

*If ever we are to make God the center of our life, we must know who and what He is.
But one could also say that that path will inevitably make Him the center.*

A Cosmic Love Affair

You will show me
the path of life;
In Your presence is
fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are
pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11 NKJV

Third in a Series

The process of committing one's life to the fullness of God is a little like opening one of those Russian *matryoshka* dolls, in which there is always one smaller nested inside. The deeper one goes into taking God seriously, the more one discovers significant, essential aspects nested within what one had thought to be the foundational root. And determining a logical sequence—do this, then this, then finally this—is a hopeless, ultimately futile enterprise, since every component part both feeds into and draws from all the others.

But surely somewhere near the beginning of taking God seriously is a resolve to fill oneself with Him. And how can one do this without knowing who He is? And what is the point of that, if we do not accept all that He is?

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Romans 1:20

God is not an opinion. God is a knowable fact. To that end He has given us all of creation, for it speaks of Him; He has given us Christ Jesus, for the Savior displays Him; He has given us the Holy Spirit, for He clarifies Him; and He has given us His word, the Bible, for it reveals Him.



The church building in which I was raised, so long ago ground into the dust of civic and architectural improvement, was (oddly for the Midwest) built in a “Spanish mission” style, with twin towers on either side of the main entrance and all overlaid in stucco. The main sanctuary was bordered on two sides by small stained-glass windows, in which were emblazoned the names of early saints, remembered by their friends and families. The third side of the sanctuary consisted of huge wooden sliding doors that could be either a wall, for normal-sized crowds, or opened to reveal an auxiliary room full of chairs, for larger congregations.

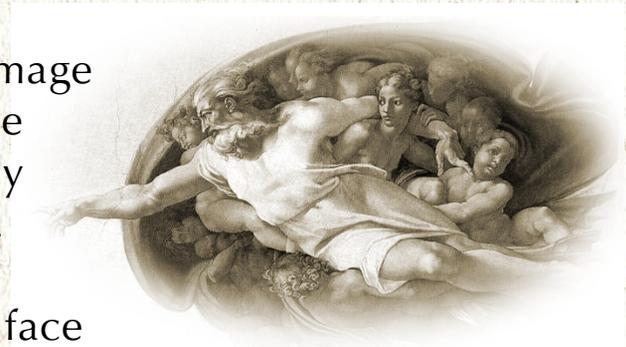
Ranged across the back of this large room was a series of alcoves that had been used as Sunday School rooms in earlier days of the church. During my childhood the center one of these alcoves had been transformed into the church library.

If one was young and easily distracted, and if one was looking for an out-of-the-way corner in which to while away the very long minutes of a church service, one could find no better haven than that small alcove filled with books.

My favorite book in that collection was a large coffee table-sized vol-

ume filled with photographs of the frescoes painted into the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. What held my interest were the faces, and the extravagant body language given the saints and angels by Michelangelo. The figures—meant to be viewed from far below—were, in the close-up views in the pages of the book, twisted into fantastical, even grotesque shapes. Limbs and torsos danced to a tormented, almost macabre tune; eyes bulged from sockets; and just about everyone in the paintings seemed to be either angry or afraid. I was at once fascinated with and repelled by the images of Adam and Eve giving in to the serpent's temptation, then being expelled from the Garden; the damned souls suffering the anguish of hell; the frantic escape from the rising waters of the Deluge.

Most fascinating of all was the dramatic central image of God the Father giving life to Adam. Here was the sublime gift of creation—a personal, and profoundly intimate expression of God's generosity and grace. Yet even here the face of God seemed hard: not angry, but stern. There is no joy to be found in the face over His inventive creation. Here was a God it was easy for a young boy to fear.



It was difficult reconciling the angry God in those glossy pages with the beatific visage looking down at me from the Sunday School wall. The portraits of Jesus were warm, peaceful, gentle and calm. He did not condemn; He did not punish, but invited all to “come unto” Him. Jesus healed the sick and comforted the poor. He laughed and wept, and seemed to have the same range of emotions as I. Yet I was taught that Jesus was as much God as the one I saw portrayed on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. How could it be?

As I grew up and learned that even humans were more complex than their simple, well-groomed portraits, I also came to realize that my God was far more complex than the simple, warm-hearted portraits of His Son that had decorated my Sunday School walls.

At the same time, I understood that any God able to work with and command the complexities of my own life, must surely be something greater and more interesting than the hard-faced portraits painted into the ceiling of that Vatican chapel. Any God who could orchestrate the creation of the universe, yet also stoop to know and save me, could not possibly be faithfully rendered in paint and wet plaster—regardless the artistry of the one wielding the brush.

He must surely be someone with an intellect more detailed, a personality more gentle and profound, a sense of Himself beyond the fleshy, mus-

cular tyrant spread across the pages of a library book. These images did not square with the One who had permeated my heart—nor did they fit the person I read of in the pages of His own book.



The process of filling oneself with God is, essentially, participation in a grand, cosmic love affair that spans all time and all space—yet is carried out and chronicled in the tender privacy of the human heart. Just as we are surrounded by the invisible tempest of angelic/demonic conflict, we have at our disposal—yet rarely apprehend—the invisible fullness of an eternal, omnipotent God.

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2 Kings 6:16-17

Most people are so firmly, even desperately attached to the pragmatic and tangible loam of earth that they remain blind to the spirit world ranging all about them. And, unaware of that, they remain blind to much of what God has to offer their temporal life.

From the beginning of man's existence, God has condescended to minister to him on the earthly plane. One need not rise into the heavens to meet God; He is pleased to meet man where he lives. But God is not of the earth; He only meets with man here for man's benefit. God is spirit, and dwells in a spiritual place. For man to apprehend the fullness of what God has to offer, he must release his hold on the familiar and dare to soar in spiritual realms.

"I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

John 3:11-12

I may observe with respect the man who is hired to excavate around the foundation of our house. I watch him expertly move the earth, then make repairs to the cement wall that not only supports the floors above, but keeps out soil and moisture from the floor below. I respect the man's skills, his dedication to his craft. But then I wonder: In this man's mechanical world of toil and sweat, is there time left for the spirit? As he feeds his body for labor, does he feed his mind as well? He knows soil and cement, gravel and sand. He can fashion them all into structures of permanence, walls and sidewalks that will last

for decades. But has he so fashioned his eternity? Is his spiritual mind as alive and expert as the brain that holds all his earthly knowledge? Filling oneself with God is a process that begins in the mind. Or you may prefer to call it the heart.

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Romans 5:5

Regardless the terminology or imagery, God is at the center of it all. The engine that drives the process—from both ends—is His Spirit. To know the mind of God we must first link up with Him, and remain in contact for His Holy Spirit to pour into our mind and heart copious helpings of the Father Himself.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19

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