you name a few of them? Can you name any of them? The Bible says all of us, like sheep, have gone astray. Maybe you don't know anything about sheep. Then just think of your pet released from confinement to familiar surroundings, finding himself loose and overwhelmed with exotic aromas and trails. He plants his nose to the earth and just goes wherever the stink leads him. We're like that with sin, and the smell is temptation that overwhelms us and pulls us.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

We want to have our way, not God's way, but our way. That's called sin. So our basic, fundamental problems are not social, educational, institutional or some "systemic" flaw in what we have made or legislated or instituted or mandated—it's a fundamental flaw in men and women; it's sin. Who wants to hear this? Willfully Godless people and those who are wholly ignorant of God have no explanation but some tired old blame to direct attention away from his or her own heart. Is it any wonder that people behold the mayhem and violence

and hatred all around us as a mystery? It is a mystery, the mystery of iniquity! The Bible Speaks:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

Sin alienates you from God. And only God can unite the disparate, unite the many of us into a oneness of love and fellowship. When you break away from God, you break all possibility of peace with your family, your neighbors, your community with anyone.

You are a spirit. You have a body but inside your body is your spirit, a soul. You believe there is more to you than your flesh, don't you? When you die, is that all that a burial is for you, a disposal? Or do you believe that there has to be something more than this? Don't you sense that there must be, there has to be more? Haven't you been at the death bed of someone and seen them slip away? Surely you've visited a loved one in the hospital, perhaps your grandmother or grandfather, someone like me, old in years and body, and seen them sick and suffering. Didn't you ask that the suffering end? Who did you ask? The doctor, your mother, your girlfriend or boyfriend, your teacher? You know better than that. You have an intimation of immortality, that something more that is part of all of us, and of you, and you're asking God even if you will not or cannot acknowledge that. What happened when the breathing stopped and the nurse turned off the monitor with all of its alarms— Look out, death is coming...death has come. Sometimes we just stare at the machines.

The real person left the body. The real you will leave the body. This body will crumble and decay and return to

the dust, to the earth, to the ocean to the universe. But the real you is going to live on, because the real you leaves the body. And if you know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior you go into His presence. And you spend eternity with Him. Today I buried a 23-year old young man, and many of his friends came unprepared and with no answer to the death of their friend, the death of a young person. Knowing Jesus Christ is the only answer. In Him and Him alone, love has victory over death and *life* becomes the last word about you, not *death*.

Death has three dimensions. There's Natural Death. We're all going to die. The President's son John Kennedy, Jr. and his wife Carolyn Bessette boarded a light aircraft on the evening of July 16, 1999. They never dreamed that they'd never see home again. Like other young men and women, they had great dreams for their lives—their careers, marriage, family. I doubt they even entertained the thought that they'd not live to see those dreams fulfilled. There is also another death, a Spiritual Death. Your spirit that lives forever dies in the sense that it's alienated from God. This is the wages of mortal sin, the death of the spirit. The Bible also speaks of Eternal Death described as being Lost, Perished, Condemned, Punishment, Torment, Hell, Fire. You ask, do I believe that? Yes, I do believe it; I know The Bible teaches it, and therefore I believe that it is true. If Jesus said that Hell exists, then there's a Hell. I don't like to think about, talk about it or preach about it, but Our Lord Jesus did. Some say He talked more about Hell than about Heaven. I must say that Hell is a place, it's real, it's not an idea, it's not simply being apart from God, denied the presence and comfort of God, but a punishment where there is memory of the past and awareness of the present facing an eternity.

The Bible Speaks that Jesus Christ took your sins on the Cross. He did it once and for all. He does it today at every Mass. Mass is Calvary. There you place your sins on Him, He becomes your sins, and you become His grace when you receive Holy Communion. United with Jesus on the Cross He dies for you, He carries away your sins and the wages of sin, eternal death.

We implore you on behalf of Christ: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

Think of being sin. That is all that Jesus was on the Cross, sin. Your sins, mine, all the bad things that we have ever done, the lies we've told, the lust, the greed, the envy, the cruelty...all on Him, all Him. Think on that the next time you come to Mass. The Mass is Calvary, and you're there with your sin for Jesus. He's there to love you and forgive you your sins on that Cross. His real suffering goes beyond the physical, as terrible as that was, but His spiritual suffering! It was our sins. He had never known sin, and all of a sudden all of the sins of the world are on Him. The Bible says God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Cursed is He that hangs upon the tree, the Cross, the Righteous One Who suffers for the unrighteous, you and me. He died for you, because He loves you. And from the Cross God is saying: I love you; I love you. At every Mass, God says from the Cross: I love you; I love you. I am giving My Son for you. Jesus is taking your place. Three days later something Glorious happened.

Jesus rose from the Dead. Jesus said: I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. (John 11:25)

You will never die spiritually, because Jesus died on the Cross and rose from the dead. This is the center of Christianity. It all comes down to a place, Calvary, and a time, about 4 in the afternoon, and the God made man Jesus, Who died to save you from death.

This ends Part II of THE GOD WHO IS. Please return next week for another installment, and be sure to share this with your friends, your family, your children and especially with a young person who living in this world today may never have heard of God and His love for them in Christ. Where he or she spends eternity may well depend on this gift that you can give them today.

Pastor Julian Harris