

## Thoughts from "The Maligned God" by Carsten Johnsen

*Was God ever maligned? Who would dare to divulge any story of slander against Him behind His back? And if so, was there ever any serious attempt to vindicate His name, wash it clean again? What is God's vindication?*

*It is the most exciting drama in the history of this world. That demonstrative vindication of God's true character is essentially undertaken by the Creator Himself. But His creatures are also destined to have an important part in it.*

*And now, what are the special traits of character thereby so spectacularly drawn into focus? God is shown, not only as the blameless One, but as the Creator whose character shines out with an excellence and beauty going far beyond anything His finite worlds have ever known, or could otherwise manage to know.*

**Some crucial notes of introduction on God - and the origin of evil: how could Lucifer conceive the idea of a rivalry with Jesus Christ?**

### Was God Ever Alone?

God is unthinkable as a person staying alone all the time, -- or any time. There seems to be something disharmonious about loneliness (or aloneness) in the case of God. For God is Love. And love makes aloneness an intolerable state of being. So love seems bound to constrain God to embark upon some act of creation. It goes without saying that "constraint" must here be understood in the only way that is compatible with love. This is known to apply even to men, insofar as they are conquered by God: "The love of Christ constraineth us." II Cor 5:14.

As a loving Being, God needs "the other ones," those whom He can really love. He needs creatures of such intelligence and freedom that they can return His love, serving Him out of sheer affection, not just because they have been commanded to do so. He needs the love of those who love Him of their own accord. But saying this, we do realize that we have somehow exposed ourselves to the acute logical problem of the following question: How could God get along, as long as He did, without any creatures?

How long was that, by the way? Eternally long, -- that is the only answer given by plain philosophical logics. For God is from eternity, whereas the first creature created was necessarily a creature created at a definite time. And if--possessed with your simple philosophical logics--you want to go back from that moment to the "origin" of God, you will never be able to go far enough, for God is the eternally Existing One, the Self-Existent One, the Being without an origin. In other words, God was without any creatures around Him during an endlessly long time, during a whole eternity.

Does this mean that there is no meaningful answer whatsoever to our spiritually meaningful question as to how the God of love could "bear" to be "alone" for an eternity? No, it does not mean anything as bad as that. There is an answer, and it is a meaningful one. Will the cold philosopher find it meaningful? Maybe not. But the warm religionist will. For while philosophy seeks the answers of the sharp brain, religion seeks the answers for the tender heart.

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The answer is: God was never alone. At least the Bible's concept of God is not a concept of aloneness, of singularity. It is a concept of togetherness, of eternal plurality in personalism. It is the concept known as the "trinity," the doctrine of the "triune God." Here you may object that the curious idea of three persons in the Godhead is one that develops in Christian minds, so only during New Testament times.

It is not! Already the first pages of Genesis release the idea of a togetherness, a plurality, in God. The notion of more than one Person in the Godhead occurs, remarkably enough, in connection with the creation of a first intelligent creaturely "other one" on this earth: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Genesis 1:26). So this much is revealed to us, here already, about the unfathomable Elohim (plural!), and what they undertook to do as late as some 6,000 years ago.

To my 'Doctrine of God' students, as well as in my ancient philosophy classes, I have tried to express in the following way something I like to call the altero-centricity (or other-centeredness) of Christian theology. It is this which sets Christianity apart from any other theology or philosophy ever conceived by our world: Other-centeredness means being mainly concerned, not with oneself as the great center, but rather with the other ones. This altero-centricity is the fundamental motif of all Biblical religion.

But how could it be technically possible at all during that eternally long time when God had not yet called his creaturely little "other ones" into existence? The Bible's answer is: God was, from everlasting, His own "Other One." In other words, God was never, never alone! On the contrary, they were always, always, together. So the great motif of Agape (or perfect altero-centricity, perfect other-centeredness) was in operation all the time. Throughout all eternity the Father loved the Son, and the Son loved the Father. And from eternity, in the depths of their mind, there was this incomparable plan: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

(Mohammedans boast of having a concept of God superior to that of Christianity. They do not know what they are speaking about. Their God is the summit of all absurdity. This is what happens when men have the boldness to make religions. They then commit blunders of logic. Islam was foolish enough to think a Godhead consisting of just one single Person was the summit of all spirituality. In reality, that concept of the deity reduces both eternity and Agape to meaninglessness.)

### **Creation--the Heart Affair of God**

Why does creation take such a capital place in the religion of the Bible? Because creation is nothing less than a "heart affair" in the life of God. Perhaps it is the most spiritual thing that has happened in His life? I could not imagine a more decisive step taken toward the perfect realization of togetherness. Togetherness, however, is the very opposite of aloneness. In fact, we can hardly understand the importance of perfect togetherness except against a background of the idea of absolute aloneness. That monster of aloneness is a concept we have already mentioned as a theory, but can never fathom as a practical reality. Still, it is well-known by Scripture. It is a most real eventuality of the future for some beings. The Bible calls it hell. That is the absolute separatedness; first and foremost a separation from the One with whom we need most desperately to be together!

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It is interesting to note that some Germanic languages have a most descriptive expression for this absolute or desperate way of being alone. Here is a very human word. The German adjective is "mutter-seelenalleine". That suggests: as heartbreakingly alone as an abandoned mother. In the Bible's language the tradition would say Father. God did have a Son, as we have pointed out. So he was never "mutter-seelanalleine,"-- or "vater-seelenalleine." (Christ was His only-begotten--"monogenes," the Only One of a kind, the Unique One. John 1:14..).

Still he did long for other sons. That is evident enough. And here we certainly have to do with a most curious case of longing. In the life of God this longing must be closely concatenated with what we shall observe as His willingness to "go down," nay, His veritable passion for going down. For just as surely as God longed to create beings with the freedom of will necessary for true personal communion with Him, He did know, as well, another possibility inevitably implied in such creaturely freedom: that is, the potential event of a fall into sin: He was fully aware of the creature's possible choice of a course of disobedience (sin) rather than a course of obedience (sinlessness). This eventuality would be a cruelly painful blow against the tender heart of God. But His love and His longing for an infinitely extended other-centeredness were strong enough to take all the risk here implied. ...

Now, precisely God's determination to "take the risk," is what so many critics charge against Him. What they fail to realize is the boundless significance of creation. In fact, the most tragic deficiency in pagan thought, is its fatal failure to have a due appreciation of the marvel of creation. Not only creation on the highest level, the calling into existence of intelligent beings, is an infathomably great event, but even the creation on a lower level with its endless variety of species and forms, is beyond all measure significant! Against this background we discern vaguely what creation means in Christian theology. Hence even an eternity cannot be considered as "too long a time" to plan, and put into practice the plan, of divine creation. For even the smallest thing created testifies to the infinite greatness and the absolute uniqueness of God.

This leads us naturally to the capital Christian question: Just how does the Creator reveal Himself to His creature? Here a strange detail should be carefully noticed. It can be rightly said about the pillar of cloud of the exodus, for instance: it both revealed God and concealed Him at the same time. Revelation and concealment go hand in hand in the mysterious plan of God's approach to man.

Why does God conceal Himself? For the same fundamental reason that He reveals Himself. Out of sheer love, out of sheer mercy. Now, then, can love and mercy manifest themselves through concealment? Is God forced to make Himself small and pale in order that we may comprehend Him? Something very close to that seems to be the case. And He has to limit Himself, as it were, in order to make place for our freedom. Divine absolutism is circumscribed in order to provide a sphere of elbowroom for human will.

Now, the One who has undertaken to reveal God to man--and to the whole universe--is Jesus Christ. He reveals God to us by revealing Himself (see Christ's answer to Philip's curious pleading, John 14:8-10). But how did He go about that Self-revelation? And how has He revealed Himself from the beginning until now? This is the most incredible of all stories. Am I right in saying that it is, from the beginning to the end, a story of lowliness, as the great

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characteristic of God? Here I include the time of His revelation even prior to the creation of our world.

Is there a mysterious sort of self-reduction, or self-erasing, in the sense of self-sacrifice and self-denial, in the way God revealed Himself from the earliest time of which we have any knowledge at all? This is the curious question to which I would here like to have some kind of answer.

### **Is There a "Divine Self-centeredness"?**

First, we do have, in contrast to this, the impression of some students of OT theophany. Theologians sometimes seem to think that there is a strange trend of "divine egocentricity," if I may dare to suggest such a term, coming out in biblical theology. God is portrayed as doing whatever He does for the sake of His own glory: "I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). "For mine own sake, will I do it: For how should my name be polluted? And I will not give my glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11).

And Solomon provides us with a still more problematic text: "The Lord hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Proverbs 14:1, see also 16:5)... Does this mean that the principle of altero-centricity ends where divinity begins? In other words, does the theo-centricity of the Bible actually swallow up the whole motif we have considered to be fundamental to Christianity: the altero-centric trend? In one way, we must admit that this would seem to be nothing less than a... necessity. For how could God even find the ultimate purpose of his creative act in anything outside Himself?

So, does this mean that the essence of the God of the Bible brings us right back to that "self-sufficiency" we have otherwise characterized as paganism in a nutshell... Why do we have such difficulty in understanding this? For the simple reason that we have never really understood what glory means in God's vocabulary. We have not even begun to understand in what God glories, in what He finds his pride. God finds the peak of His pride in lowliness. Let us try to prove this important point. For it can be proved. And for that purpose we are not going to be satisfied with scanning the history of man. It is too evident that God reveals Himself there as the One finding His pride in humility. But we shall go much farther back. Here the Spirit of Prophecy can give us precious glimpses of some astounding facts.

In the first chapter of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White tells us about some strange remote events that had been shown her in vision. This was before the time when our world had, as yet, been called into existence. For a long time certain things in that report never failed to strike me with astonishment. There was something I could not bring to rhyme with other things. I am sure the same enigma happens to you:

How could Lucifer hit upon the strange idea of comparing himself to Christ? He ought to be perfectly aware of the fundamental fact of his own creatureliness. Secondly, he ought to know the infinite distance there is bound to be between Creator and creature. Any intelligent creature does. But how then could he fall into the incredible error of considering his relationship to the Son of God in terms of any rivalry whatsoever? To us this would immediately appear so foolish--so contrary to elementary common sense--that we are not offhand able to grasp it rationally at all.

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Now, of course, these reflections might be just that boastful "you-ought-to-know-better" attitude we all so easily display when we have the good fortune to consider a matter in retrospect. We so elegantly base ourselves on a profounder stock of enlightenment which we assume to have been there all the time. We forget that we are just dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants.

But did not Lucifer have elementary enlightenment? Did he not know who had created him? If he did not possess this fundamental element of light, then why was he called Lucifer, the Lightbearer?

Let us only say--with the caution of the ones who happen to know that they know nothing, or next to nothing, themselves--that just the most elementary and fundamental truths, such as those about generation and regeneration, are the most difficult ones of all to grasp...

Let us admit one thing: We human beings have little to boast of in regard to our knowledge of essential things. What does man know today about facts as essential as his creation and redemption?

How many millennia of gradual revelation from God has it taken for that little group of relatively receptive souls, God's church on earth, to gather the tiny bit of knowledge they possess at present, regarding the three main issues of all true philosophy: Whence? Why? Whither? (Where do I come from? -- Why am I here? -- Where do I go?) If we have managed at all to grasp some glimpses of light regarding the mysterious paths of God's love for us--the only thing that really matters for our lives--we certainly should not be so rash as to consider this an intellectual performance of consummated masterliness on our part.

### **Among Whom Do "We Sensible Men" Pick "Our Favorite Rivals"?**

So back to Lucifer and his incredible idea of rivalry -- with Jesus Christ? How could it happen that he was so totally blind to the immeasurable greatness of his Lord and Creator?...We ask these questions in all candor and sincerity. How could it enter into Lucifer's head to compare himself to Christ in the first place; I mean, in the spirit of a possible emulation? For even to the most envious, the most perverted and downright foolish among us, there is, after all, a certain limit to what can arouse our envy: There is a limit to our perversion, or our foolishness; or at least there seems to be. The ones we compare ourselves with, are generally our peers. Those who are infinitely far above us do not really disturb us. We are simply not able to feel them as our serious rivals. Otherwise, there is certainly no lack of envy among us...

Now, what about Lucifer? Was he entirely outside the rules of common sense and common sentiment? Hardly. But how, then could he hit upon the preposterous idea of having a case of "rivalry" with Jesus Christ, the maker of the universe, the creator of the heavenly hosts, including Lucifer himself? I do believe in the law that wickedness makes foolish. This was certainly a law asserting itself in the case of Lucifer, as well.

But part of the explanation may lie in something remarkable about the very nature of the Godhead. What do we know about God's essential nature? Too little, indeed; let us admit it frankly. What we do know, and perceive, is only the glimpses we catch here and there, as "through a glass, darkly" (1Cor. 13:12). One of these glimpses is the one we are trying to evaluate in the Spirit of Prophecy texts.

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Are we wrong in saying that there is a tremendous risk involved, on the part of God, at the moment when He determines to reveal the supreme secret of His glory? We have already suggested that this glory consists in something no one of us would, of himself, assume: It is His characteristic of "going down". Obviously this "going down", in terms of going into creation, is a matter of such momentum that man has no inkling of its far-reaching implications. This is why he fails to understand why the Bible attaches such a unique significance to this very theme: Creation. A human brain alone is utterly incompetent for these depths. It is more a matter of the heart's perception than of the brain's perception. For the sense demanded is the sense of love. And the surprising summit of this love is humility. Although it may offend many, we must dare to state that God is, above all, this: He is humble. The practical unfolding of that quality in God was His going all the way down.

Here we must now point out one thing that is seldom properly understood: It was not only at the moment when such "going down" became a desperate necessity, for the salvation of fallen man, that the Eternal One began to manifest this peculiar essence of His being. Thanks to the simple testimony of the Bible, already, it becomes evident that God has been "like that" all the time. The foundation of the plan of salvation is from eternity... To understand more easily, it might be duly emphasized as a general rule: Any person who abounds precisely in the qualities and practical acts of humility, obviously takes tremendous risk in so doing. Of course, this is bound to become apparent when the person in question makes such self-humbling his specialty. Christ was that kind of person, excelling in humility and self-sacrifice.

### **The Strange Risk Incurred by the One Who Humbles Himself**

Let us first consider the risks involved, in our fallen world, by an attitude of extreme humility. Where wickedness is already rife and rampant, a positively original course of action is particularly liable to be misjudged and distorted. That risk of misjudgment and distortion happens, for instance, whenever a person steps suddenly and generously down to another person's level. The risk of being misjudged will be greater, the greater the wickedness among the observers is. For a wicked world will also be a foolish world. And fools consistently fail to appreciate a person's generosity. They fail to appreciate, at its just value, that person's coming down to a level where a fruitful dialogue can start. The fool says to himself--and this was just what happened repeatedly in the environment of Christ, when He came down to earth: "Oh, look, He too is down here. He is on my low level. I really feared He might be superior to me. Fortunately that is not the case. It comforts me to know that He is no better than I am"...

Probably one reason why we find our dogs so sympathetic, is their "humble" behavior in front of us. This permits us to feel more important ourselves. We can adopt a condescending attitude. Finally, we can afford to be generous. Is it possible that dogs, through generations of gradual conditioning, have managed to please their vain masters by a trick of simple flattery, -- a most efficient trick, indeed, if it is one at all?

Christ's approach of humility certainly is no mere trick. It is a realistic going down, if such has ever happened in this world. I can only shrink back in awe and admiration before the virile realism beaming forth from that key text of ours, Matt. 11:29,30. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my

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yoke is easy and my burden is light." What a treasure of wisdom, for the one who wants to dig for eternal depths, in the nature of God.

Of course, Christ is the one who keeps on revealing God to His creatures. But how does it come to pass that the core of this revelation is simply: God as the Meek One? Has God always been like that? Will He always go on being like that? Or is it just a mode of momentary crisis, a transitory phase? Let me hurry to say: I do not believe it is a mere transition. This is among the most permanent features in God's nature. He IS "like that."

There is evidence enough to establish this as a fact. The attribute of "going down" is not an attribute of God developed only at the critical moment when such "going down" became a desperate necessity, an emergency measure for the sake of our salvation. It is not limited to the accident of our father Adam's fall into sin, in the Garden of Eden. It is an effulgence of God's very being, all the time. God's descent into the depths of creation and redemption is an expression of His constant nature. He goes all the way down to the lowest levels because His essence is lowliness. And this is not by virtue of an automatic principle. He is the One who goes down to me, because He loves me, and that is a love that makes separation an unbearable atrocity to Him. And His going down to me was a personal heart affair, involving fatal personal risk. In fact, God's act of creation and redemption never avoids being an act of destiny-laden drama. It is high time we become more anxious to look into the elements of that drama...

(1) In the first place, it is mysteriously glorious, in the sense of that boundless going down. God never makes a new world without going down into it Himself. Is not this in fact the great difference that has been established regarding Eros versus Agape? While Eros, the pagan principle of "love," fails in love with a value that is already there, just becoming ablaze with passion for that value, in order to enjoy it in what I have preferred to call the egocentric (self-centered) way -- Agape, the unique heaven-born principle of a Christian love, has an entirely different attitude: Agape creates the value, miraculously calls it into being, where it never existed, as yet. That is how Agape manages to love me, an entirely unlovable creature. It creates the value, as it loves, and this creativity is part of its essence...

(2) On the other hand, if God's act of creation is this mightiest of all demonstrations of His unfathomable lowliness, His bottomless going down, to the deepest depths of the absolutely valueless, which is made valuable by so doing, then it is at the same time an equally salient demonstration of his "remaining all the way up." God is, and remains, above His creation. He stays outside of it, and is entirely independent of it. He goes on forever and ever, to be the absolutely Self-dependent One; in fact, the only Self-dependent Being ever known...

Well, you may say, all this applies to our world, to Christ's historic "down-going" at the time when the Father agreed to the Son's proposal to sacrifice Himself in man's behalf on this earth some 2,000 years ago. Then, to be sure, some foolish men did misjudge the generous Supreme One's inscrutable plan to condescend, to walk the painful path of the humble Lamb of God, right on to the slaughterhouse. Then, to be sure, we did avail ourselves of every possible chance to misunderstand His condescension. We displayed the full range of foolishness forged by wicked hearts: We were as ungrateful, tactless, impassive as we could be. We said, in unison with the Pharisees: "That dumb fellow over there is no better than I am. His extraction is the most poverty-stricken one in Nazareth. True, I do become somewhat uneasy sometimes. I

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begin to wonder whether He may be above me, after all -- in some respects. He attracts followers I never reach. But then I establish the pleasant fact of 'human equality'. He is a man, like myself. I am fully justified in comparing myself to Him, compete with Him--perhaps outstripping Him completely. I cannot afford to be below anybody. My principle of self-sufficiency forbids it. My way to rise above the others is to cut the others down." Do you hear the voice of the Pharisee?...

But that is the reaction in a wicked world, you still object--we are not speaking about a wicked world. We are speaking about the world of Lucifer, at the time when the heavenly host joined in song -- "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7)

Where was Christ then--and how did He reveal God then? What do we know about the time prior to our world's creation? Do we have any evidence that Jesus Christ, the One equal to, and co-eternal with, the Father, already at that juncture, had the strange habit of "going down", of concealing His glory in humility?...

### **Jesus Christ--an Angel Among Angels**

...Do we have any evidence that He ever identified Himself with the state of angels? An identification in terms is something we know well enough, both from the Old and the New Testament. Many readers have marveled, in fact, that the Scriptures qualify the Messiah as an Angel. The reaction among men is here sometimes one of downright offense. It is looked upon as a certain depreciation of the great Yahweh...

One thing is here remarkably characteristic of man's reasoning: and the same comes out in his constant failure to understand the simplest fact about Agape: From age to age, the great descent--God's fabulous going down--was something men never seemed capable of taking. Obviously our human way of reasoning is so entirely different from God's way of reasoning. Our value scale is so entirely different from His value scale. The result of this is our complete inability to grasp one plain idea: GOING DOWN is God's supreme glory. Humility is Love--short and sweet...

Now we happen to know, don't we, that Christ was to go to much lower depths than that of the angels. He was to identify His destiny with that of fallen mankind. This ought to throw some brilliant light also upon what happened in heaven at the crucial moment when Lucifer went through his decisive trial.

No creature at that time, of course, had any notion to what degree Jesus Christ was going to abase Himself. Nor did any creature have any notion to what degree He was going to be elevated--to what degree He had been elevated all the time. This is what we find plainly evidenced by the Spirit of Prophecy... "In order that intelligent creatures on various levels should get to know His glory, and enjoy the supreme happiness that is implied in that knowledge, a remarkable pattern of communication is followed: Christ comes down, it seems, to the respective levels of those whom He has determined to heap with His blessing. There is always sacrifice involved in Christ's approach, sometimes an infinite amount of sacrifice. Obviously, infinite love can only be expressed by infinite humility. Concealment is bound to be part of the revelation process."



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That gradual revelation of infinite glory, not for the purpose of self-glorification, but to the benefit of other ones, the not-so-glorious ones, this is the delicate considerateness Paul sets forth as an example for us to emulate. He does it in the following illuminating words: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." (Phil. 2:4, 5)

...He thought it not robbery to be great. So He made himself small--for the other ones" sake--for the small ones" sake. The risk of an "over-exposure" to God's naked, unveiled glory was to be made as small as possible. The crowning glory of the Son of God was soon to burst forth in its own unobtrusive way. What was the culmination, in fact, of that same trend of exquisite glory? Our usual name for it is the incarnation. But the Scriptures also call it the mystery of godliness... The gist of the whole matter is this: God's essence is mercy. It is humility, in terms of the utmost humiliation and self-sacrifice. No creature should ever think that he has come to the bottom of that mysterious glory...

Now, what is the diametrical opposite of this mysterious humility? That must be an equally mysterious pride. Quite right, the inspired Word gives us remarkable information about it. That pride came into the world with Satan. And what curious name has it got, as it assumes its gigantic dimensions of stubborn titanism? The Scriptures call it "the mystery of iniquity". (2 Thessalonians 2:4-7; contrast: "mystery of godliness"--God-likeness, Christlikeness, perfect humility, 1 Timothy 3:16.)

This mystery started with a creature who did think it "a robbery" to be equal with the Son of God, the Eternal and Unique One. Precisely that was Lucifer's reaction at the time when Jesus Christ had the generous approach of coming down to his level. He constitutes the first and classical instance of how completely generosity can be misunderstood, when a substratum of good will is lacking in the heart. The most exquisite tactfulness, and unheard of modesty, are then like pearls thrown before swine. Did Lucifer discover anything whatever of the matchless greatness of Jesus Christ, flashing out like brief glimpses of discrete sunlight behind a veiling cloud? Did he discover the greatness taking such endless pains to make itself small, unobtrusive, --that is, not the proud greatness of standing aloof, but the humble greatness of being together. No, not a bit of it, for he himself had already become enamored with that cold type of greatness which enjoys to bask in its own glory. This is precisely the greatness of aloofness, not of togetherness with the other ones. He was on his way to become the robber above all robbers, the great usurper of divine rights.

However, what is the fascinating thing we should discern here, far out into the vague distance of a pre-terrestrial past? It is rather the contours of Christ; that is the Anointed One, assuming for the first time, His role as the great Mediator. Of course, there are questions here to which we do not know the answer: How long a time already had the Son of God been carrying on his mediatorial function? How long a time had He kept "going out of His way" to reveal the love of His Father to the heavenly hosts? Obviously there are mysterious gulfs to be bridged even where sin has not yet penetrated its work of splitness in creaturely minds? Obviously a tremendous act of mediation is needed, simply in order to cover the infinite distance inevitably existing between the Creator and the created ones.

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What we know for sure is the fact of our own history: Once creatures had yielded to the temptations of self-aggrandizement, a mighty Mediator was desperately needed. But even for angels, whom could we imagine as qualified to have charge of a mediatorial office, apart from Jesus Christ? Who, other than He, could be fitted for the task of bridging the gulfs of infinity. And eventually,... even in the heavens, this was no longer a matter of that normal gulf between the finite ones and the Infinite One, between the created ones and the Self-Existent one. No, it is soon the tragic question of a veritable abyss between a God of righteousness and creatures of iniquity.

... God was willing enough to forgive, even angels who fell into temptation. Whatever might be the sacrifice here involved, we know that Christ was willing to make it. And why should we marvel at this? I see no more reason to doubt that Christ would even have died for the salvation of those angels. In fact, the Spirit of Prophecy clearly informs me that He would have died for me, even though I happened to be the only lost one in this world. Now, what am I, compared to myriads of angels? What is my tragedy, compared the tragedy of between one half and one third of the entire angelic host?

### **Illuminating Details in Lucifer's Drama**

What interests us above all, in Ellen White's report, is a series of incidents throwing a fascinating light on the character of Jesus Christ. Take the moments when the heavens were breathless with tension, anxiously watching the perilous game Lucifer was playing with his own life. His decisions were laden with destiny. Not only his own fate, but that of myriads of angels seemed to be weighing up and down in the balances. And this was not just a passive on-looking. Ellen White informs us that everything was being tried in order to influence the rebellious ones and save the situation: "In heavenly council the angels pleaded with Lucifer." (p. 36). And this was not all. Christ Himself as the most outgoing, the most anxious of all to save this Light-bearer, whom He loved so dearly: "The Son of God presented before him the greatness, the goodness and the justice of the **Creator** (sic; emphasis mine), and the sacred unchanging nature of His law." (P&P 36).

It appears here that Jesus did not at all refer to Himself as the Creator on this occasion. He distinctly refers to the Father. ... Was He not the incomparable Artist and Architect to whom the Father had delegated the whole task of calling into existence a marvelous universe resplendent with beauty? The testimony of John 1:1 is indubitable: "Without Him (Christ) nothing was made of all that was made."

But what about Lucifer, then--the Son of the Morning? Who had created him? Could there be any doubt about that in our minds? It was Jesus Christ, of course. Then why did He not tell him so? Why had He not made this clear to that rising "Son of the Morning" a long time ago?

Christ had more important missions than that of demonstrating in front of His heavenly associates His own remarkable might and external glory. He had the mission of demonstrating His love--the small, still voice of meekness and mercy, of spirit and grace.

But at this extreme moment any amount of that sweet delicacy on the part of the definitely "Down-Going" One, the utterly Self-Abasing One, seemed to be of no avail. Lucifer's heart had too long brazed itself against the fragrant and tenderly touching mildness of God's appeal, the

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God who had created him and loved him with an infinite love... "Lucifer allowed his jealousy of Christ to prevail, and became the more determined." PP 35.

The self-abasing meekness of Christ's appeal became a trial to Lucifer in a double sense. It is the same that happens to you and me in the destiny-laden moments of our lives: How could our Maker apply a more perfect means of trying us? But this means that our very life is on trial. If your heart is not melted by it, it is definitely hardened. There is no neutral alternative. The day of judgment (crisis) is at hand, it is a day of clear discrimination, an either--or.

### **A Secret of the Heavens, Finally Disclosed Under Dramatic Conditions**

It was only at this tardy moment that the Father Himself, in His turn, made His inevitable decision. For the sake of the sincere and loyal angels, whom Satan was trying to make his accomplices, God was forced to lay bare all the facts. This took place under conditions of a dramatic tension. That certainly was not a revelation wholly in accordance with the ideal plan of God. But there simply was not any other way it could be done under the prevailing circumstances.

"The King of the universe summoned the heavenly hosts before Him that in their presence He might set forth the true position of His Son, and show the relation He sustained to all created beings. The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the Eternal, Self-existent One encircled both. About the throne gathered the holy angels, a vast unnumbered throng." (Ibid) And now, what, exactly, was the "relation He (Christ) sustained to all created beings?" The solemn declaration made by God the Father on this occasion was bound to be a significant one. It simply brought out the full truth about "the position of His Son:"

...Lucifer, on realizing the stupendous fact of Christ's condescension, finally had a most realistic reaction: He was for some time overwhelmed by a sense of true admiration.

... The inspired description of that battle in Patriarchs and Prophets is as conformed to the significance of the topic as any piece of world literature could be. This is the giant controversy between Humility and Pride, in its most breath-taking disclosure: "The angels joyfully acknowledged the supremacy of Christ, and prostrating themselves before Him, poured out their love and adoration. Lucifer bowed with them: But in His heart there was a strange, fierce conflict. Truth, justice and loyalty were struggling against envy and jealousy. The influence of the holy angels seemed for a time to carry him with them. As songs of praise ascended in melodious strains, swelled by thousands of glad voices, the spirit of evil seemed vanquished: Unutterable love thrilled his entire being" (Ibid.)

Notice two phases of this battle, which actually go together, forming one single whole: On the one hand, one may distinguish an "intellectual phase." Remember that Lucifer, as well as the whole heavenly host, had now received pointed information about the relevant facts of the matter. Christ's capacity of Creator, that is, His self-evident title to every creature's homage and allegiance, had been solemnly established by the Eternal Father Himself. In other words, such sober considerations as "truth, justice and loyalty" would henceforth, without any reasonable objection, have to be registered in favor of the wayward child's "coming to himself" (as the story of the prodigal son expresses it). On the other hand, however, there is a "sentimental phase." That is what becomes evident when it says that those virile qualities of

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"trust, justice, and loyalty" had to struggle against "envy and jealousy." We do realize the fierceness of the inner conflict.

... The truth as a definite spiritual value, was intensely active on the side of good. Thanks to the interceding prayers of thousands of angels, who still loved Lucifer dearly, this truth was on the very verge of gaining a decisive victory in the insurgent's soul. The triumph of good over evil seems to be right at hand. Triumph, here as always, means "bowing down". Will Lucifer, in the depths of his heart, bow down? This is the question that still keeps weighing in the balances. It means destiny to Lucifer, and to many others with him. Conditions are as promising as ever; the good influences are in the majority, and the incredible thing seems about to happen: "His (Lucifer's) soul went out in harmony with the sinless worshipers in love to the Father and the Son".

... But unfortunately that turning outward is a trend soon abandoned for the opposite one. Lucifer's gaze begins to turn inward in that exclusive way which spells defeat. That is a turning to the place in which there is no hope, no salvation: the abyss of egocentricity and sentimentality in creaturely beings. God has given His creatures the prerogative of a free will. The "other ones" may carry you on the wings of holy song and interceding prayer, but they cannot make the final decisions for you. Those decisions are yours. They may go straight against the most compact majority. To the numerous observers of Lucifer's drama comes the pang of seeing the triumph turned into abrupt defeat. The pendulum has struck over to the wrong side. This is Autarkeia (self-sufficiency) still winning the day in the last round. Looking back at himself (an empty stare), instead of out to the other ones, and to the Other One (a sacred vision), Lucifer sinks into the billows of gloomy perdition.

"Again he was filled with pride in his own glory, His desire for supremacy returned, and envy of Christ was once more indulged."

Ingratitude is here indicated by Ellen White as the direct cause of a destructive process now taking its wild course. This deadening poison of the self-centered soul is described with masterful insight, as regards its deleterious effects on living minds.

### **Gratitude--The Christian Realist's Only Alternative to Pagan Vanity**

..."The high honors conferred upon Lucifer were not appreciated as God's special gift, and therefore called forth no gratitude to his Creator. He glorified in his brightness and exaltation, and aspired to be equal with God."

How different from Christ's own fundamental attitude. The Lord of the universe who really did have something to glory in, a glory entirely His own, He actually makes conscious efforts to hide His glory, as long as it is not profitable to the other ones to have it revealed to them, as yet. He who was, from eternity, the Self-sufficient One, the truly Self-dependent One,--He, of all beings, deliberately makes Himself dependent-- heartily dependent--on the other ones. For their sakes, intentionally and systematically, He veils the radiant glory of His absolute supremacy, His divine Self-sufficiency.

How pitifully contrasting to this is not that "self-sufficiency" which Lucifer introduced into the universe. In fact, self-sufficiency in connection with mere creatures is not only a miserable

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sham phenomenon, It is an abomination. It is a mocking of God, an affront against His divine uniqueness.

So it appropriately maintains its position, becoming the symbol par excellence for man making himself into a god, assuming all the sacred prerogatives of God. That is self-exaltation, self-deification. It is the creature's proud way up, in marked contradistinction to the Creator's humble way down. Briefly, it is paganism versus Christianity.

There should be no difficulty, then in pinpointing this as related to our key text, Phil. 2:4,5. The pagan titan insists on making himself equal to the Divine One: Nothing less than that. This is the great "robbery". It is simple usurpation and presumption. The mildest terms of interpretation one can find for this is foolishness, illusion, self-deceit. We should know that these qualities are fateful. But it should also be noticed what makes them particularly fateful: It is a certain atmosphere of "romanticism," perhaps the most dangerous trend in this universe. Let us notice the following words:

"The spirit of discontent and disaffection had never been known in heaven. It was a new element, strange, mysterious, unaccountable."

In how far unaccountable? -- It simply could not be accounted for by any substantial logical reason. Sin has no reason. Therefore, no one can explain why it happened. If it had had a reason, it would have had an excuse, says the Spirit of Prophecy. But it has no excuse. It is entirely unwarranted. A special dispensation of grace is necessary in order to obtain forgiveness for it. And this grace has become available to us through Jesus Christ.

That strange "unaccountableness" of sin is exactly what has tended to make spiritualism so dangerously attractive as a tool in Satan's workshop. There is something here surrounding the schemes of the evil one with a weird luster. Sin, from its very entry upon the scene, had something inexplicable to recommend it. (That is, to the hearts of creatures indulging in the temptation of self-contemplation, egocentricity.) It's very novelty rendered it fascinating, exciting, filled to the brim with a strange promise. That promise is vain. It is arch-false. But on first views even that vanity and spuriousness do not present themselves as utter disadvantages.

Upon illusion, however, follows disillusion. And that is a bitter experience,--not "bitter-sweet", but just bitter. Satan very soon had this experience of disillusionment. No intelligent creature is so mad that he does not eventually realize the heavy loss he is suffering, due to sin. But in Lucifer's case that realization came too late. For the first time in creation's history, this idea becomes a destiny-laden one: "Too late!" "He nearly reached the decision to return, but pride forbade him." (PP 39).

The wayward one had a last opportunity, a gracious offer on the part of a Mediator, a Redeemer, to come back, -- but "pride forbade him!" What a dictatorial, tyrannical master pride is! Later on he did "decide to come back", but this "decision" in itself was nothing but a delusion. There was no coming back: "He had now gone too far to return". (PP 41) It would have been unrealistic to "take him back". God cannot afford to be unrealistic. In his pity and grace He goes as far as there is any realistic coverage for going. Not one inch farther. Christianity has no quarrel at all with radical realism.

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And what is the trend of disposition Satan now discloses? A new stage of his warfare with God is reached. He goes into open battle. He avails himself of every unfair argument which is the apparent advantage of the unscrupulous evil-doer in his work of misrepresentation. Most eloquent in this respect is the argument he now uses in order to alienate the other angels from God: He points to "the long-suffering of God as an evidence of his own (Satan's) superiority" (PP 39). In other words: God's going down is represented as a sign of His "inferiority". As the Spirit of Prophecy puts it: "His mercy was misrepresented". (PP 39).

The trend of "reasoning" is strikingly uniform: "That person over there, who I feared was superior, has finally come down to my level. So this is where he belongs. It is exactly as I thought all the time: I am certainly a match for him in anything. Perhaps I can even climb far above him. That is what I am going to do!"

What a pitiable set of logics, -- the logics of envious minds, a frantically distorted pattern of thought. Particularly pathetic becomes the tragedy of the present case when viewed in the light of what was due to take place shortly afterwards, -- and did take place, according to the plan, a divine, irrepressible plan.

You certainly recall what was the great issue to be agreed upon by that divine council to which Lucifer was not invited: According to the Spirit of Prophecy, it was precisely when the great cherub discovered that he had not been deemed worthy of taking part in the deliberations of this divine council, that he permitted his jealousy to burst out into open flame. So we have good reason to be curious about the agenda of that council. What was the great question at issue? It was whether God the Father and God the Son should now put into practice their eternal purpose of going down as they had never gone down before, and take all the risks involved in this most radical going down! We happen to know today something about the suffering and sacrifice implied in pursuing, with divine inflexibility, and to the bitter end, the original plan of creating the planet Earth and the creature man.

If there is not an irony of fate in this, then an irony of fate has never occurred. What was the precious glory and exaltation from which Lucifer imagined that he had been "shamefully excluded", "treacherously bypassed"! It was simply the glory of going down, absolutely all the way down.

It should here be underlined that there hardly was a time in all the history of intelligent free-will creatures, when they were refused the life-inspiring revelation that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the great Creator of all things. Even from the first moment when He came down to this earth in the form of a lowly human being, that glorious truth was evidently the great light of a gradually dawning day. It was immediately available to some whose hearts were already receptive to just this kind of humble revelation selected by Providence. I am thinking of such persons as Mary and Joseph, Anna and Simeon, etc., etc. So, the main fact we should hold fast to, is: Christ's favorite method of revealing himself, to angels as well as to men, has evidently been the humble alterocentric method, of pointing to the Other One, in this case, the Father, as the great and glorious One. On the other hand, to whom does the Father in His turn, constantly refer us, as a demonstration of divine glory? To the Son!

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Still it remains an indisputable fact that the King of Heaven did come down to this planet. The first time, not as the King of Glory, but in the form of a little human baby. This lowliness manifestly was the best point of departure from which He could reveal God and vindicate His name.

So definitely, once more, the principle of altero-centricity becomes the adequate methodology; according to that, you do not proceed to point at yourself, but at the other one. Christ availed Himself of the great pedagogical principle of revealing God to man objectively. This objectification is what happens whenever one Person in the Godhead reveals to His creatures (His "students", if you like) the great Creator as One He can point at outside Himself, as it were. In other words: "Please look over there, dear disciple of mine, I am showing you God in all His admirable beauty".

It is obvious that this was the favorite method of instruction in heaven among the angels as well. Of course, there was nothing here, either, that prevented the creatures from getting to know the full facts about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Maker of worlds and of all living creatures. We remember how Anna and Simeon were enabled to see divine glory as it flashed through humanity in the form of a tiny babe. So Lucifer also had the privilege to detect majesty through the outward display of divine lowliness. But we know on what the perspicacity of Anna and Simeon depended. That was the attitude they themselves, as free-will agents, chose to adopt toward what they saw. In a similar way, a test of obedience and goodwill toward God was placed in the pathway of angelic beings. They had the privilege of intelligent creatures to say "No, thank you" to what they did see, from the beginning. But it is the positive answer of an eager "Yes, thank you" which is the obvious intention of all volitional freedom. It is the blessed possibility of loving freely.

The heart is the sense perception instrument through which an intelligent creature is able to see the most essential truths in life. And that heart is a totality. It comprehends will power, love feeling, humble submission to objective facts, everything that is basic for total perception.

"My teaching is not Mine," said Jesus, "But His that sent Me. If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself." John 7:16, 17 RV

The question of these cavilers Jesus met, not by answering the cavil, but by opening up truth vital to the salvation of the soul. The perception and appreciation of truth, He said, depends less upon the mind than upon the heart. Truth must be received into the soul; it claims the homage of the will. If the truth could be submitted to the reason alone, pride would be no hindrance in the way of its reception. But it is to be received through the work of grace in the heart; and its reception depends upon the renunciation of every sin that the Spirit of God reveals. Man's advantages for obtaining a knowledge of the truth, however great these may be, will prove of no benefit to him unless the heart is open to receive the truth." DA 455-56

### **For Meditation and Summary**

Why then--to get to the real depths of it--did Christ veil His divinity in the case of Lucifer and that angel's fellow creatures? For, as we do know for a fact today, this veiling was to occasion a misunderstanding in Lucifer's mind and in the minds of so many of his fellows--a fatal

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misunderstanding, you might safely say. For their part, the result of the whole development was that they simply came to think: "Christ is as 'low' as that. He is not just lowly, humble. He is, as it appears, 'LOW'." And they treated Him accordingly: That is, in accordance with their own fatally wrong conclusion.

The same problem could be formulated in a different way: Was not this unique plan of Christ, of going down, a manifest failure, a sad mistake?

No. First we may here remember that all the angels were faced with the same testing experience. But did they all react to it in the same way? No, there is a significant distinction between two different ways of reaction to that lowliness of Jesus Christ, as He made His historic encounter with them in their lives. In fact, there are principal and widely different ways in which creatures may react in front of the tremendous phenomenon of lowliness. Lowliness is a most forcefully decision-provoking thing. It simply forces a line of distinction to be drawn, majestically and irrepressibly, between some things that must be distinguished. At the moment when lowliness appears upon the scene, crisis is there. What kind of crisis is that? It is crisis in terms of a most necessary test. That is, the test that knocks at the door of every creature who has been called to the unfathomable privilege of being endowed with personality. Personality, or will, means the solemn fact of being called upon to make a choice, the choice of life?

There seems to be something inevitably attending upon any demonstration of lowliness here. It is a mechanism of acceleration. It precipitates you toward a final decision. You are never the same after it. You are either a thousand times better or a thousand times worse. You are most precipitously on your way up, or on your way down. And in the very condition of the world there is an urgent desire for that ultimate determination. In Christ's own heart there is this urgency:

"Think not that I have come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."  
(Matt. 10:34) "I am come to send fire on the earth: and what will I if it be already kindled."  
(Luke 12:49)

### **Conclusion:**

Satan has declared war on the law and government of God, which are founded upon His character, His Agape love. Christ says: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:29,30.

Satan says, "... I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Isaiah 14:13 ,14

In this war there is no non-combatants. We each must choose who will be our Master - the Infinite One, who humbly came down, or will we be as that proud, creaturely one, self-sufficiently and vainly, trying to usurp His place.