**Angry gods and Lonely People**
by Wendell Krossa

**God's Scandalous Generosity**

There is an interesting story told by Joshua Ben Adam (the historical Jesus) about a son who took his inheritance and left home. Over the following months he wasted all his money on prostitutes and drinking. He ended up a wasted, down and out bum. On returning home, his father was so glad to see him that he called for a party. He wanted to celebrate. In telling this story, Joshua intended to illustrate, among other things, something of God's delirious joy at having humanity for his friends. Even though the son wanted to beg for forgiveness, the father would not hear of it- he wanted just to celebrate.

This story illustrates God's scandalously generous attitude toward us. It also illustrates our misconceptions about God, his supposed anger, and our misconceptions about needing to cower before him and beg for his forgiveness. We tend to see God all wrong. Millennia of religious beliefs and myths have severely distorted our thinking on God and also messed us up psychologically and emotionally.

Think of the long history of angry, bloodthirsty gods punishing hapless sinners, the guilty consciences of the Reformers, The Puritan writings on God's wrath and hell, Jonathan Edwards 'Sinners in the hands of an Angry God', and much more teaching of a similar vein. All of this groveling before a supposedly angry God is certainly out of touch with Joshua's view of God as joyously celebrating our company.

These religious ideas of an angry God have deeply influenced Western society's thinking and practices in broad and profound ways, more than most people are willing to admit. We agree with the statement that "matters that appear to be solely political or economic in nature and thereby assumed to deal purely with practical matters are in fact linked to deeper religious, moral and philosophical affirmations of faith... It is this unconscious world view, this hidden and usually unconfessed metaphysics that structure our consciousness about life and colors, in turn, our policy values and decisions" (Religion and the Penal System). Ideas people hold about gods profoundly influence the way they feel and act. It is true then that any movement toward a truly human social order will require change not just in broad social attitudes, but also in the underlying ideas that support such attitudes.

As an illustration of how ancient religious ideas influence broader social ideas and practices, we think of the widespread social and institutional practice of punishing people. Whether in schools, the workplace, or government institutions- everywhere there is punishment of people for failing to adhere to systems of law. We accept punishment as normal, natural, and right. We believe this widespread social acceptance of and practice of punishment has its origins in ancient ideas of angry gods who demanded blood sacrifices as punishment or who required sacrifice for appeasement of divine anger and justice. Punishment is a barbaric idea and practice, but we never even stop to question it or its pagan origins because we unthinkingly accept it as something which has originated with God or the gods. Far too often in human existence, things believed to be divine are not open to question or change. This pathetic acquiescence in the face of supposedly God-given truths has resulted in far too much misery and suffering among human beings. It is time to declare we are as mad as hell and we refuse to take it anymore.

**An Angry God and Traumatized People**

Some of the most traumatizing and most damaging impacts on the human psyche are caused by rejection and abandonment, with the consequent loneliness and despair these also produce. Research on the break-up of families is revealing the massive impacts such disintegration has on young lives.

Loss of community relationships and community support over the past few millennia have also added to the sense of abandonment, isolation, alienation, and loneliness of human existence. Contemporary economic systems, with their emphasis on self-interest and people competing against each other, intensify the sense of psychic aloneness experienced by many in our modern societies.

You often hear people express their sense of aloneness and how they feel like outsiders, they don't fit, they feel like something is wrong with them, or that they are not part of the group. These very common complaints are all expressions of something more deeply embedded in the background of the human psyche.

We would suggest there is something deeper at work here than just the immediate and obvious factors found in contemporary societies- the breakup of families or the loss of community. As we noted earlier, we believe these experiences of alienation, loneliness, and isolation may also be due to the religious beliefs that are at the root of many broad social attitudes and ideas. Ancient myths of having been forsaken by angry gods may be important contributing factors to the widespread sense of abandonment found in modern Western societies.

**The Cruel Myth of the Fall**

One of the central myths in this regard is the myth of a Fall long ago. This Fall myth is found in both Western and Eastern societies. This myth states that God had revealed his will or law but ancient man was bad or rebellious and did not obey that law. God therefore became angry with humanity, rejected human beings, and left them.

**God went up into the heavens, far away.**..

This most important person in any life- God, the Creator and Father of all- this person of more profound import than any parent, becomes angry with people, rejects them and there is nothing they can do about it in terms of appeasing or reconciling with the angry God.

If parental rejection and abandonment is traumatizing- how much more traumatizing to find the Creator Father rejects and abandons you, and does so forever.

Albert Nolan has made some insightful comments on the damaging effect that such harsh views of God had on people at the time of Jesus. He says, "The 'sinners' were social outcasts. Anyone who for any reason deviated from the law and the traditional customs of the middle class (the educated and the virtuous, the scribes and Pharisees) was treated as inferior, as low class... They (sinners) would have included those who had sinful or unclean professions: prostitutes, tax collectors, robbers, herdsmen, usurers, and gamblers... There was no practical way out for a sinner... To be a sinner was therefore one's lot. One had been predestined to inferiority by fate or the will of God. In this sense sinners were captives or prisoners" (Jesus Before Christianity, p.24).

"Their suffering therefore took the form of frustration, guilt, and anxiety. They were frustrated because they knew that they would never be accepted into the company of 'respectable' people. What they felt they needed most of all was prestige and public esteem, and this is what was denied them. They did not even have the consolation of feeling that they were in God's good books. The educated people told them that they were displeasing to God and 'they ought to know'. The result was a neurotic or near-neurotic guilt complex which led inevitably to fear and anxiety about the many kinds of divine punishment that might befall them... Very many of them seem to have suffered from mental illnesses, which in turn gave rise to psychosomatic conditions like paralysis and speech impediments" (Ibid).

Around the basic myth of an angry God, further myths also arose regarding the requirement of blood sacrifice to appease the angry gods. This is where Christians invented the belief that Jesus' sacrifice appeases God's wrath for us. But the brutality of such blood sacrifice completely distorts any sense of forgiveness. As Brinsmead says, "If God can not forgive us unless Christ pays our debt, then he does not really forgive at all. If a debt has been paid, then there is nothing to forgive. Atonement and forgiveness, therefore, are mutually exclusive" ( see No Atonement, p.14).

But far more traumatizing to the human psyche has been the religious teaching on hell. Not only are we abandoned by God for being 'bad' people, but far worse, we are threatened with the worst thing ever conceived by any human mind- eternal torture and burning in raging fires, with frightening demons to add to the torment.

If earthly forms of punishment and torture are traumatizing to the victims, even while holding forth some hope of cessation and escape, then how much more traumatizing are these horrific beliefs in a future place of eternal and inescapable damnation? No wonder billions of frightened and traumatized people will subject themselves to religious authorities and do anything in order to find relief and some hope of escape from such an enraged and vengeful God.

Threat of punishment is a powerful tool for dominating, manipulating, and controlling people. Religious authorities understand this well. In a recent battle for control of a local Sikh temple, traditionalist members are threatening others that "they will incur the wrath of God" if they do not vote for the traditionalist position. This use of angry, punishing gods to coerce others is very common in all religions.

**There Never was a Fall**

Fortunately for all of us, there never was a Fall. It is a vital part of the Fall myth that before that catastrophe the world was a paradise, there was no suffering or death. But we now know that suffering, death, and misery were everywhere operative since the earliest emergence of life on earth some 3 billion years ago, long before humans entered the scene. There was never a catastrophic time only a few millennia ago when suffering and death began due to an act of human disobedience.

The Fall is simply a myth. It never happened. Consequently, we can also conclude that God never became angry with us. God never rejected or abandoned us. Like the myth of the Fall, our ancestors made it all up.

For many people afraid of an angry, punishing God, this may be the most profoundly liberating news they will ever hear. There is no angry God to fear and no punishment or hell to come.

Further information on life and the nature of reality also reveals the fallacy of God's anger and abandoning people. God has always been present as the life or power sustaining all in existence. God has never left as though he could be something outside of so-called physical reality. He did not create the physical world, wind it up, and leave it running on its own. Material reality does not run by itself. God is the energizing life behind all reality. Reality has no life or power of its own, or ability to survive on its own.

**All reality exists in God**

And all reality is the same everywhere, both here and way out there. It was once believed by the ancients that God lived out in some separate spiritual place called heaven. This was thought to be up in the skies or in outer space. We now know that all space consists of the same reality. God is everywhere in the same way sustaining this reality. It is not true as the ancient myths stated that the earth and heavens were different.

There are several important implications of this truth about God sustaining all reality. First, there is no periphery or center to God- a place where God is more than some other place. One could state this same point in the words of Bede Griffiths, who said, "modern physics affirms that the whole is present in every part... we become aware of ourselves as parts, as it were, of that whole, but also the whole is present in each one of us... It must always be remembered that these are only words which we use to describe a reality infinitely beyond our conception, but they are useful in so far as they point us towards that reality" (A New Vision Of Reality, p.175).

Also, God has never left anyone. He has never rejected or abandoned anyone. He has never left any place to go to some other place. His sustaining presence makes leaving any place impossible.

We state it again, as modern information continues to undermine critical parts of these old myths, we can safely conclude that God was never angry with anyone. God never punished anyone with suffering, misery, or death. These things have always been part of life and not due to anyone's disobedience.

And most importantly, there is no eternal hell or eternal torture. There is no angry, vengeful God waiting beyond death to damn people forever.

We must realize now that we have inherited worldviews that are simply wrong and made ourselves miserable all these millennia for nothing. We have believed myths, lies.

God has always been present. And God is not just neutrally present. He is present with intense love because that is his essential nature. The story Jesus taught about the returning son reveals a little of that generous love or compassion. It makes God celebrate with sheer explosive joy. What we sometimes feel in our lives is only a dim and minute taste of the reality of God's unspeakable and boundless love for all of us. It is love beyond all possible imagining or feeling.

All the loneliness, frustration, emotional pain, isolation, the too often unsatisfying inability to connect intimately with or feel close to others, the misunderstanding and abandonment that we experience here, will soon be obliterated entirely and forever as we are all immersed in the intense love of God. While not wanting to limit the experience of that love to a future time, it is true that in our material dominated reality of the present we simply can not experience fully the profound sense of unity and closeness to God and to each other that is yet to come. However, the realization of the soon coming of such unity and love should energize us with hope and enable us to live in love while we are yet here (see Bede Griffith's book A New Vision Of Reality for an inspiring discussion of the unity with God we will experience when we transcend this limiting time and space universe).

Further, God has always forgiven us. There was never any need for a sacrifice to appease God. God was never angry with us. He never demanded blood. In fact, he stated in the Old Testament long ago that he hates blood sacrifice (see No Atonement).

So relax. There is nothing you could have done anyway or need do to appease a supposed angry God. It was all a myth. There was no need to say prayers, to attend church, to go stand on a street corner to do your duty to witness. There was no need to give anything, no need to repent, to crawl or grovel before anyone, especially not before God. There was no need to endlessly flip beads or whatever else the religious bosses demanded. You can not earn God's favor, because you never lost it.

And no one has more of God's love or favor than any other person. No one has better access to God because they are a better person, more committed, or more diligent, or because they know some secret truth or formula. No, we are all equal in access to and knowledge of God. It is absolute nonsense if anyone suggests any differently.

There is nothing special to learn or do or pay to gain God. There is no where to go (no special places) and no special persons to submit to or obey in order to enter God's presence and favor. Are we getting a bit redundant here? We are trying to drill home the amazing truth that we are free, free of all religious obligation and slavery. We have always been free in God.

There are also no difficult practices of the mystics that we must spend a lifetime learning, whether they involve long prayers, meditation, or other special techniques of straining to focus on an invisible person or trying to shut down the noisy, scattered images flitting about in our minds. None of this is necessary to enjoy God.

God is found and experienced in the ordinary of daily life. When we work, love and share in daily life, then God is expressed, experienced and known. Such loving and sharing requires the power of God. When we do not retaliate, but turn the other cheek, forgiving as God forgives, then God is visibly present. When we refuse to dominate or control others, but instead treat all as equals, then God's humanity is seen. "He who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him" (1 John).

It should be clear now how badly religion has distorted God to us by continuing to propagate these horrible myths of angry and distant gods. That is why the comedian Steve Allen said you have to leave the church to really know God. Joining some religion will not help in properly understanding God as present and loving. Too often religion only imprisons people's minds with archaic myths that are simply out of touch with the reality of God as we now know him.

And anyway, God has never been locked up in any religion to be dispensed in correct doses by religious people. No- he has always been everywhere in normal daily life. He has never been a religious or institutional God.

**God is not Offended by Human Failure and Imperfection**

The story Jesus told of the wasting son also reveals that you can not offend a loving God with human failure and imperfection. There is no need to grovel for forgiveness over human failure. God celebrates you and will not heed any groveling for mercy. He is simply overwhelmed to have you with him. God's love and forgiveness is not conditioned on returning or repentance or improved behavior (measured according to religious or moral standards which often have very little to do with real right or wrong which relates more correctly to what is human/inhuman or loving/loveless).

Just as an aside: It has been pointed out that the true meaning of repentance in the Bible is to reject the notion of payback justice (atonement) and to exhibit never-ending forgiveness (Robert Brinsmead, Verdict Essay 'No Barriers', Nov. 199. Biblical repentance is to forsake and reject religious ideas, attitudes and practises and to become fully human. This concept of repentance is opposite to most religious teaching on repentance which urges people to forsake humanity to become religious.

Jesus' teaching on God not being offended with human failure and imperfection also brings into question all the elaborate teaching about grieving the Spirit of God and the misery this brings to sensitive but imperfect people. That misery generating mythology must now end.

I am fully aware in saying God is not offended by human failure that this will set off defensive reactions in many people. If you say God is not angry or upset with sin then how do you prevent or stop people from doing wrong? We are so used to threat, fear, and punishment as the only means of influencing or controlling behavior that we are terrified of removing these motivations in any way. Don't people need to be punished to teach them a lesson and keep them from repeating their mistakes? But if God is not worried about it then why should you be? And God obviously knows that scandalously generous love and forgiveness is a much more powerful lesson than revenge and punishment.

**Don't be like the Older Brother**

In bringing up our defensive complaints against God's generosity we are acting more like the loveless older brother who resented his father's scandalous generosity toward the returning son. And bringing up these defensive reactions of ours regarding the supposed need for fear and threat, only serves to cloud and weaken the sense of God's love and forgiveness. That is the point of so many of Joshua's stories. They were stories of scandalous mercy, love, and forgiveness not conditioned on any repentance or improvement in behavior.

Tragically, too often all that religion has done is to hide the infinitely incomprehensible and liberating love of God. With impossible requirements and standards, confusing and contradictory systems of doctrines or beliefs, and inhuman threats toward fallible people, too often all that religion accomplishes is to bring misery and despair to people already struggling with their imperfection. Religious authorities try to bring love or mercy into their belief systems, but it never works. Their emphasis on very harsh systems of justice, punishment, and damnation, only confuses and clouds any true sense of God's love and forgiveness. They are unsuccessfully trying to reconcile or mix mutually exclusive realities.

In emphasizing justice so much, religion has most often played the role of the cruel and cold older brother who demands groveling before strict human justice and subjection to very human punishment. The older brother would not welcome back the waster with a party but would instead punish, reject, and send away, at least until there was sufficient evidence of having met religious standards of improved behavior within a probationary period. Even then, the younger brother would remain subservient to the longer serving and religiously faithful older brother.

The older brother, viewing life from a sense of strict payback justice, could not understand his father's (God's) generosity. In another parable Joshua told, laborers in a vineyard show a similarly harsh attitude toward latecomers and also can not understand God's scandalous generosity toward all. They would also deal with others according to a strict system of justice.

Albert Nolan says regarding this parable, "the laborers who have done 'a heavy days work in all the heat' complain because others have received the same wages for working only one hour. It seems to be so unfair and unjust, in fact so unethical. But this is not so. One denarius is a just wage for a day's work and that is what they had agreed upon. But the employer, like God, had been moved with compassion for the unemployed he found in the market place, and out of genuine concern for them and their families he had employed them for the rest of the day and paid them a wage which was not proportionate to the work done but proportionate to their needs and the needs of their families. Those who had worked all day do not share the employer's compassion for the others and therefore they complain. Their 'justice', like the justice of the Zealots and Pharisees, is loveless. They envy the good fortune of others and, like Jonah, they regret God's compassion and generosity towards others" (Jesus Before Christianity, p.97).

Fortunately for us all, God's love has always been absolutely free and scandalously generous. There have never been any religious requirements to meet nor any strict systems of justice to satisfy. Joshua wanted to overwhelm guilty, anxious, fearful people with a sense of God's amazing love, mercy, forgiveness, and unconditional acceptance. He did not want any supposed requirements (manmade) to limit or cloud people's sense of the scandalous generosity of God.

**Relax and enjoy God's Love**

And one final note about God's presence. God is present not as any sort of superior, like a king or ruler. He is present as a friend or daddy (Greek 'abba'). Someone you play with and share common jokes with. God wants us to relax and to simply realize this amazing love and generosity. He has always been present and loving us intensely and we knew it not. We believed instead the lies that he was angry with us and far away above us. Consequently, we waste our lives in unnecessary guilt and misery.

When we realize the truth about God and his love then we are free to go out and show it to all others. We go freely, un-coerced, not threatened with punishment.

Most important, we have never been alone or rejected or abandoned by God. He was never angry with us. We have always existed in his awesome love. This truth deals profoundly with the deepest roots of alienation, loneliness, fear, anxiety, rejection or sense of abandonment.