



# Seeking Our Global God

## Is it Time for Graduation?

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Human awareness and understanding of the world changes throughout the ages. In prehistoric times, humans revered fertility and the miracle of birth. Early Egyptians and Greeks thought a sun god traveled across the sky during the day. Before Copernicus, people believed the earth was stationary at the center of the universe.

Two thousand years ago we were walking around in sandals carrying swords. Today we send spaceships to Mars. Two thousand years ago we invented paper and scissors. Today we study quasars, black holes, stem cells, quantum mechanics and bioengineering.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said “When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11). Are we ready for a more mature practice of religion than we’ve been capable of in the past?

We might agree that God doesn’t change, but what if our ability to understand God does? What if God speaks to us on our level? The way you explain an egg is different if you’re talking to a five year old, a ten year old or a fifteen year old. Someone doing doctoral research in biology or life sciences will understand eggs in ways many of us do not.

Every culture has a creation story whether it’s God sending a bird to dive through an abyss to fetch a piece of land, or deities springing up like reeds from a floating mass, or the sun sprouting from a giant flower, or a god descending on a chain with a rooster.

We all want to know where we came from. Are we ready for a story that doesn’t involve a talking snake undermining God and causing women to be cursed and blamed for thousands of years thereafter? I don’t know what would have been more satisfying to God – designing wings or watching feathers evolve, but I do know that human beings will continue to ask questions.

Holy books are holy. They are rich, instructive, inspiring and revealing. We can stand on our faith that the words bring meaning and godliness to our lives. Even if one doesn’t believe in the deity of a messenger, the wonder of teachings surviving for hundreds and thousands of years means we should study them as part of our amazing culture just as we study Homer, Confucius, Plato or Virgil.

The Dr. Seuss book “Green Eggs and Ham” has a great lesson in it about being open-minded, and one can benefit from that lesson even if one is studying for a PhD in literature, philosophy or religion.

Is it possible that we are ready to mark as complete some of the instructions God gave us? “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28), for example. Many would agree

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Create  
the climate  
in which  
we thrive

we've been excellent on this point.

"You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together" (Leviticus 19:19). Would the world be a better place if there was no Spandex in my cotton shirt? Perhaps, but Jesus didn't speak of these things when he walked the earth.

"On the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Sabbath of complete rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death" (Exodus 35:2). This would certainly reduce population growth.

"Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak" (1 Corinthians 14:34). "As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, forsake them in beds apart and beat them" (Koran 4:34). Today we have laws outlawing discrimination and violence.

If we can agree that teachings are relevant to our level of maturity, then one day we could agree that we are through smiting our enemies, and we could accept a vision of God that unites us rather than divides us.

Studies show that there are few genetic differences among us. While looking at human blood under a microscope, you can't determine the race or ethnicity of the person from whom that blood was taken. The view of earth from the moon is one of the most enlightening photographs humankind has ever seen. Today you can have a video conversation with someone orbiting the planet. You can get nearly instantaneous updates on events halfway around the world.

Medicine is a good example of how our understanding has changed. In the past we had no anesthesia and no antibiotics. Bloodletting and leeches were considered good practice.

Inventions have improved our lives, and this is what we have to deal with today – six-lane highways at 65 miles an hour (if you obey the speed limit), oil spills in the oceans, polar bears drowning in the Arctic, time measured to hundredths of seconds, and we're expected to learn quadratic equations.

Are there universal truths that we can understand in this day and age that will lead us to greater love for God and our neighbors? What if we all agreed, for example, that our creator doesn't want us to kill each other? What if we all agreed that our creator doesn't want us to kill ourselves?

"Every ravine shall be filled up, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough roads smooth and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:5-6). This is the nature of things. This is the nature of progress. New rivers have many twists and turns. Old rivers flow more directly to the sea. New mountains are steep and craggy. Old mountains are gentle rolling hills. When will our differences not seem so different?

In the year 325 a council met in the city of Nicaea and adopted a creed, known as the Nicene Creed, that expressed the basis of common beliefs among churches. What unifying messages might people agree on today?

I do not suggest that we pick the easy parts from the world's great religions. "The gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it" (Mathew 7:13). The good news is we can leave our baggage behind. We can shed the weight of bitterness and disappointment and judgments about others. We don't have to pull heavy possessions along with us. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my load is light" (Mathew 11:30). Living an enlightened life may not be easy, but it is simple. It is freeing.

In all times, people have believed that the world was ending. It is motivating to think that life on earth is temporary and that we are the ones who are chosen to rise above the troubles here. It is comforting and ego-boosting to believe that we will go with God while others will be left behind.

Jesus said, “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other...Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matthew 24:31, 34).

Two thousand years later, we’re still waiting for this to happen. I pray for this to happen. I want to be relieved of the trivial and stressful and painful things in life: paper cuts, taunting, fear, assault, losing my keys, losing loved ones, man-made deadlines.

But Jesus also said, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Matthew 24:36).

What if the world doesn’t end, or what if it is always ending and renewing? What if, as Jesus said, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5)? If we count ourselves among the people who will inherit this earth, then we might stop living in a short-sighted way, and we might care for this planet. We might avoid poisoning the air and the water. We might stop feeling justified in hastening our demise. We might work towards peace on earth.

What if the kingdom of God is not an external destination but a place inside us? What if we currently know both heaven and hell? What if everyday God calls us and most of us just don't hear it?

Adopting a new, deeper, more mature relationship with God would be extremely threatening to some people, just as the theory of evolution was extremely upsetting to people. Actually evolution is still upsetting to some on the Texas school board.

Asking people to be receptive to new messages from God also increases the threat of false prophets. Jesus warned about this, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). “Many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many” (Matthew 24:11). Jesus also said, “By their fruit you will know them” (Matthew 7:16).

False prophets:

Incite division, hatred and violence.

Promote suicide.

Act for self-gratification.

Maintain a narrow focus.

Crave adulation.

Insist on control.

Denounce those who doubt.

“The path of life leads upward for the wise (Proverbs 15:24). The struggle of good versus evil is primarily within us. We have a world within us.

God has the power to create something out of nothing. Humans are made in the image of God. Humans create things – art, music, mathematical equations, clones, genetically engineered plants and animals.

Let us honor God within us. Let us honor God within other people. Let us seek an enlightened

concept of God that transcends boundaries, transcends culture, transcends history. Let us grow up. Let us engage in adult conversations. Let us seek the truth that we are able to receive.

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face o face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13: 12-13).

We can start with the knowledge that God loves all of us, not just those of a particular institutional religion or denomination or sect, but all of us. We can start by agreeing that God lives within us, that we all have the power to create and destroy, that all of us originated in the same way, and that all of us share this planet.

A good way to hear is by being ready to listen.

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