

Behold Your God



Jim McGuiggan

BEHOLD YOUR GOD

Reflections on the God and Father
of Jesus Christ

Jim McGuigan



Sunset Institute Press

3710 34th Street ♦ Lubbock, TX 79410
800/687-2121 ♦ www.extensionschool.com

Behold Your God!

Sunset Institute Press
© Copyright 2017
All Rights Reserved.

Printed and Bound in the United States of America
All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are from
THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION

ISBN 978-1-938335-97-6 (Print edition)

All Rights Reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the Author or publisher, including translations.

“This will not be a good book. No matter! If through it, great things are dreamed about.”

Gustave Flaubert

“To expect a change in human nature may be an act of faith; but to expect a change in human society without it is an act of lunacy.”

Eustace Perry

“Life means Christ to me...” Philippians 121,

Moffatt

I too will set my face to the wind and cast my handful of seed on high.

Gaelic saying

There is nothing redemptive in a paragon of virtue. No Pharisee ever succeeds in stirring anything but contempt for religion in a happy pagan or the world-hardened publican as he clutches more tightly than ever to his money-bags and sits down contentedly to fill them. But Jesus saves him. Levi deserts the receipt of custom, because he cannot, he dare not, resist the love that seeks him. There is a key to every conscience, but the moralist does not hold it; It hangs from the belt of One who has travelled far to find it. It is His only who can turn it with a pierced hand. **John Clifford**

Dedication

For Ed & Martha Wharton

**In sincere admiration and gratitude for their
lives long, faithfully and fruitfully spent in
the service of our Lord Jesus Christ**

CONTENTS

Introduction.	7
1. The Incarnate God.	11
2. Be Holy as I am Holy?	36
3. The Living God.	57
4. The God Who was Hanged.	93
5. But Now is Christ Risen.	133
6. Reconciliation & Forgiveness.	169
7. Jesus: The Alpha & the Omega.	208
8. Resurrection & Ascension?.	224
9. The God Who Came Preaching.	230
10. The Church & Her Response.	244
11. When Death is not Death.	262
Bibliography.	270
Scripture Index.	272

INTRODUCTION

The Jesus of Holy Scripture is God manifested and He is God on a double mission that is, in fact, a single mission. Jesus is God who by creation became the Father of a human family. When we chose alienation and loss of identity He came to save us and to complete His eternal purpose toward us which was to give us a share in His glorious immortal life.

Jesus makes it clear that we have been created sons and daughters of God and that that relationship has to do with more than bare human existence. We were and are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), that is, to function as His created children in reflecting Him. People become what they have been created to be when they function as the image of God (Matthew 5.45; Luke 6:35-36).

I don't need help to understand that there is unutterable suffering and abuse, cruelty and corruption in this world. I'm aware too that those who experience it at the deeper levels, day in and day out all their lives, don't care what we *call* it or how we explain how it all came about. They just want it to stop and whatever or whoever brings that about and gives them some peace to live out the rest of their days will have their gratitude and maybe worship. Then they will grow older and feebler and die. I have no criticism for those in ceaseless pain and despair who would gladly settle for a happy life and a permanent sleep but I've come to believe that God has so much more

to offer that if people heard it and could receive it that they would, even with sobs, think the anguish was worth bearing.

I'm content now to believe that God is our Father and that centrally what He feels toward us is love and that He is committed to bring us to the awareness of the stunning truth that whatever else we are we are His children whom He has created.

But it's precisely because we are His children that our rejection of Him renders our Sin and ours sins of such a magnitude and our appalling treatment of one another beyond rational explanation. It's *who* and *whose* we are that leaves us speechless at times at what is going on and why we would do what we do to each other (or why we do not do things *for* each other).

"Why? Why?" Nettie sobs at her sister's lecherous husband who is throwing her out of the house and driving her off the land, separating her from her beloved and much abused sister Celie. Nettie had rejected his evil advances so she knows why but "Why?" needed more than that—the anguish he was heaping on her went beyond the rational. Didn't he know what Celie meant to Nettie? Should that not have kept him from acting as he did? It didn't for he was enslaved to the evil all around him and which he finally invited into his heart where it made its home and ruled him.

As long as God is content to allow humans to be humans (shapeable, choosing beings) we'll have more than

we need of cruelty and oppression, of people in ignorance and *kept* ignorant and isolated. But imagine a day (a day of God's choosing and Christ's visible return) when all wrongs will be righted. Imagine that day at its truest and best, its fairest and happiest, a day stunning in its loveliness, the beginning of endless righteousness and joy and adventure. That's what's ahead (Acts 17:31).

I got off the phone with a very dear friend of mine. We spoke for more than an hour and the center of it was about his joy at what he is discovering from the Scriptures about God. Immediately linked with that was this: it has affected and is affecting his view of life and making it so much more wonderful than he had already believed it to be. He was close to delirious and I can truthfully tell you that I was thrilled for him and for the people he has a lot of influence with and also thankful to a God who draws people to Him in this way and does this kind of thing to them.

So, here I am, about to let this little book go and truly wishing I have done or could do so much better because I wanted so badly to get in on the joy-bringing gospeling that my friend brought to me in that lengthy conversation. (I'm still smiling at the tone of his voice.) The thing that consoles me (some) is that even if I were capable of writing an epoch-making book God would still be infinitely more wonderful, wise, admirable, worshipful, holy and fatherly than that book. Any book I would ever write (any book any of us would ever write) must fail for the obvious

reason. A greater than the entire Bible is here, a greater than the entire creation is here. Bless me, Jesus Himself said (John 14:28), "My Father is greater than I." If Jesus of Nazareth said that our silence might be in order; but then again, if God is that glorious silence would be a crime!

There is a good bit of repetition here but I can truthfully tell you I tried to avoid a lot of it but because I lack the discipline of others there it is. I think I suffer from pedagogic and homiletical Tourette's. Still, truths overlap, don't they.

There is truth in this book about the Magnificent God and may He bless us with the richer vision of Himself that He has given and is giving to my exulting friend who made me happy this day.

jim mcguiggan

September 2017

1

GOD INCARNATE

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

John 1:14

"Go to my brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and to your God.'" John 20:17

**"...the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
2 Corinthians 4:6**

Half a million mourners followed the cortege of Victor Hugo to his resting place in the Pantheon in 1885. No wonder the French people revered him. He was more than an international playwright, poet and famous author; he was a statesman, lover of the poor and a Frenchman who loved France with all his heart. He grieved with France through its troubles and when the Prussians moved against Paris Hugo sent word from his safe home in Guernsey to the French capital, "I am coming to Paris."

On his way through Belgium a young Frenchman enquired, "Are you Victor Hugo?" and on being told he

was the young man wanted to know, "Is it prudent to go to Paris at this time?" The response was immediate, "It is very imprudent. You ought to go." Hugo arrived just as the Germans were closing the last avenues of entrance to or escape from Paris. A host of hurting, worried and deprived French people met him and were enthralled with this great man who had come to *be* with them and *bear* with them and *for* them whatever was ahead in Paris.

As P.T. Forsyth has taught us, it won't do to speak of Christ *only* as a hero but it is true to say that He came to bear with and for us the pain and loss that comes as a result of our choice of alienation from God. On his way to Paris Hugo had seen the Germans at work in the villages burned to the ground and on his way to Bethlehem and Golgotha the Christ had seen the human race at work. We might have thought with Matthew Henry that in light of our awful sins and desperate wickedness his name might have been "God against us" but no! When he acts as "God against us" it is because he is God *with and for* us. Romans 8:31: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us who can be against us?" He is "Immanuel!" Hugo appealed to the best that was in his people and Jesus dealt with the darkness that was in his people Israel and in us all, that he might create within us the best that is in us. And so it is that the Immanuel baby is both our judge and our Savior. What a holy Judge and what a gracious Savior, who saw us in sin and error pining, who came and thrilled us

God Incarnate

with hope and made our souls feel their worth. No wonder we admire and revere the name of Victor Hugo and no wonder we fall on our knees and worship Jesus Christ. (Matthew 1:21, 23 and Isaiah 7:14.) * Adolphe Adam, composer, and a poet Placide Cappeau are responsible for the marvelous hymn *O Holy Night* that is always a thrill to listen to. Here's the heart of it.

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;

Chorus

Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.
O night, O holy night, O night divine.
Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is Love and His gospel is Peace;
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease,
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful Chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise his Holy name!

Chorus

Christ is the Lord, then ever! ever praise we!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim!
His pow'r and glory, evermore proclaim! *

And the Word who was God and was with God became flesh (a human).^{*} This does *not* mean that God borrowed a fleshly body and located in it for something like thirty-three years.

It does *not* mean that God turned into a human so that God ceased to exist and we have a human substitute for one of the persons of the Godhead.

The incarnation of God does *not* mean that the one we know as Jesus was a living “mix” of human cells and divine “substance”—there was not nor is there a “Godman.” Jesus was not nor is He a hybrid.

The incarnation of God does not mean that God attached Himself to a complete human so that there were “two persons” or (if we are permitted to speak in this way) there were two spirits inhabiting a human body—God as one spirit and a human spirit.

The incarnation of God does *not* mean that “the 2nd Person” in the Trinity emptied Himself of Godhood; that is; He did not empty Himself of attributes essential to Godhood in order to be a man.

The incarnation of God does *not* mean that God became a glorious non-human creature (such as an archangel, for example).

The incarnation of God does not mean that God saw a beautiful human who lived so purely and selflessly that He “adopted” Him, called Him His Son and lived in Him and

God Incarnate

revealed Himself in that fashion.

Jesus of Nazareth, the now glorified and exalted Lord Jesus Christ is God *being* a man." Jesus Christ is GOD ceaselessly choosing to be a man. Jesus, the man, fully, completely and only a man is the man that God is ceaselessly choosing to be. There is no moment when Jesus is not God fully Himself *being* a man. There is never a moment when it is not a man, fully and only a man that God is choosing to be. That is, Jesus is not one day God and another day a man. He is *always* God *always* being a man.

How can we explain that? There is no "explaining" some things. Dalby was and remains correct when he said, "Bad religion (theology) answers the unanswerable. Good religion (theology) cherishes the mystery." God's incarnation was and is a dynamic and ceaseless *choice* by God to be a man, the man Jesus Christ and no other!

Implications & Messages of the Incarnation of God

God eternally purposed to be at-one with humankind and His actual and historical entrance into union with a human (Jesus of Nazareth) made that more than an eternal *purpose*.

If we had known the truth of the matter then our simply looking at the man Jesus standing there before our eyes would be the proof of the fundamental truth of our faith: that He wanted and wants to be one with us. Before

the baby is self-conscious, before the little child says a word we see God and humanity in union. Not humanity choosing union with God but God choosing union with humanity. Jesus was a specific human but He was more than that; He was the invisible God making Himself visible and in *doing* that (not just *saying* it) God's heart's desire was actually, historically, physically being demonstrated. That is and must be *faith's* interpretation, of course, but what we interpret is God's deed, His act—an act in space-time history. Our interpretive moves don't generate the act; the divine act generates the interpretation and the recognition of the event that occurred in a space-time world!

Having become human (for multiple purposes) He has everlastingly taken humanness up into the divine experience. It is *God* who has entered into union with humans and in that sense humans experience union with the divine (see 2 Peter 1:4 & 2 Corinthians 3:18). Humans never become God, of course, though God has become a human in Jesus Christ. But since we are given glory in union with Jesus Christ, who is God being a man, we as glorified humans have a share in that glory of God Jesus experiences in the incarnation. Jesus became one with us and so we are one with Him and He (uniquely) is one with God and we with Him share that oneness. Do see John 17:21-24.

There is something mysteriously wondrous about GOD. There is no limit to His power but His power is such that it can be shown in a human—*that* human, Jesus Christ.

God Incarnate

In Jesus, God's power is never seen in isolation from a loving and redeeming purpose. Creative power, seen in willing bread *to be* where there had been none, is exercised to bless the needy; it is seen in the undoing of Death, the casting out of evil power that deranged and diseased people. The entire record of such events shows us that we aren't to isolate God's omnipotence from His loving heart and purpose. God is a single, fully integrated Being; His will, power, character and purposes are all expressions of one undivided Being. There are no compartments in Him where we find love and then another purposes and another power and another anger. One Being acts out of who He is and therefore who He chooses to be and that central, all-encompassing motive, as best we can gather it up, is Love (see Psalm 136 and 1 John 4:8).

It is true that Jesus of Nazareth is not omnipotent or omniscient but His power and knowledge and wisdom and love must be in keeping with God's or He is not revealing God at all. What we see in Jesus as a human must be true in God. What if Jesus's sense of justice contradicts God's—where are we then? What if Jesus' sense of goodness is not the goodness that is goodness in God? Then we could never be sure of God! But since the man Jesus of Nazareth is an expression of the love of God then the love of God can truly and faithfully be shown in a human! This is not God *slumming*; it is not God acting as someone *other than* Himself, someone *less than* Himself

—this is God showing as much of His very self as can be shown in a human life, even the life of Jesus (be sure to see John 14:28). The difference between the life of Jesus of Nazareth and GOD is not a difference in *kind*. Additionally, Jesus is not *merely* a wonderful man who exhibits the nature and character of God; He is GOD living His life out in our space-time world. What is everlastingly true of God can be exhibited in human life—so who are humans? “What is man that You should note him, and the human creature that You pay him heed?” (Psalm 8:4, Robert Alter)

Sinners cannot be or do flawlessly what Jesus was and did—who doesn’t know that? But though Jesus alone could and did it without sin it is not beyond humans to love as God loves. We know that because Ephesians 5:2 encourages and calls us to “walk in love as Christ loved us...” 1 John repeatedly calls us to love brothers and sisters in the Lord as He loved us (3:16, *passim*) and Jesus even called His followers to love enemies and in this way they’d truly be the sons and daughters of God (Matthew 5.45; Luke 6:35-36).

But in Jesus of Nazareth God is choosing to be a man within a world of humans who live in alienation from Himself and in which Sin reigns through Death, where darkness, corruption and oppression have made their home. Into that world GOD came as light, redemption and life. To truly *be* a man God has shared the suffering and loss and abuse that exists in a world alienated from Him

God Incarnate

and He does all that to redeem, to rescue and to let humans know He was with and for them.

Revelation 13:8 speaks of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world so the Incarnation was no *ad hoc* arrangement. See also 1 Peter 1:19-21. The incarnation was not an act to last only for Jesus' earthly lifetime. The glorified and exalted Lord Jesus is still described in terms such as John 20:17 above. Colossians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 1:3; Romans 15:6; Revelation 3:12. In these texts the Lord Jesus is still a worshiper of God. God is said to be His "God" as well as His Father. In 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 where Jesus functions in contrast to the first Adam (note 15:45-49). With Psalm 110:1 as contributing background the Lord Jesus reigns with delegated authority (15:27) until His enemies are utterly defeated. At that point, in contrast to the first Adam who rejected God as supreme, the human Jesus, the appointed Lord of all, acknowledges God's supremacy (15:28).

In the incarnation God did not become incarnate in some "custom made" humanity. In the incarnation God in the Son became an *ordinary man*—God sent Him in the image "of sinful flesh" (humanity) *in which* Sin had made its home and enthroned itself. In the very same flesh (humanity with all its creaturely limitations) Jesus condemned Sin and its usurpation (Romans 8:3-4) on behalf of an enslaved human family.

In the incarnation God did not choose to dwell only

Jim McGuigan

among the righteous. Note such texts as Matthew 9:13; 18:11, 14; Luke 15:1. This truth that is exhibited in the earthly life of Jesus Christ was taught from early days; it was always true and what happened in space and time only exhibited what was eternally true. The arrival of the baby Jesus was making the invisible visible and the eternal real in time. Once more the very existence of Jesus of Nazareth is God uniquely being united with humankind but Leviticus 26:11-13 makes it clear that God was *never* reluctant to dwell among sinners. This text is an OT John 1:14.

“I will set My tabernacle among you and My soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God and you shall be My people. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright.”

The message of the text is clear: This is a sinful People and God reminded them of that in the plagues, the burning mountain and the distance He insisted on between Himself on that occasion. Still, knowing who and what they are He assures them He will not abhor them and will dwell in the midst of them as their Companion and fellow-pilgrim God and will acknowledge them as His special people. The foreground assurance of that is the Exodus and now His present word. Texts like these are profound assurance but the incarnation is (at least it should be) the act that for the

God Incarnate

believer should end all doubt. The life of Jesus, His death, His resurrection and glorification and His return in and as the Holy Spirit to tabernacle in His People are made possible by that initial mesmeric and spellbinding Incarnation.

The incarnation of God makes the point that God came to share the pain and suffering of the human family rather than just observe it. But since the suffering, abuse and anguish grew out of the rejection of God, the choice of alienation from God, it might well have been thought that God would permit the human family to stew in its own juice. The Incarnation is the visible and historical denial of that and it is in that act (leading to and making the following acts possible) above all other acts of God that He offers as assurance. Because He is who He is (and not only what He purposed) it “became” Him to come as Jesus who was not and is not ashamed to be called our brother because by His incarnation “we are all of one” (Hebrews 2:10-11). His sovereign will and purpose is in accord with His being and character. The incarnation “becomes” Him, looks good on Him and expresses who and what He *is!* He is the being of love. If He were to say, “I am love!” He wouldn’t be using a figure of speech. In Him *love* is a Being. With us it’s a word and a quality, with Him it is *Himself!* In light of that His incarnation, life and death were inevitable.

In the Incarnation God not only unites with the

abused, suffering and oppressed, He becomes one with *glorified* humanity. Suffering, abuse, loss, Sin and Death do not have nor could they ever have had the last word. The last word is with God and that last word is revealed in the experience of the Word becoming a human with all the creaturely limitations and then being glorified. Watching the incarnate One is watching human history lived out in a single but representative Person and in Him redeemed humans are brought to glory (Romans 8:18; Hebrews 2:10; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2; Colossians 1:27). He *is* the embodiment of what the eternal God has meant humans to be. In Jesus of Nazareth God takes His place in a world under the judgment of self-chosen alienation, in Him Sin is borne (not by personal guilt or the *transference* of human guilt on to Him and off sinners) by Him as He suffers with, from and for sinners and brings them through to glory by being the offer, the embodiment and assurance of God's reconciling love.

The Incarnation and God's Love for Humans

John 1:14 does not say that God (the Word) loved humans; it doesn't say God redeemed humans. It doesn't say God created, wanted, saved, guided or lived among humans! It says He *became* one! All the above is true and they are expressed in the Incarnation but they are not as breathtaking, not as stunning as the truth that He actually *became one of us!* God didn't say, "I'd like to have one of those." He said, "I want to *be* one of those." He might have

God Incarnate

loved, guided and sustained us “at a distance” or He might have done it while “among” us but He didn’t will to do that, He wanted to do it *as* one of us. He *wanted* to do it as one of us. I choose here to say *wanted* though the word *willed* is the word that expresses sovereignty, majesty and transcendence. But the word *wanted* catches the warmth of the *will* of the Sovereign; He wills it because He wants it. We see that warmth, that intimacy and in the case of Jesus of Nazareth we see *affection* as well as covenant love and the glory of the Eternal One. A single text like Matthew 11:19 brings this home. The critics insulted the incarnate God and never spoke a truer word than when they accused Him of being “a friend of sinners.”

“Give My Love to the World.”

John Greenleaf Whittier, the noted and fervent abolitionist, pacifist and poet, died in 1892, two years before my mother was born. He was of the Quaker persuasion and a very fine and influential man in his day; he was a close friend of many notable people including Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Helen Keller and Phillips Brooks the famous preacher. Though dogged all his life by ill-health he lived well into his eighties. He died with a small company of friends and family around him and not long before he passed away, his biographer, Pickard, tells us he said, “Give my love to the world.” How’s that for a way to take your leave?

Someone greater than Whittier breathed that kind of

Jim McGuigan

spirit into Whittier. As the Son of God sped His way into our world to do for us what we could never do for ourselves the Holy Father shouted after Him, “Give my love to the world!” And that’s precisely what He did. Bearing in mind that it was His already existing love that purposed the Incarnation and led Him to become one of us—bearing that in mind, we mustn’t confine the love of the Lord Jesus to the several hours He suffered beating, mockery and crucifixion—His entire human life made His eternal love visible and the cross was the final act in the presence of a jeering world.

But it wasn’t just the duration of His love that sometimes astonishes us; it was and is the *intensity* and *depth* of it! It was the intensity and depth of His love that led Him to flame against Peter in Matthew 16 and call him “Satan.” It was the intensity and breadth of that love that led Him to express surely the most scathing sustained section in the entire New Testament (Matthew 23). It was the intensity and length of that love that had Him sobbing on a hill overlooking the city He knew would soon reject and kill Him (Luke 19). It was the intensity and dimensions of that love that led Him to pray for the forgiveness of His enemies in Luke 23:34.

But Is it True God Loves Us?

The Argument from Size.

More than once I’ve heard it said that humans are just like fungus clinging to the surface of this planet. Our little

God Incarnate

planet is unfindable in a universe that is 92 billion light years in diameter and still expanding (so it's said). It's the size that troubles many of us. In a small village or town we tend to think we matter; we know and are known by so many but in a huge city? Quasar clusters 4 billion light years across? What's the point of such a vast creation? Earth shrinks to nonexistence. We're too tiny to matter. There *is* a God-denying look about the world and there is the haunting thought that a God that powerful simply can't be interested in us and our less-than-a-speck-of-dust planet. Make your own list of realities that trouble you.

The God of the Holy Scriptures created a universe vaster than we can imagine and every square inch of it is mindlessly and thoughtlessly moving in keeping with His sovereign will that is expressed in what for convenience sake we call "the laws of nature." This majestic and glorious monster declares the glory of God and the sky shows His handiwork (Psalm 19) but for all its wonder and mind-boggling size you could travel for endless years and never see a little child, never see a generous act, a smile on a contented face, a breathtaking act of forgiveness of a great wrong done, or two lovers laughing and being marvelously silly. Black holes don't weep at injustice and you'd never see an unselfish act or hear tender speech; you'd never hear a song of praise in response to gallantry and you'd never see vicarious suffering freely chosen that someone less fortunate could be enriched and made happy.

Jim McGuigan

No huge quasar would ever say, “Poor thing” at the sight of someone very ill, the incalculable miles of lightless empty space would utter not a word of sympathy for the abused and tormented beings somewhere in the vast universe; nothing sobs in sadness out in the darkness of this huge empty mansion, nor is there any giggling or laughter, the kind of laughter that we hear when a couple of humans simply can’t control it and it becomes a shriek that stops for seconds and then bursts out again; nothing out there smiles at a picnic or children shrieking in mad laughter as they run from a wave that’s coming after them or at a child’s intense pleasure as it builds a sandcastle. Nothing watches stunned at the birthing of a little baby, nothing looks admiringly at an elderly married couple who’ve been intimate friends for more than sixty years. The wondrous heavenly phenomena know nothing, care nothing, want nothing — they’re lifeless! Limitless deadness! The only thing that invests them with wonder is the God who made them and the human family that loves to explore them. Historian Elmer Barnes once said that astronomically speaking man was negligible and Albert Coe responded that astronomically speaking Man is the astronomer. Checkmate!

One day all the stars, quasars, black holes, spiral galaxies, dark matter and dark energy (whatever they are, if they are) will gather and then file by to gaze in wonder at a tiny planet, the “Visited Planet,” that saw what never was seen (never!) in limitless space of a thousand times ten

thousand universes. Note Jesus' astonishing Luke 10:21-24.

The Love of God Seen on Little Planet Earth

Those of us who have come to believe in God can't pretend that His loving us bankrupts words but even sinful people can love each other in breathtaking depth. (Though multiplied millions don't know it is the work of God in them and don't give Him thanks, it is nevertheless His lovely work in them) But yes, of course, the love of God is greater in all senses than ours but we don't need to dismiss the glory of honorable, tender, fearless human lovers to make God's love appear even more glorious. *Especially since theirs is an expression of His.* He gives us "life and breath and *everything else.*"

A while back I watched a sad, older and weary mother, maybe she was seventy, who together with her husband had spent all their life's savings and whatever else they could get their hands on, to repeatedly get their troubled and addicted son out of prison, out of debt and then all the rehab help available. They saw no happy ending; and as I recall it they were now going to lose their home as well. The interviewer gently asked her how she and her husband could go so far for so long at such great cost. This is what I heard this dear woman say, "*When you love you have no choice.*"

We've seen that truth lived out before our very eyes as we watched children, parents, husbands and wives, friends, brothers and sisters gallantly and often cheerfully

Jim McGuigan

give and give and then give more when all they get in return is withering criticism and further demands. *"When you love you have no choice."* These are humans. We more than half expect such love of God because He's God, for pity's sake, but when we see humans live like that we shake our heads in wonder and then we have to move on.

Heinrich Heine, German poet, literary critic and political seer (died 1856), after describing the feasting Homeric gods paints this picture:

Then suddenly a pale, bloodstained Jew came panting in, with a crown of thorns on his head and a great wooden cross over his shoulder; and he threw the cross on to the gods' high table, so that the golden goblets trembled, and the gods fell silent and turned pale, and became paler and paler, till at last they entirely dissolved into mist." ...

Anyone who sees his god suffering finds it easier to endure his own pain. The merry gods of the past, who felt no pain, did not know either how poor tortured human beings feel, and a poor person in desperation could have no real confidence in them. They were holiday gods; people danced around them merrily, and could only thank them. For this reason they never received whole-hearted love. To receive whole-hearted love one must suffer. Compassion is the last sacrament of love; it may be love itself. *Therefore of all the gods who ever lived, Christ is the god who has been loved the most."*

God Does Not Find it Difficult to Love Humans

God Incarnate

We mustn't give the impression that God finds it hard to love us. It's because we wish to honor God that we often speak as if it's incredible that He loves us. He is God, after all; He is powerful and majestic beyond our imagining and we are sinners so we speak and write often leaving the impression that One such as God must have to "work at" putting up with us; especially after what we did to His beloved Son. It's easy to forget, it seems, that Acts 2:23 has two parts. Mankind's sinful rejection of Jesus is only one aspect of His death—the other face of it is God's gracious determinate counsel and foreknowledge—His coming was a divine purpose and choice and no accident. The death of Jesus was God's determinate counsel before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 13:8). God couldn't share our sinful behavior but He could and did share the agony and evil consequences of it all.

As believers many of us tend to feel secure in God through the Lord Jesus (a good thing!) but when we do we characteristically see Him as a "sweet Savior"—that's the word that comes most quickly if not exclusively to our minds. Look at this text (Isaiah 33:22) which speaks of glorious days ahead for His people and gives the reason for the happy vision:

**For the Lord Is Our Judge, the Lord Is Our Lawgiver,
the Lord Is Our King; He Will Save Us.**

Jim McGuiggan

This is not our kind of speech. We might have expected the prophet to close these affirmations with, “He will destroy us” or at least, “He will punish us.”

And here’s Hosea 11, after a full seven chapters surveying Israel’s national treachery, He is pictured as a heartbroken father who doesn’t know quite what to do with his insolent and heartless son. “How can I give you up Ephraim; how can I hand you over Israel?...My heart churns within me...” (11:8) Then He gives up the inner wrestling and says this (11:9), “I will not execute the fierceness of My anger...for I am God and not man.” Note why He says He won’t destroy Israel, “Because I am God and not man.” Look once more at His rationale—why won’t He wash His hands of this sin-soaked and heartless son? *“Because I’m God and not man!”*

Many Imitate God but No one Out-loves Him

We’re humans! We’re sinful humans but even sinful humans suffer and are abused and wonder how there could be a good God if there’s a world this evil, this abusive and this heartless? Only *a religion* that’s heartless dismisses such wondering as another exhibition of human evil. Such religions dismiss these agony-filled questions by quoting Paul in Romans 9:20-21 as if Paul held their views. Heartless!

We should be realistic! We should see the anguish of the world and the evil that generates it, but if we’re going to be realistic we need to be consistently realistic—the world isn’t

God Incarnate

entirely heartless. How can there be no God that is good if there is Jesus in the world? It's difficult to answer the question about suffering and evil but it's also difficult to answer the questions generated by the presence of profound love in the world. To look at the cross, a symbol of human heartlessness and injustice generates questions of one kind and to look at the One on the cross generates questions of another kind! I understand that the cross of Christ is unique because of the One on it! I do! But He is one of multiplied millions that choose a cross for love of others.

Richard Selzer, a noted American surgeon became noted for His writing skill. He died in June 2016 but not before he wrote a number of books and some have been highly praised. Among them I particularly enjoyed one called *Mortal Lessons*; it's about the body, surgery and such things. In it he tells of a case where he performed the surgery on a young woman who had a cancerous lesion in her cheek. It was a very delicate procedure and he assured the reader that the surgeon [himself] followed every line with religious care but found it necessary to cut a little twig-like nerve that controlled the lips and the muscles in that area. All went well with the central concern but it meant that the young woman's mouth and lips were markedly twisted. Selzer during a post-operative visit looked at her and her young husband that stood on the other side of the bed and wondered, he tells us, who these people were and how things would work out. "Will my

Jim McGuigan

mouth always be like this?" she asked the surgeon and he confirmed it would be, gently explaining again there had been no choice but to sever the nerve. Then silence! And then the young husband's sweet and loving deceit, "I think it's cute," he said as he leaned over and twisting his mouth and lips to match hers he kissed her. Selzer tells us, "And I being so close and seeing everything, knew at once who they were, and I dropped my gaze. One does not look steadily at a god."

Here Selzer saw something so beautiful that ordinary prose wouldn't describe it. When we see or hear of such a brave acceptance of loss and an act that said that the kiss still worked because the love was as permanent and real as the scar, then it's right to think that God has had a hand in it. Jesus Christ goes around twisting His lips and mouth as He kisses the spiritually injured, letting them know that the kiss still works because the love is true and the moral, spiritual deformation cannot and will not kill it. People like Selzer's young husband remind us how deeply even limited little humans like us can love and then we remember that no one out-loses God and if humans can love so wondrously—and they do!—God can do no less; not if He is the one who is showing Himself in Jesus Christ.

**Jesus as a True Revelation of God
as He Is in Himself**

Jesus doesn't show God "slumming" for a while! In Jesus God isn't "playing a part," He is being Himself! If

God Incarnate

God is not being Himself in and as Jesus then we know nothing about Him at all. Unless God is *something like* what we see and hear in Jesus Christ we know nothing at all about God. Those of us who are not scholarly specialists don't have the temperament or interest or time or gift to launch out into the philosophical and theological depths. All we want to know is: Is God like Jesus Christ?

If we can't be sure that He is, then we need to look at the NT and ignore the bulk of it along with its entire drift. With strictly historical tools and our definition of "history" as nothing but a mass of contingent happenings verifiable only by sight and sound we *might* be able to tell that "Christ died" but we could never tell that "Christ died *for our sins.*" We don't understand all the difficulties but we have some sense of them and while "we don't yet see" the end to all difficulties, as the Hebrew writer says to people like us (2:8-9), "we see Jesus!" and if in seeing Jesus we're seeing God that's enough for us at present.

When the apostolic group met up with Jesus of Nazareth they didn't have an exhaustive checklist of "markers of the true Messiah from the Torah." They didn't come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah by comparing Him with the OT; they met Him and as time went by they began to read the OT through His eyes rather than read Him through the OT. At first they came to believe He was sent from God and spoke for Him and then they came to believe that in watching Him and hearing Him teach they

got a clearer picture of what God was like. They heard Him say things like, “He that has seen Me has seen Him that sent me,” or “If you know Me you know the Father.” John 12:45; 14:7. In all this they knew He was *like* God. It was only later when Thomas finally “got it” that they knew He *was* God and not just *like* Him. What they had known was true but it was only some of the truth—it’s always bigger, more wondrous and more stunning!

It’s vitally important to be assured of the truth that Jesus is *like* God for if He is not then we have no reason to praise or admire or imitate God. We admire and glory in Jesus Christ and seek to be like Him but if God is not like Jesus where are we? If we believe Jesus Christ is GOD then the depth and dimension of our faith, the power and richness of our faith is expanded beyond measure.

If the compassion, kindness and love of Jesus is truly the nature of God’s kindness, nature because it *is* His love then good news doesn’t get better! There is this also. It’s surely a great mistake to think that kindness, compassion and forgiving love is a persona that God puts on *for a particular occasion* rather than an expression of who and what He is by nature. That would be to construe Hebrews 2:10 to mean that *how* He brought sons to glory was chosen *only* because it was a method to complete the glorious enterprise but that it was no reflection of what He is within Himself. What Jesus shows is not merely a method by which something is attained; it shows the nature of the

God Incarnate

God who is attaining the goal. It is GOD showing *Himself* as He is.

Who Became Incarnate?

The Tri-Personal nature of the one true God seems to be required by the Holy Scriptures. In the course of God's self-revelation we're told of The Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19). The Son is spoken of as distinct from the Father and the Spirit and the Holy Spirit as distinct from the Holy Father. Whatever it is that constitutes God as God all three "persons" share and together they constitute one true God. Tri-theism is false; there are not three Gods but three "persons", distinguishable not divisible. It is "the Word" who was *with* God and who *was* God that became incarnate. It was not the Father or the Spirit that became incarnate. But since the three "persons" are not divisible it follows that when the Word became flesh (John 1:14) the fullness of the Godhead became flesh (see Colossians 2:9). God *as Father* did not become the incarnate One. God as Holy Spirit did not become the incarnate One. It was God the Son that became incarnate. But we are not to suppose that "one third" of God became incarnate. In the "person" of the Son GOD became incarnate. So we are assured what we see in Jesus of Nazareth is the self-disclosure of GOD.

(You might be interested in listening to this rendering of the wonderful hymn by Josh Grogan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Zh-yR0pbmU>)