

## Conclusions

1: The Hebrew Bible's concept of the Deity is through and through anthropomorphic. The God Paradigm presented by the data of the Hebrew Bible is not consistent. Polar tendencies are quite visible. The concept of divine transcendence is there, but is not systematically presented, clearly elaborated, and completely safeguarded against possible misconceptions, mis-interpretations, exploitations, and violence. It is very much scattered throughout the Bible. One has to sift through a great many contradictory statements, assertions, information, and face thorny problems to derive a concept of the absolute otherness and transcendence of God from the text of the Hebrew Bible itself. It could not be done satisfactorily without external help.

An anthropomorphic concept of the Deity is strikingly evident. Anthropomorphic descriptions of God, anthropomorphic attributes, qualities, and portrayals are so pervasive in the text that a cursory reader can determine that the God of the Hebrew Bible is undoubtedly anthropomorphic. Many of the biblical anthropomorphisms are naive, at times concrete, and are not essentially needed for the sort of modality intrinsic to proper religious communication except for the type of religious understanding which hold God as absolutely anthropomorphic. God is presented as a body, walking, talking, searching after somebody, weeping and crying, resting, wrestling, repenting, lamenting, in certain incidents lacking power, knowledge, mercy, justice, impartiality, universality; i.e., the basic traits of a transcendent God. On the other hand, many human limitations, qualities, and categories are ascribed to him that he often appears like a human being but of a higher rank or gigantic proportion. Many of these passages can be interpreted metaphorically, but a great majority of them would not render to such an interpretation without violence to the text. At times it seems like that man is creating God in his own image and form. Consequently, that image quite often suffers the finitude of its creator.

2: The Hebrew Bible's God Paradigm seems to be progressive and evolutionary. The later Prophet's conception of God, specially the one's after the 8th century B.C., is more elaborate, systematic, and unified than the earlier writings but not necessarily non-corporeal or non-anthropomorphic. It is as much anthropomorphic as the earlier writings but in a different way. The anthropomorphic expressions are, to certain degrees, refined and at times convey a sense of mystical experience or reflection. Many of them render to metaphorical interpretations more easily than their counterparts in the so-called books of Moses and other earlier writings. Still they convey nothing less than the concept of an anthropomorphic deity.

3: The traditional Rabbinic mind is very close to the Bible God Paradigm. There are times when the Rabbinic God seems more anthropomorphic, familiar, and bound than the God of the Hebrew Bible is.

4: The philosophical and transcendental thinking, in the sense of non-corporealism or non-anthropomorphism, had been looked upon (by the Jewry at large) as non-Biblical. Such an understanding of God had not been very popular in Jewish tradition over the centuries following the Rabbinic period.

5: It is not hard to determine the human aspect of the anthropomorphic Biblical passages. Human creativity seems to play a vital role in the creation of these anthropomorphically oriented, and at times immorally tuned, passages of the Hebrew Bible. This human aspect, ignored over the centuries, has been highlighted by many biblical scholars since the 19th century. It has almost become a standard explanation, particularly in academic circles, of many theological, moral and religious difficulties presented by the text of the Hebrew Bible.

6: It has become impossible to logically prove or rationally substantiate the traditional claims of the Hebrew Bible being the inerrant Word of God verbatim. Modern critical scholarship looks at it as the word of man or at the best as an indirect inspiration with Word of God mixed up with human word. The presence of a fanciful jungle of allegorical interpretations, violence over the centuries against the text of the Hebrew Bible and specially polar and contradictory tendencies about the Deity are not proofs of the depths and infinite mysteries of these problematic passages but the other way around. All of these problems, wittingly or unwittingly confessed by almost all biblical scholars, prove the point that the Hebrew Bible in its present shape and form cannot be taken as the inerrant Word of God.

7: The New Testament seems to be far removed from the Hebraic universe of discourse and very close to the Greek one. It is not theocentric. It is Christocentric. There are a greater variety of theologies (Christologies) presented in the New Testament than the variety one notices in the Old Testament and not all of them are mutually congruent. They are more problematic, divergent and mutually dissonant.

8: It is not what Jesus said and wrote about himself, and probably not even what he understood about himself. It is what the Church and later Christians understood and interpreted that he was or should have been.

9: The traditional Christian Incarnational theology is a result of centuries later reflections and developments and is not necessarily what the text of the New Testament presents. It is not clearly charted out in the New Testament in its developed, traditional, literal sense, and cannot be proved as the essence of the New Testament writings as a whole without external intrusions. It could

possibly be construed from some of these writings but not without superficial efforts and violence to the text on the part of the one who intends to do so.

10: The Incarnational theology, especially in its literal sense, is absolutely corporeal and anthropomorphic. It is practically impossible to separate the divine from the human. In reality it is the divine, the *Logos*, which is dominant, visible and worshipped while the human Jesus is conceded and concealed in the back. He is often claimed but seldom given a true and natural existence of his own. In reality, God the Father, the supposed First Person of the Holy Trinity, seems to be second while the Lord Jesus Christ, the supposed Second Person of the Trinity, seems to be taking over in such a fashion that God the Father often becomes invisible. Christianity, in its traditional popular sense, is really what the word literally means. It is really anthropomorphic.

11: The Incarnational theology is not only paradoxical. It is contradictory. Centuries of debates, difficulties, developments, political interferences, and controversies to pindown the true nature of Christ and his relationship to God are clear indications and proofs of the difficulties involved. These difficulties are inevitable and unavoidable. They can only be averted if we accept the dictum that the Gospel of Jesus has more to do with God the Father and our relation to our neighbors than to the person of Jesus himself. Without such frank and honest confessions even the metaphorical interpretations of the Incarnation in its traditional garb would be misleading.

12: The compilation and canonization process spread out over centuries, many regions, persons and intentions leaves a great many questions and impossibilities unresolved about the New Testament text as being the inerrant Word of God. Perjuries, insertions, textual violence and many other factors (discussed above) raise serious questions about the purity and authenticity of the text itself. All these difficulties are well recognized by a great many New Testament scholars. It is time to accept and highlight the human aspect of the New Testament.

13: The Qur'an was canonized from its inception. Its compilation process was not spread over centuries but over a few years. The authenticity, purity and universality of its text is a historical fact admitted by Muslim as well as non-Muslim scholars and sources. Many questions and objections about various aspects of the Qur'an have been raised by many non-Muslim scholars over the centuries. Now, there seems to be a sort of consensus among those who are actively involved in the field of the Qur'anic studies regarding the unity, universality and purity of the Qur'anic text. Moreover, the Qur'anic challenge of producing a rival text like that of the Qur'an stands unmatched, though efforts have been made, while fourteen centuries have already passed. On the other hand, its claim of divine protection, preservation and purity of text, made also fourteen centuries ago, has not been violated. The unity and universality of its text over these long centuries is a strong witness to that fact.

14: The Qur'anic God Paradigm is transcendental. Its monotheism is strict and absolute. The Qur'an has a systematically well explained conception of God's transcendence, otherness and uniqueness. It is supported and substantiated by countless verses, a variety of methods and arguments. Unlike the Bible, it is safeguarded against possible violations (like existence of other gods

as true gods, their ability to harm or benefit without the leave of God, division of power, knowledge, or person or any other division within the Godhead etc.). Moreover, it is not a bare and abstract notion of transcendence but a balanced, vivid and live concept of God. The transcendent God is immanent by dint of His infinite knowledge, power, love, mercy and the other positive attributes spelled out in the text of the Qur'an. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'anic Paradigm is consistent. There is only One transcendent God, unknown in His essence but known through His signs, attributes, qualities and actions. The idea of such a transcendent God is conveyed through the text of the Qur'an consistently. Its strong ethical nature and egalitarian tone is also evident from the Qur'anic text itself.

15: The Qur'anic God Paradigm is not corporeal or anthropomorphic. The few seemingly anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur'an can be interpreted metaphorically. That could be done without inventing facts or metaphors which are not their in the text itself. Such a non-anthropomorphic explanations could be established either from the context (or from within the Qur'anic text) or through metaphors commonly used in the language. This is what has been proved by a great many Muslim scholars and theologians over the centuries; however, these seemingly anthropomorphic phrases help create a modality helpful in the communication process between God and man without leading to corporealism if kept within the parameters and boundaries prescribed by the Qur'an. Therefore, except for the absolute literalists, the mainstream Islamic thought has always refuted corporealism and anthropomorphism.

This is perhaps the reason that Islamic faith has not been secularized or shaken to the extent some other traditions have been over the past centuries. Ernest Gellner observes that "At the end of the Middle Ages, the Old World contained four major civilizations. Of these, three are now, in one measure or another, secularized. Christian doctrine is bowdlerized by its own theologians, and deep, literal conviction is not conspicuous by its presence. In the Sinic World, a secular faith has become formally established and its religious predecessors disavowed. In the Indian World, a state and the elite are neutral *vis-a-vis* what is a pervasive folk religion, even if practices such as astrology continue to be widespread. But in one of the four civilizations, the Islamic, the situation is altogether different."<sup>1</sup> He further argues that "there is one very real, dramatic and conspicuous exception to all this: Islam. To say that secularization prevails in Islam is not contentious. It is simply false. Islam is as strong now as it was a century ago. In some ways, it is probably much stronger."<sup>2</sup> He attributes this stability and resisting power to its "emphatic and severe monotheism, the view that the Message received by the Prophet is so to speak terminal, and that it contains both faith and morals- or, in other words, it is both doctrine and law, and that no genuine further augmentation is to be countenanced."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it can easily be contended that the Qur'anic God Paradigm has the potential to stand the ground against modern atheistic challenges and avert the dangers that have shaken other civilizations to the very core of their essence.

16: Modern man is getting more and more removed from God and seems to be faithless. One of the great reasons of this alienation is an anthropomorphic and corporeal concept of God along with the insistence upon the Bible as the inerrant Word of God verbatim. The irony of the fact is that instead of discarding the human aspects and interpretations of the Scriptures, modern man seems to be rejecting the Deity Himself. The death of God can be avoided by emphasizing the

transcendent God who is beyond all shortcomings, all human qualifications, and does not seem to be created by man but is the Creator and Master of everything existing in the universe.

Such a notion of God has been aspired by all the three Semitic traditions though the text of the Bible is not consistent about it. By emphasizing non-corporeal and non-anthropomorphic elements in the Deity, one would not be terribly out of the boundaries or territories of these traditions. With the help of such a concept of God the wide gulf between alienated man and God can be narrowed down and science and faith can be brought closer if not together. The modern science and philosophy seem to be opening up to belief in God.<sup>4</sup> Paul Davies, for instance, argues against purposelessness and meaninglessness of the universe in the following strong words: "Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strong that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact. There must, it seems to me, be a deeper level of explanation. Whether one wishes to call that deeper level "God" is a matter of taste and definition."<sup>5</sup> He observes that "Although many metaphysical and theistic theories seem contrived and childish, they are not obviously more absurd than the belief that the universe exists, and exists in the form it does, reasonlessly... We are truly meant to be here."<sup>6</sup> He believes that "science offers a surer path than religion in search of God."<sup>7</sup> At the same time he wants to distance himself from the "organizational-manipulative God" of theology.<sup>8</sup> He does not believe in the anthropomorphically personal God of religion.<sup>9</sup> His God is not a "a person in any simple sense."<sup>10</sup> He emphasizes the need to think of God in less anthropomorphic ways and not to have a "naive image" of God but perhaps think of God as transcendent "universal mind", "supreme holistic concept",<sup>11</sup> "Being-itself" or a "Creative Force" or as a "mathematician".<sup>12</sup> He argues that "Only a god that transcends space-time, that is above causality and manipulation, can have any real relevance for the natural activity that blazes all around us."<sup>13</sup>

John Leslie writes: "If God is real then his reality seems to me most likely to be as described in the Neoplatonist theological tradition. He is then not an almighty person but an abstract Creative force which is "personal" through being concerned with creating persons and acting as a benevolent person would."<sup>14</sup>

I am not saying that religion must follow the scientist's concept of God or subordinate revelation to science. What I want to say here is that a crude anthropomorphic notion of God is a great hurdle between modern intellectual thought and belief in God. This gulf can be narrowed down by emphasizing and insisting upon the transcendent God. The difficulty in believing today is not belief as such but rather having a concept of God that is non-anthropomorphic. Here the Qur'an can contribute more than the Bible as having stressed more the importance of the Deity as the transcendent being, having emphasized the importance of not taking anthropomorphic imagery about God as if it were literally true of God and having consistently pinpointed and averted the dangers of an anthropomorphic notion of God.



---

1<sup>1</sup>E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, Routledge, London and NY, 1993, 5-6<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 5<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 6; see also his *Muslim Society*, CUP, Cambridge, 1981<sup>4</sup>See details in Paul Badham's "Introduction" to his father's book "Verdict on Jesus", IKON, Wantage, 1995, xixff; see also Paul Johnson, "Peaceful Co-Existence", *Prospect* London, Issue 7, April 1996, 34-8; Terry Miethe, and Antony Flew, *Does God Exist?: A Believer and an Atheist Debate*, Harper, NY, 1991. I owe most of this data as well as the claim to a well researched recent paper by Paul Badham, "Modern Science and the Argument for God's Existence". I used the paper with his permission.

---

5 <sup>5</sup>Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*, Simon & Schuster, NY, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore, 1992, 16; 213ff; see also his *God and the New Physics*, Simon and Schus-

---

ter, NY, 1983, 25ff, 214ff and his *The Edge of Infinity*, Simon and Schuster, NY, 1982, 171ff<sup>6</sup>*The Mind of God*, 231-2<sup>7</sup>*God and the New Physics*, 229<sup>8</sup>*The Edge of Infinity*, 171<sup>9</sup>See *The Mind of God*, 17, 191<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, 17<sup>11</sup>*God and the New Physics*, 223ff<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, 222; *The Edge of Infinity*, 188<sup>13</sup>*The Edge of Infinity*, 171<sup>14</sup>John Leslie, *Universe*, Routledge, London, 1996, 2