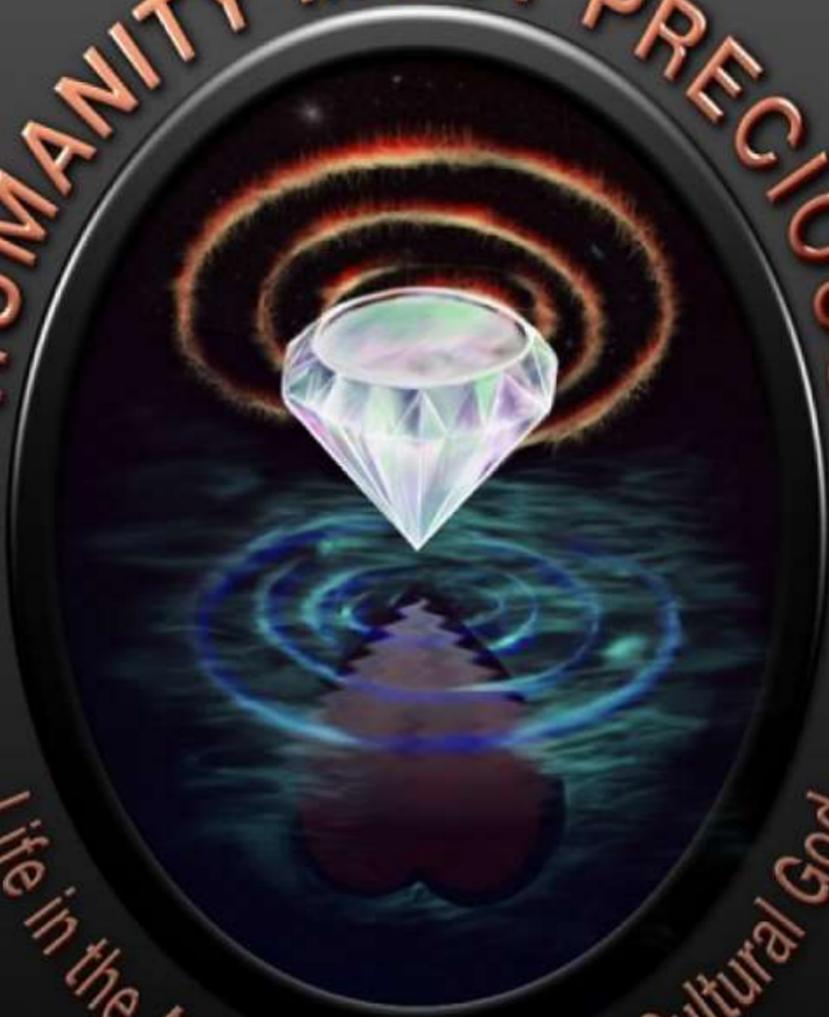


HUMANITY MOST PRECIOUS



Life in the Arms of "THE" Trans-Cultural God

Ron Galloway

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Vogelstein Press  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

## Introduction

What is so wonderfully abnormal in the Judeo Christian view of humanity is that we humans are regarded as greater and more precious than anything else in the created order, so much so that even before the creation of the world the Judeo Christian God was preparing to redeem us through the death of Christ on the cross. My purpose in writing *Humanity Most Precious* is to show that the very way the Judeo Christian God views, loves and treats us transcends normal religious patterns and the ideas of God and man these patterns describe. The text of scripture that first got me thinking in this direction is found in the Bible in the Gospel of John (John 7:45–46). Here some Jewish temple guards are afraid to arrest Jesus when they hear him speak. They report back to their superiors declaring that: “No man ever spoke as this man spoke.” That is to say, these men could sense that the words and understandings of Jesus went utterly against the grain of normal religious perceptions respecting God and man.

John Hick, the famous pluralist theologian, seems very aware and troubled by the implications of the claims of Jesus Christ (Whaling 1986, 150–151). Hick realizes that if Jesus really is the eternal creator, then it becomes intensely difficult indeed to treat Jesus, the New Testament, and the Christian faith on the same plain as other religions. By implication, the path to God would then be Jesus, and Jesus alone.

From this starting point I build the argument that the kind of love for humanity Jesus spoke of—and demonstrated—is *trans-cultural*. It does not originate in humanity, nature, or other religions, but rather in him who was fully God and fully man—Jesus the Christ. Ironically, even though humanity cannot arrive by special revelation at the Judeo Christian view of equal human worth, it has been swiftly embraced and rapidly integrated into normative religious worldviews which logically imply just the opposite. For example, Atheism and Secular Humanism admit of no real ultimate purpose for human beings, and yet they are frequently defending human worth and arguing against racism. I argue that this irony exists, precisely because people are made in the image of God, no matter how hard they try to run from that reality. We are therefore naturally attracted to the Judeo Christian teaching of human worth, the teaching of Jesus the God man who spoke as no mere human man ever could. Those who deny the revelatory and trans-cultural view of humanity set forth by the Bible are left with the unenviable task of finding this teaching about God and humanity anywhere outside it.

In the first chapter I show that normal religious patterns either advocate many personal or semi-personal gods, or else infinite gods who are impersonal. None of them ever rise to the heights of a God who is infinite and yet personal, and who regards every human being who has ever lived as equally precious. All normal patterns of belief have in common that they are either all invented by

human beings or by supernatural entities greater than us, but still infinitely inferior to the Judeo Christian God who is both personal and infinite. Using this comparative approach, I seek to demonstrate that normal religious patterns have their origins in the limitations we experience, first because we are finite beings, and second because we are sinful. For these reasons, I argue, we are therefore incapable of ever conceiving on our own the Judeo Christian God, or the value ascribed to humanity by this God. By examining four different religions, all with an impersonal God, I illustrate how each—far from finding humanity as more precious than anything else in creation—actually imply the annihilation of the human self, or else see the human self as a temporary organism with no ultimate purpose. I therefore show how all religions with impersonal gods follow the normative pattern—the reduction of the human self to an illusion, or to a temporary mass of protoplasm.

The second chapter sketches the dehumanizing impact of the Enlightenment and Post Enlightenment. I sketch how both eras contributed to the now normative belief that human beings are no more than stimulus response organisms, or mere passing phases in the history of consciousness. I illustrate, as well, how both eras soon jettisoned the belief in a personal God, and how what followed set a pattern in the western world for the now normative patterns of religious beliefs which characteristically dismiss the idea of a personal God who loved and died for every human being who ever lived.

The third chapter introduces the wondrously transcendent idea of humanity found in the Genesis account where it says: God called their name Adam (Genesis 5:2). I argue that in Genesis the great worth of male and female is set forth in a fashion far transcending any finitely derived perceptions of the relationship between man and woman. In the remainder of the chapter I show how Genesis itself and its doctrine of human dominion in no way imply a disregard for living things or for the natural environment. I contend that Genesis teaches that humanity is precious, but also that we must still be responsible to God and his creation. I then argue that the real source of disregard for both the environment and humanity in the present world heavily derives from the nature worship and the impersonal view of nature and man that mainly arose out of the enlightenment and post-enlightenment eras. Quoting a very specific passage from the Bible—where Jesus declares that humanity is far more precious than anything in the animal kingdom—I contrast these words of Jesus with the collective nature worship arising out of the enlightenment and post-enlightenment eras.

In the fourth chapter I argue that typical perceptions and arguments as to the nature of an *Almighty God* lead to misconceptions and poor logic as to what *almighty* means in scripture. I then show that a truly biblical understanding of the meaning of *almighty* corrects the misconceptions and allows even the critics to begin from a right premise. Most importantly it introduces the reader to the transcendent and trans-cultural love of a God who is truly *almighty*.

In the chapters following the ones just introduced, I share with the reader biblical passages and themes that show what God has done, promised or foreshadowed in the past, and that illustrate how very precious we are to him. The selections I chose are based on thoughts, reflections, and experiences that have deepened my own walk and my own nearness to the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. The reader will therefore find that this book is partly argumentative and partly devotional. Of course, I mean *argumentative* in the most positive sense, wherein reason and logic seek truth. The reader will hopefully become aware that it is sometimes difficult to know where the argument ends and devotional begins. For I have found that argumentative thought is often very near indeed to praise, worship, and adoration.

In the closing chapter I explore reasons why a yes answer might indeed be given to the following questions: Could it be that the symbols, myths, ritual insights, teachings and religions past and future conceal and yet reveal a partial understanding of God? Could this be true even for that range of humanity that is still distant from him and do not yet know him as he is, or what he promises to those who embrace the incarnation, resurrection and transfiguration? Might not symbol, myth, event and ritual act as a bridge to point people to Christ, whether to his incarnation, resurrection or transfiguration or to all three? Might there not be a way that they can be seen to foreshadow Christ and even to reveal that Christ is not the shadow, but the concrete reality? Here we speak of the time space reality of a Savior who cemented the value of humanity, crying out to us: “Seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened.” It is my hope that at least for some of my readers, the door to understanding how precious we are to God will open wide.



# 1. The Bible

## *The Preservation and Value of the Human Self in the Judeo Christian Scriptures*

### *How Precious We Are*

As a way of establishing the theme of our worth to God, it is appropriate to begin with some basic understandings. The Bible has two parts (Metzger 1987). The first part was put together over a period of eleven hundred years (Bruce 1950, 36). Christians call the first part the Old Testament. Jewish believers call it the Tanach or the Hebrew Bible. The second part is called the New Testament. The New Testament scriptures were all composed in a period of about fifty years, but were not organized into twenty-six books until well into the fourth century. The Old Testament, on the other hand, was composed and organized over a period of approximately eleven hundred years (Bruce 1950). But both parts of the Bible make wonderfully clear, when rightly understood, that all human beings are made in the image of God and are therefore infinitely precious to their creator.

Such an assertion does not mean that we can ever afford to take this for granted, even though most people appear to do so. Nevertheless, it is a declaration that goes far beyond the normal religious or purely secular pattern of thinking or believing. It is not simply a unique idea, but it is a concept that goes directly against the grain of how human beings think about God, themselves, and humanity as a whole.

What then are the characteristics of what I am calling normative religions? First the god or gods are either impersonal and infinite, or personal but not infinite. All impersonal religions have impersonal infinite gods which by implication imply the annihilation of the human finite self. The finite self is either believed to be an illusion or a temporary mass of protoplasm that will eventually turn to dust. Impersonal gods are either nature gods or higher consciousness gods.

Equally typical are the personal gods of Polytheism. Gods of this sort are personifications of nature. Sometimes the afterlife is a continuance of pleasures and activities enjoyed in this life, but usually death is a shadow state, a condition far less substantial than this life. The worship of Polytheism involves both the favoritism of the worshipper and the favoritism of the Gods. In normative religions there is never the idea of an infinite personal God who loves every human being equally no matter his race or color. None of these normative world views sustain the trans-cultural teaching that human beings are made in the image of God. These religions or world views have no chance of independently arriving at such a transcendent trans-cultural teaching. This can only be known because the Bible presents to us what God has told us about himself and ourselves. The Bible is filled with a great many things human beings could never invent or conceive of on their own; again

this is because the teachings of Old and New Testament are trans-cultural and transcendent. As a consequence the view of God, man, time, and history that the Bible presents goes utterly against the grain of finite human thinking and its normative religious or secular patterns with respect to God and religion. Throughout this chapter and the rest of the book I will be illustrating this contrast between the normative and the trans-cultural which is always the truly transcendent.

But to be fair, we must start far enough back that one does not mistake finding this idea of equal human worth originating in other cultures, when in fact it is there only because of the widespread influence of the Bible on other religions and cultures. Since the advent of the Christian faith, many cultures contain this wonderful and elevated understanding of humanity. For when other cultures and religions come into contact with the Bible, there are often marked and pervasive changes in those religions and in the culture itself. For example, Mahatma Gandhi began to deplore the doctrine of re-incarnation and to believe in the equal value of every human being. Therefore, in light of his view of the universality of human worth Gandhi came to believe, that re-incarnation with its doctrines of inferior and superior beings was a doctrine India could no longer afford.

But Gandhi himself admitted being heavily influenced by the teachings of Jesus Christ in this regard. The rejection of the doctrine of re-incarnation was more than a minor change in the nature of his Hindu belief. Indeed the very fight for the Independence of India, to a considerable degree, involved the idea of the equal worth of every human being, an idea utterly foreign to the traditional Hindu idea of re-incarnation.

As a consequence the prime ground for the struggle for India's Independence was grounded in a teaching alien to Hinduism itself. It was motivated by the truly transcendent idea that every human life is precious, but it was cut off from its real source, the love of God who sent his son to this world to die for us and to give to us all the gift of eternal life in his eternal family.

The Bible makes clear that the only reason we can accept the idea that every human being is loved by God and precious to him is because God told us so (John 3:16). This will become clearer and more evident as we proceed. Whether we examine the past or future, what do we find? We find cultures and civilizations with patterns of belief and thinking that never arrive independently at the conviction that all human beings are equally precious and loved by their creator. In fact, the Bible teaches that God loved us so much that he became the man Jesus. This is what Christians mean by the incarnation. Jesus the God-man lived among us, and became through his death the savior of all who truly seek him now or in the future. This kind of love is all too high and deep for normal human experience and understanding to invent or conceive. Yet, as soon as it is revealed in history, many people will instinctively recognize that there is no greater love than this. I invite any of my readers, scholars or other-wise, to explore the human history of religion and find this incredibly wondrous

and elevated view of human worth anywhere else. Where else does a creator God say: “You are in my image?” Where else does a creator say: “I want you to be with me and a part of my family forever” (author’s paraphrase) or, as the more traditional rendering would put it: “In my father’s house are many mansions.” (KJV) Such were the words of Jesus, who was both fully man and fully God.

Wherever the idea of universal human worth is found or has been found, it has never originated with people. Rather it is due to the widespread influence of the Judeo Christian God (Schmidt 2001). It is my intent to demonstrate this constantly as we proceed. Since the advent of the Judeo Christian Scriptures, many cultures have adopted the idea that all human beings are precious, but they exclude from their worship the very Lord and Savior who created and loved them in the first place. When other cultures and beliefs come into contact with the Bible, they often undergo pervasive changes. For example, it is only due to the fact that the Christian faith teaches all human beings are precious that we find many feminists with no regard for the Bible fighting for the Biblical teaching of equal human worth. Ironically, some of these feminists as well as other defenders of equality make the claim that the Bible is hate literature. This is an insane claim in light of the fact that it is the Bible itself that is responsible for the very idea of equal human worth for all people, no matter the color of their skin. Fragmented and distorted understandings of this belief exist around the earth. Many people now believe that all human life is precious, but they no longer connect it to the love of God; they suppose that this concept can somehow hang in mid-air without roots or connections. Ultimately, this *mid-air* approach makes no sense and has no support whatever apart from the belief in a deity that created us and loves us. As soon as the love of a creator is rejected as the cause of this worth, there remains no way to support it. I will show this continually as we move through this chapter and the book itself.

In summary, the Bible presents a view of human beings and human worth that human beings could never come to on their own. The proof of this is the fact that before the Judeo Christian tradition spread its influence, every known pattern of human religion, civilization, and culture was devoid of such a wondrous view of human value.

Ever since this tradition was first revealed, all subsequent civilizations have the opportunity to realize that there could be no more advanced or wonderful understanding of human worth and value. This great teaching of collective human dignity was foreshadowed in virtually all the writings of the Old Testament. But it was only after the death and resurrection of Christ that even the first-century Christian Jews began to understand God’s love for all human beings. Not even the closest followers of Jesus even remotely understood the central meaning of the Old Testament (see especially Hebrews) until they began to understand what Jesus did for them all by dying on the cross. Only then did they gradually come to understand that God so loved every human being “that he gave his only begotten

son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Therefore, I maintain that whenever we lose sight of this and revert back to the idea that human beings are neither loved of God, nor are of equal value, we simply move back to normal finite cultural and religious patterns of fragmented thinking with respect to God and the universe. These patterns of limited level understanding are as prevalent in the world today as they were before the time of Christ. They are particularly evident in Secular Humanism. Formerly it was called Religious Humanism. We see this in both versions of the *Humanist Manifesto*. The *Humanist Manifesto* was signed and promoted by early advocates of Religious Humanism such as John Dewey. Secular Humanism is the prevailing religion in most of the western world and much of the rest of the globe. According to this religion or belief, God does nothing for us (*Humanist Manifesto* 1933, 13–15). He simply does not exist, and it is all up to us to form our own futures. In most versions of Religious or Secular Humanism these self-created futures are actualized in an intrinsically purposeless, aimlessly evolving universe. In Secular Humanism then, we witness this reversion back to one of the normal human patterns of viewing God, ourselves and humanity as a whole.

Another reason human life is so precious is precisely the fact that the Bible differentiates every human being from all other creatures. We alone are made in the image of God and are therefore loved by God far more than any animal or non-human creature on this earth (Matthew 6:28–36). If we reject this Christ-centered, God-centered basis for human worth, there remains no real basis for the idea that all human beings are precious beyond all other creatures on this earth. For then we are just the same as any other part of nature, and there exists no God who loves us and died for us. If we are consistent with this cold and impersonal belief, we can thereby, following the logic of such world views, substitute human beings for laboratory guinea pigs or rats with no sense of conscience.

Where does Secular Humanism leave human beings? It leaves us without any way of logically supporting the superiority of human worth over the rest of nature. If we try to come up with a different justification for it than the Christian view we will always end up with a basis for worth that will make one human being more important and more worthwhile than another.

In human history, it is not difficult to find views of human beings in which some segment of humanity is considered superior to another. It is not difficult because such views are the norm. Not only are they the norm, they form the very character of human culture and civilization. Outside of the Bible’s influence this fragmented preferential understanding of human value, ever prevails (See Zacharias 2000).

This is essentially due to the fact that human beings are finite. Consequently, they can never know enough about humanity or its origins to ever arrive at the wondrous idea that they are equally loved, precious, and able to choose to come to their savior, Jesus Christ.

The only way that people can come to know this is by learning from the Bible or its Christian ambassadors that their creator loves them and died for them on the cross. On the other hand, we might, for example, argue that because we are more intelligent than other creatures, we are therefore more precious. That might sound solid, but who has ever established that degrees of human intelligence has anything to do with human worth.

In fact, there are some very damaging implications in seeking to establish human worth on the basis of intelligence. For if this is made the basis, it means that any person who is smarter than another person is automatically of more value and worth. Therefore, those of superior intelligence can treat those of inferior intelligence as creatures of lesser worth and value. Just imagine how barbaric the world would become if this were the basis we all used for human worth. The Nazis maintained something similar to this, claiming that Caucasians possessed minds far more developed than the minds of colored races such as the Japanese, Chinese or African peoples (Hillel and Henry 1975, 3). This led them to develop a breeding ground for what they termed the Nordic Super Race. The breeding ground took the form of Stud Farms called *Lebensbornes*—meaning *fountain of life*.

Perhaps we could make the claim that human beings contribute more to the earth than animals and are therefore superior. But when we make a move like this, we make usefulness the basis of worth. It would then follow logically that whoever is more useful than someone else is thereby superior. Such a basis for human worth is wholly subjective. Who has ever been able to support the idea that superior contributions to society, or usefulness, establishes superior worth? Whatever standard of worth we come up with other than the love of God will not only be subjective, but it always ends up making some humans superior in worth to others. As soon as our definition of human beings allows for the idea of superior and inferior human beings, then we too, like the ancient Romans or Greeks or other former civilizations, can treat other human beings as inferior to ourselves. Giving a sound basis for the idea of equal human worth is an impossible idea to implement if we try to justify it apart from what the Bible says about human worth and value.

### ***Skinning the Carrot, Humanity and Religion***

Now if we only take only a surface look at many religions we might suppose that those without a personal loving God can also make room for the self as precious—each and every human self. What is often not realized, however, is that impersonal views of God cannot sustain human worth in the least. This, of course, is the inevitable implication of normal patterns of human religions with impersonal Gods devoid of the teaching that all humanity is loved by God and precious to him.

In order to show how hard it is for impersonal religions with impersonal gods to give an adequate basis for human worth, let us examine four that are highly influential and representative.

Such an analysis requires the need to get underneath their deceptive exterior skin. Toward this end I offer a kind of illustration. Let us picture some normative impersonal religions as carrots that have an outer skin. When the outer skin is scraped off, it reveals the pure inner skin of the carrot. Let us say that the deceptive outer skin of the carrot represents not the pure religion, but rather some of the actual beliefs fused or combined with beliefs that come from the Bible.

Therefore, all we have to do to see the true pure beliefs is to scrape off the outer skin of the carrot. Once we have done this, we can detect whether these normative religions can support the belief that all human beings are precious. We cannot be exhaustive, but let us skin four carrots, i.e., four major belief systems. Of course, we cannot give a detailed account of any of them, but let us focus on their basic view of God and humanity. The first carrot to skin is Hinduism with respect to its doctrine of Karma, second, Theravada Buddhism since it is the earlier form of Buddhism, third, the United Nations Global Education Program, a belief system which claims that all is one, and all is God and fourth, Secular Humanism, or as it is less frequently known, Religious Humanism.

### ***The First Carrot: Hinduism, Karma, Brahma***

In skinning this carrot we will first talk about Karma and Brahma, two concepts essential to Hinduism. Then we will look at the Hindu belief that is stated in the following way: “This too is Brahma.” This is a way of saying that Brahma is everything.

At the very core of Hindu belief is the doctrine of Karma. Karma is a kind of *seed thought* that predisposes one to a similar thought or action in the future (Renou 1962, 19, 43, 44, 191, 197). Karma is ever in motion, and in flux, and therefore, according to Hindu thought, unreal. Brahma alone is unchanging and real; therefore, Karma is always a state of illusion. The human self, in fact, is Karma and therefore an illusion.

In Hinduism, Atman is really Brahma entrapped inside of human beings because of all our Karma. As long as some Karma is left at death, the soul must be reincarnated, which means to be born again, whether as a bug, a bird, an animal or some kind of a human being. The reason why rebirth must occur is precisely because Karma is an illusion. Until all illusions are removed, there can be no release for Atman who is really Brahma encased in the human self. Thus, inside the human illusion is the eternal impersonal soul of Brahma, the Atman. The only way Brahma himself can find release, is to get rid of all the Karma including the illusion of the human self, the shell that entraps him.

Despite being impersonal, Brahma is an eternal consciousness that can recognize himself. Once all the shades of Karma are gone and can no longer conceal the Atman (Renou 1962). Atman recognizes himself as Brahma, the only reality. As a result Atman is freed from the human shell and also from reincarnation. Reincarnation is often called *the wheel of life and death*. In essence, then,

the annihilation of the human self equals the freedom of Brahma. This is why Hindu believers do good deeds. They are taught that by doing good deeds, following the right path and right thinking, they can get rid of their Karma. Contrary to Western notions, Karma is always something to work at eliminating. Although good Karma exists in the temporal sense, ultimately, there is no good Karma, only Karma that is a lighter shade of illusion than the darker forms of Karma.

The highest stage is the Brahman Stage. A Brahman must even get rid of the Karma that makes him think that his own self and personality are real. This is the final bit of Karma that must be eliminated in order to escape the wheel of life and death (Renou 1962, 43, 191, 197). The Brahman then reaches enlightenment for he finally realizes who he truly is. Brahma or Atman alone is real. Therefore, every Hindu believes that he or she is Brahma in disguise. In other words, Brahma is trapped inside the outer imprisoning shell of mortal minds and personalities. Human beings are not themselves real. They simply imprison the soul of Brahma in the illusion of their own Karma (Renou 1962, 83–84, 88–89). For, by implication, in Hinduism the very idea of a real human self is the last Karmic illusion. That self must therefore be discarded.

We earlier learned that religiously consistent Hindus do good moral deeds not because human life is real, but in order to get rid of their Karma. However in the final analysis, the idea of good and evil, and of good and bad conduct are also forms of Karma that must be extinguished in order for Brahma to be free. So, good and evil are, by implication, no more real than human selves.

In one of the newer forms of Hinduism, there exists the belief that through loving Brahma, the reciprocating love of Brahma will fill the souls of men, and they will thus be freed of the wheel of death and life, and thus freed of the mortal shell in which their souls dwell (Renou 1962, 90–91, 43–44, 191–197). This sounds very encouraging indeed. In the final analysis, however, the love of which this idea speaks is without any real content. Brahma simply loves himself. What is really happening is that the soul in individual believers is Brahma himself in the form of Atman. The mortal self still has no share in this love. Indeed, we are the shell that must be eliminated for Atman to break free. Once again the finite human self with his or her emotions, personal will and finite personality is dissolved. The love of Brahma destroys everything that is not Brahma, not Atman. For remember Atman is Brahma and Brahma is Atman. They are one and the same. Brahma is often spoken of as loving, but in reality Brahma has nothing to love, since everything other than Brahma is really nothing, mere illusion, a temporary extension of Brahma that can only be called a real illusion. Human value and the human self is real, only in the sense that both are real illusions, real nothings if you will.

We have now looked at Hinduism focusing on Brahma and the doctrine of Karma. Now all that remains with respect to the skinning of this carrot is to examine the implications for the human self of one last central belief in Hinduism, the belief that everything is Brahma, or as the Hindus would say:

“That too is Brahma.” (Renou 1962, 83–89) Brahma is everything, because everything in the world is an extension of Brahma. Therefore Brahma, in this sense, is everything in the world. The world in motion is called Samsara. It is ever in flux, so it, like Karma, is unreal. It is Brahma’s extended Samsara form. Brahma un–extended is the eternal substance that the illusions of Samsara conceal. But in another sense, Samsara is in fact Brahma—hence the teaching, “this too is Brahma.” Whenever any part of Samsara is called Brahma, it always refers only to Brahma extended. Brahma un–extended is never Karma, or Samsara—only unchanging reality. So whenever we speak of Brahma extended he is so named to include the flux of all that is not real—all that is Samsara, the world of phenomena.

This extension leaves no basis for human value or even human values, because Brahma is everything. Brahma is a cancer germ and a massive killing plague, just as much as he is the scent of the sky or the kindness of the human heart. Neither is there any room whatever for the idea of human beings as precious; they simply exist, and even then, only as illusions. For only Brahma not extended is pure, unchanging substance. This makes all else flux and non–reality, so the particulars of individual human personality—man, woman, or child—are flux and non–reality as well.

Neither does it give any basis for us to be either better or worse than a bug or a flea. For Brahma extended is all things; all things are equally Brahma. Murder is Brahma as much as love. Therefore, there remains no such thing as real evil. One cannot call murder or slaughter evil, one must simply call it yet another extension of Brahma. We earlier mentioned the Hindu saying that sums up Brahma: “This too is Brahma.” Therefore, by implication, there remains no basis for establishing either equal human worth or any basis whatever for either justice or injustice. For Brahma is the sum total of injustice just as much as Brahma is the sum total of justice.

We have now skinned the first carrot and we have seen that where Karma and Brahma are concerned, there is nothing in Hinduism to support the idea that all human beings are equally precious, let alone more precious than anything else on this earth. Brahma is often spoken of as loving, but Brahma really has nothing to love except himself since everything other than Brahma is illusion and indeed the very obstacle preventing Brahma’s own freedom, his own self recognition. Human value and the human self is real, only in the sense that both are real illusions, real nothings as we earlier noted.

### ***The Second Carrot: Theravada Buddhism***

Now it is time to skin the next carrot, Theravada Buddhism. There are other forms of Buddhism, but we shall focus in on Theravada, the earliest form, and only with respect to its teaching regarding God and the human self. Theravada Buddhism teaches that what is real is the unity of all specific things, and the harmony of all things. It teaches that human nature, apart from the ego, first has

the impulse to do good (Gard 1962, 114, 116, 120–122).

For example, if someone in distress asks for our help, our first natural feeling is the desire or the impulse to help. Then the selfish human ego kicks in, and we decide not to help due to it not benefiting us personally. So, Theravada Buddhism teaches, if we could just get rid of the human ego and the idea of a God, we would instinctively do the natural and therefore the good. So in Buddhism, it is necessary to divest ourselves of every desire in the ego (Gard 1962). For the human ego and its desires create the idea of a self, and the idea of a self leads to illusions about the self that create desires of selfishness in us (Gard 1962).

The result is that human beings and their desires are mere nothings, so much Karma. It therefore becomes impossible to talk of every human self and every human being as equally precious and loved by God. So for different reasons, the human self is utterly demolished and seen as the chief obstacle to bliss and harmony. In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, the human self is illusion, Karma. The Buddhist who escapes from the belief in a human self, with its accompanying desires has removed a major obstacle to achieving Nirvana, the Buddhist perception of eternal bliss. For in Theravada Buddhism, it is believed that the belief in a permanent human self and the belief in a personal God perpetuates Samsara, the wheel of life and death. So the very goal of Theravada Buddhism is to free the believer from the illusion of human identity and worth (Gard 1962).

We have now skinned yet another carrot and it is clear that Theravada Buddhism seen at its core, both in terms of what it means by moral actions and by human nature, leaves no room whatever for the idea of human worth. For the Theravada Buddhist, the illusion of human worth is the supreme and final illusion that must be demolished in order to experience the bliss of Nirvana, the end of all desires, the very cessation of consciousness and in particular consciousness of the self.

### ***The Third Carrot: The Universe as Divine***

The third carrot to skin is an idea fairly common in various forms of nature worship and much of eastern thought. It is the idea that all nature is divine (Gard 1962). As mentioned earlier, it is also the core doctrine of the United Nations Global education program instituted by Robert Muller the one time Under Secretary of the United Nations (Kjos 1973). It is really very similar to the doctrine of Hinduism which teaches that Brahma is all things. It implies pretty much the same things. It trumpets the belief that “All is one, All is God” or that the earth and universe is divine. Following this premise, it is a religious persuasion that never allows for human beings to be more precious than other life forms. The logical implications are horrific. Since every action, motion, and emotion is divine, the mind of a mass murderer, or a cancerous cell is just as precious as us.

The same logic applies to any sexual act. Child abuse is as divine as the love of a father and

mother for their children. For the underlying doctrine is that all is one, all is divine, whether animate or inanimate. There is therefore no way to support the idea that animate things such as children are of any more value than a rock or stone.

Therefore by implication, human beings should be treated with the same regard we have for rocks or stones. Under this model, there is no basis for different levels of value in reality. Disease and pestilence can never be viewed as of less value than children who are free of sickness and disease. Of course, what often happens, whenever its adherents speak of a reality that is all divine is that some things somehow get to be a little more divine than other things. Therefore, in Hinduism, we see that cows are extremely sacred. Therefore it is not uncommon for a cow to be well fed, while children perish of starvation (Renou 1962, 18). If this worldview is lived out consistently, then nothing can ever be valued beyond anything else. There remains no basis in this belief system for human worth at all. It becomes an idea that is impossible to apply, since any teaching establishing real human worth always requires that one thing in creation is of more worth than something else. If everything is of equal worth, yet another problem arises, for there is then no practical way to ever do anything more worthwhile since everything is equally worthwhile, whether it is sloth, mass murder, or mass cruelty.

### ***The Fourth Carrot Religious Humanism (Secular Humanism)***

We now have one more carrot to scrape. This particular carrot has a skin chock full of mixtures of Christian ideas. Indeed the very success of this particular carrot is precisely its outer skin. So what we will endeavor to do is scrape that skin and get down to the real brass tacks of what Religious Humanism or Secular Humanism really says about humanity. In the world in which we live, it is arguably the most powerful and influential belief system. But I have already suggested, we will ultimately see that its real and continued success depends on the fact that few people ever think to scrape the carrot and see its inner core.

There are certain forms of Religious humanism that see life as a kind of evolving higher consciousness, not too dissimilar from Hinduism. We shall however, discuss this form afterwards. Predominantly though, Religious Humanists see the origins of all life in evolutionary naturalism alone. Typically, they claims that the universe evolved by chance and that laws themselves were originally simply there, or else products of chance (*Humanist Manifesto 1*, 19:33, 11). It therefore teaches that there is nothing more than a physical universe, and that there is no real purpose to human life. We are therefore free, it declares, to form our own purpose for life.

Here the human self is a mere product of one's environment. This self may have certain innate biological impulses that can be mistaken for a true inner self, but all this is no more than an illusion. It

says that, in fact, we are no more than a bundle of impulses derived from the external world. The idea of will and freedom are merely mistaken perceptions in which we indulge. In reality, it argues, everything is determined by previous causes in our environment (Dewey 1926, 72–73).

This conclusion led John Dewey, the father of modern education and one of the prime evangelists of Religious Humanism, to declare in his work, *Democracy and Education*, that there really is no such thing as a human will, human choice, or human personality. We are, according to him, no more than stimulus response mechanisms with certain motor skills and behaviors (Dewey 1926, 35).

It is therefore very ironic that a statement found in the second version of the *Humanist Manifesto* asserts that “human life is precious.” (Dewey 1926, 72–75) Here we see an example of the reason for the original and continuing success of Religious Humanism in general. It is only successful because it continually rides in a piggy-back fashion on the Christian teaching that all human beings are precious. However, as I have shown, once the carrot is skinned, Religious Humanism of this naturalistic evolutionary type has no basis for even the existence of a human self. As we observed, it is, under this belief system, no more than a bundle of stimulus responses. No ground exists whatsoever for the idea that all human beings are of equal value and worth. For according to religious humanism there exists no personal creator, let alone one that loves us equally.

We shall now discuss the variety of Religious Humanism, or Secular Humanism, if you prefer, which teaches that reality is under the control of an evolving consciousness that is seeking to recognize itself in history (Kjos 1973, 58–59; Hegel, 1967). Under this higher consciousness model, human life itself is seen merely as an aid to this higher consciousness coming to recognize itself through history (Hegel 1967, 128–129). This is why we often hear about the doctrine of new paradigms, or of an evolving new consciousness. Utilizing this higher conscious notion, Hegel the father of Modern Relativism taught that the only purpose of human life is to assist this evolution of consciousness. Human life itself has no value unless it contributes to the self-understanding of this higher consciousness. Once human beings die, they have done their part and that is the end (Hegel 1967, 204–206).

Once the higher consciousness recognizes itself, all other perceptions of itself are seen in themselves, to be fragmented illusions. Once again normal human beings end up as nothing more than the transitory perceptions of the higher consciousness. Major proponents of this model include Hegel and Karl Marx and surprising enough, John Dewey. It was also the reason for the notions of racial consciousness that motivated the Nazis under Hitler (Curtis 1981, 251).

As I have said from the outset, the Bible sets before us a pattern that is too deep and wonderful for human understanding to ever conceive unaided by God himself. Under the Religious Humanist

model individual human life has no worth beyond the grave, and no basis for worth before the grave. Indeed, we cannot even speak of a true human self that is really a John Smith, or Nancy Brown. We are no more than processes or functions, mere products of nature with no way to be viewed as having any lesser or greater value than anything else in nature. The irony is that many Religious Humanists never tire of fighting oppression and standing up for the rights of men and women. Nevertheless, so long as they insist on embracing the doctrines we have just discussed, they are inconsistent with their real beliefs. Religious Humanists are usually so heavily influenced by the Biblical View of man that they sound like Christians. They talk about loving all children, and being sensitive to human beings, as if there was nothing more important in all the world than human identity. But when they start living consistently with their own true belief system, they are capable of near infinite disregard and contempt for human life. At this stage they view human life as no more than a process or convention that may someday be replaced by higher life forms such as androids or artificial intelligence

Human life can then be looked at as an evolutionary phase that will one day be replaced by a superior species. In Hitler's attempt to create a super race, we see a prime example of the horror that results when Religious Humanists scrape their own carrot and live out the pure, naked, and unadulterated horror that attaches to their worldview. In essence, it implies the utter demolition of human value and worth, and a sacrifice of that human worth on the altar of process, function, and dehumanization.

We have now scraped all four carrots clean and have seen that in every case the thing that *gets the shaft*, to coin a common expression, is human worth and value. This is such a far cry from the Biblical view that all human beings are made in the image of God and are, therefore, incredibly precious. We have seen in the four religions explored the normative result of all such religions of this sort. Human worth is always lost

We shall now treat of some human thinkers and religions that move closer towards sustaining the idea of universal human worth, while still falling far short of the Judeo Christian view. We will therefore start with an ancient people—the early Greeks. Without any direct word from God, in some respects, they came closer than most to seeing human life as precious, at least the lives of their fellow Greeks.

### ***God and the Greeks***

With the coming of Plato and Aristotle, a truly unique perception of God came into being. God was seen as reason, and reason as pure—utterly devoid of evil. It was Socrates who may have been the first Greek to advance this understanding (Plato 1965, 1–3, 48). Plato, his student, wrote varied works articulating this God of reason. Perhaps Plato's clearest and most articulate statement

concerning this God is found in his work entitled *The Timaeus* (Plato 1965, 39–40). But according to this work the God of Plato, whatever else is said about him, is not able to fashion the world of shadow (which is our home world) without making a bargain with matter. Matter, by its nature, has celestial motions that are pure and incorruptible, but those to which human beings are exposed are motions that are both good and evil.

*The Timaeus* provides a way to contemplate a divine Craftsman because even in the shadow world there is a measure of form and beauty that allows human beings to contemplate the divine and escape the shadow world of matter and motion (Plato 1965, 46–50, 59–60).

There is also a highly ethical dimension in which failure to do the right thing causes the soul that dies to be reborn as a creature of lower or higher value. Indeed, *The Timaeus* reports that some men might even be so deeply punished as to return in their next life time as women. Here we see that Plato fails, unlike the Christian worldview, to give equal worth to woman. *The Timaeus* also suggests that the gods appointed by the divine Craftsman will watch over us, judge us and even decide what kind of creature we will become in our new life (Plato 1965, 62–66).

But despite many strengths, *The Timaeus* and Plato himself possess one very great weakness concerning the value of human beings: the idea that reason, located in the head, is the divine part of man (Plato 1965, 97–100). The rest of man contains emotions that, under the control of reason, can be kept in proper bounds, but even then these emotions are in no way divine. When the mortal dies, the human being with all its emotions also dies; only the soul escapes (Plato 1965, 120–124).

Since it is composed of pure reason, the soul is like the divine Craftsman. So, according to Plato, there is a dualism established between human emotion and reason. Love can never involve an emotional component. Love can only be pure reason. Consequently, there is a dichotomy between love and the emotions that in our day we understand to be a part of any true love and not a dichotomy in any sense. So too, all the tears of humanity are regarded as weakness. All the emotions that stir the heart to express warmth and tenderness are, in themselves, forms of matter in motion that must eventually be dissolved. This is so the immortal reasoning soul can eventually escape the body and its emotions.

Therefore the true human self, with all its feelings and emotions, has no hope of being united with the gods. While Plato made some wonderful advances, including the allowance for a kind of contemplative and ethical relationship with the divine craftsman, there is nothing in Plato that can even remotely compare with the incredible teaching that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son for the whole person—feelings and all.

In the Greek understanding of God, there is no suggestion that all humanity is of equal value, or that the whole person is made in the image of God. Rather, the only part of man that resembles God is

pure reason. The God of Plato is repelled by human emotion, whenever it is not under the control of reason. It leaves no place for the value of the feelings we all experience every day of our lives, and that we believe to be the very ground for the way we reason and believe. Indeed, contrary to Plato's view, it is our Human emotions that trigger the conscience. It is, in reality, human emotions of compassion and empathy that are often the very thing that arrests the dangerous excesses to which impersonal reason is easily led, whether we consider its tendency towards depersonalization the annihilation of the self, or the dismissal of God. There is unfortunately the idea in Plato that a human emotion is always evil outside the rule of reason. Herein lies the problem; this means that feelings of love, affection, and tenderness, are in and of themselves evil. There is no place for a recognition of good and evil emotions. This mistake of Plato's resembles the one made by Buddha who insisted that desire itself is the problem. Like Buddha, Plato, does not allow for a distinction between good and evil desires or emotions.

Neither is there any suggestion from Plato that this pure divine Craftsman enters into a personal relationship with humanity. Instead, the Divine figure distances himself from humanity and leaves their upbringing in the hands of the gods he created: gods who live in the part of the shadow world that Plato regarded as pure, the world of the stars and the planets (Plato 1965, 58–59, 96–100).

There is therefore, no idea in Plato of a God who weeps for humanity, and cries out as Jesus Christ did, he who was fully God and fully man: "Oh Jerusalem, how I would have gathered you under my wings like a Hen gathers her Chicks, but you would not." Nor is there anything to resemble the words that Jesus uttered on the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34). Also, with Plato there is no suggestion that all humanity is precious before God. It is also clear from Plato's republic that, in his perception, there are inferior and superior human beings. Those superior beings are given the higher station in life, while others are created by the divine Craftsman to serve as slaves. Indeed, where Plato is concerned, justice meant precisely that each kind of creature must keep his station in life. This meant that slaves ever remain slaves. For this to change would have been to Plato, a great transgression, and a great injustice.

Much more could be discussed, but enough has been said to show that even in Plato, we are faced with a God far inferior to that of the eternal Holy God of the Bible. Plato's God shows favoritism in the extreme, and is not capable of creating the world of men without making a bargain with matter. Neither is this Divine Craftsman able to bring an end to evil, or create a world that is truly good and devoid of evil. With Plato, it would seem utterly impossible for unaided reason to perceive of a God who thinks and feels, and yet, is utterly infinite holy and pure. Plato ends up with a God who can reason and calculate and emphasize moral conduct, but who is too pure for emotions and feelings, thereby, leaving no place in his God for warmth and tenderness.

One can neither approach such a God for comfort, nor cry out with prayers of anguish. But perhaps among the Greeks, there was one exception, one idea of God that could provide these things. For Socrates spoke of one who guided him (Warmington and Rouse 1956). Even so, he never suggested that this guide was the product of unaided human reason. Perhaps Socrates understood what his student Plato never could. Yet, Plato himself had an incredibly exceptional student, one whose influence over the course of history rivals that of Plato himself. His name was Aristotle. Perhaps in Aristotle we may see a view of God and humanity higher than that in Plato. Did not Aristotle say that all things are moved towards the unmoved mover by love (Bambrough 1963, 122–127)?

Aristotle's *unmoved mover* sounds, for all the world, like a God of great compassion. Does it not sound very profound to speak of a God who moves all things by his love? The problem is that love from God under this model, is devoid of any real content. For the God of Aristotle performs all things that happen in the world, whether or not we say the things are moved by love. That is where the problem lies; for this unmoved mover of Aristotle must then be directly responsible for every evil ever committed as well as every good. We are thus left with a kind of schizophrenic God who must be viewed as a perpetrator of evil as well as good. He is as much an oppressor as a liberator, and as much a mass murderer as a giver of life, for this God is responsible for every action in the universe. Regarding holiness and purity, Aristotle's unmoved mover is thus inferior to Plato's divine craftsman. But he is infinitely inferior to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who became a man and who died for us, and in whom there is no darkness at all (First John 1:5).

This God of Israel never forces anyone to commit evil, neither does he incite to evil. Nevertheless, he will use evil men and evil forces and the choices they make to accomplish his will. That will is to bless all those who become his children in the midst of time and history. Those who remain in the realm of evil do so by their own choice, and are called *Vessels of Wrath* (Second Kings 24; Exodus 7–15). If the evil man chooses to continue in his evil, God will still use that evil man to accomplish his purposes.

If evil people, or nations, do not repent and embrace their creator and the love he offers, they will be bound to evil in this life, and come under the judgment of God. When the final judgment comes with the return of Christ, evil will be powerless to further affect those in the realm of light, who are under the love and protection of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Revelation 21). The reason for this is because evil will come to an end.

There is really no essential difference in the outcome of the doctrine of the soul, as held by Plato, Aristotle, or Hinduism. All of these teach that the human self with its emotions, feelings, and finite personality is ever the enemy of the soul, and the soul itself is utterly alien and qualitatively different from, the actual human self or selves.

But to Jesus Christ, the mortal human self is precious. The human soul is not separate from the human being. It is, in fact, the human being himself—with all his strengths and weaknesses—who is loved by God. Each finite human being God created is precious, so much so, “that he gave his only Son.” (John 3:16) Neither Plato nor Aristotle leaves any lasting place for finite human beings with their heart, emotions and personality.

For Plato, all that finally escapes the shell of the body is pure reason, and never the finite human self with all its emotions. In Hinduism, Brahma alone survives; not mortals. Likewise, in Greek or Hindu thought, the mortal soul never survives. It is instead the enemy shell that imprisons the soul, Neither Plato, Aristotle or Hinduism offer any hope for mortal finite selves. Contrary to this, the Judeo Christian faith teaches that God loves human selves and sent his son to die for them in order to offer them a way out of bondage and the final judgment that will bring an end to all the evils that now beset this world and this universe (Hebrews 11).

### ***Islam and Allah***

This discussion will be unusually short due to the fact that there is really nothing in Islam that can claim originality with respect to whatever ranges of the Koran really put an equal value on human life. Certainly, Allah is said at times to be loving, but he, nevertheless, lacks the intimacy of Jesus the God Man, who cries out within the hearts of those who have come to him, that we are his children (Romans 8:12–16).

Islam does regard Jesus as a prophet, and they do admit that much of the Koran resembles the Old Testament where Abraham is concerned. With respect to this, in the Koran the blessings of God fall not on Isaac (representing the Jews) but on Ishmael (representing the Arabs).

Islamic Scholars will of course argue that the Judeo Christian scriptures contain errors, whereas the Koran is pure and perfect. But this in no way can deflect us from the fact that Islam contains teaching about the love of God already long present in the Hebrew scriptures at least as far back as four hundred BC and likely as far back or further back than a thousand BC before the birth of Islam. Even if only the New Testament teachings were considered, we are still looking at a faith five hundred years older than Islam.

### ***Mazdaism in the Ancient World***

Now we shall address a religion in its ancient form which like Judaism and Islam was also positioned to be greatly influenced by the Judeo Christian tradition. That religion was called Mazdaism. It was the religion of Ancient Persia, and for a considerable period of time, Jewish believers were under the rule of Persia. Indeed, the Bible records that Cyrus the King of Persia was

chosen by God as his servant. It was Cyrus who overthrew the Babylonian Kingdom. Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem, and its temple, and then exiled most of the people of Israel. According to the Hebrew Bible God gave Cyrus the power to conquer Babylon and free the Jews from that nation (Ezra 1–6; Isaiah 44:28; Daniel 1:21, 6:28, 10:1). From that time on, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, Cyrus becomes a conscious servant of Yahweh the God of Israel.

Therefore, it is no great surprise to discover that some of the major teachings regarding deity in Mazdaism resemble, in significant ways, the Judeo Christian God. The name of the two prime Persian gods are Ahura Mazda, the good god and Ohriman, the evil god. Ahura Mazda is said to be holy, utterly devoid of evil and loves all human beings. Further, this god respects the absolute necessity of choice, even the right to choose his primary foe, the god of darkness, Ohriman, whose power is equal to his own. Despite the fact that in Mazdaism we are dealing with polytheism, and not Monotheism, the Counterpart god to Ahura Mazda must work through individual choice (Russell 1988, 19–23). He must tempt humanity to choose the evil. On the other hand, this evil god can bring into history great evils and afflictions to oppress the faithful followers of Ahura Mazda (Russell 1988, 19–23).

Both gods seem able to rally other gods to their cause. Yet the various gods of Mazdaism are also worshipped in their own right, and often operate without regard to human wishes or the wishes of either Ahura Mazda or his counterpart (Buber 1952, 73–74, 237). At times, these other gods are petitioned by means of sacrifices; as mortals seek their favor and blessings, Polytheism appears to have preceded Mazdaism and then been reconciled to it as much as possible.

Yet, in Mazdaism, we do have a god that affirms the value of human beings, and a God who deeply loves all humanity (Russell 1988, 19–23). But Ahura Mazda is not omnipotent, and the evil God is just as strong. This dualism seems to have endured until fairly recent times. Jeffrey Russell's work, *Prince of Darkness*, maintains that the idea of Ahura Mazda finally overcomes his evil counterpart. This, however, only finds expression in the Pahlavi writings in the third century AD (Russell 1988, 19–23). If so, the fact that it took so long reveals how difficult it was to put to rest the idea that both gods were equal in power, that the evil principle was just as strong as the good.

So long as Mazdaism involves a doctrine that evil is just as strong as the good, then human beings are at one and the same time precious and not precious at all, at least by implication. For if the good God is not any stronger than the evil, his claim that humanity is precious has no more power or force than the claim that humanity is worth nothing and should be destroyed. For the Christian, there is no contest. God is infinitely stronger than Satan and he ascribed worth to human beings out of his own eternal good pleasure and will. Nothing Satan says or does can change that. Satan is simply an evil being who lives in illusion with respect to his view of human beings, all of whom he wishes to control and destroy.

Nevertheless, to be fair, Mazdaism, presents a view that has many similarities with the Judeo Christian view with respect to the mortal human self and his value. Its high regard for human choice is equally impressive and directly fused to the value that human life has for Ahura Mazda. In this regard, I should again draw attention to the influence of the Judeo Christian God on Cyrus, and his people Israel. This would account for Masdaim's similarities with the Judeo-Christian tradition with respect to the high value it sets on human life. Furthermore, the Hebrew Bible records that it was the Persian monarchs who helped Nehemiah and Ezra to return to Israel and rebuild the Jewish temple that had earlier been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1:3–6; Isaiah 44:28, 45:1, 45:13; Daniel 1:21). It may well be that Mazdaism was greatly influenced by its Hebrew captors, just as Rome was greatly influenced by its Greek ones.

The great weakness in Mazdaism, however, is still its mixture with Polytheism. The great handicap of Ahura Mazda is that he does not have sufficient power to overcome his nemesis, the god of evil. On the other hand, In the Judeo Christian tradition, God would be able, if he so willed, to bring an immediate end to Satan. In the Hebrew Bible, Satan is always *before God* as a greatly inferior being who is no God at all (Job:1:2; Zechariah 3:2). Even in the Pahlavi sources, Ahura Mazda is not perceived as the creator of all things. Yet Ahura's freedom from evil remains the perception, both in the writings of BC, and later Pahlavi Books of the third century AD.

The emphasis on free choice—tied to a high regard for all human beings—is best explained as a product of Jewish influence on Persian thought before, and during the exile. Interestingly enough, the later Pahlavi Books of the Common Era appear to owe much to the Christian Worldview. Centuries before the Pahlavi Books, early Christians such as Paul and Peter had taught that God is utterly supreme. Satan is merely one of God's creations gone bad, who has temporary jurisdiction. This might explain why the later Pahlavi writings were finally able to attribute to Ahura Mazda—a final triumph over evil. It is doubtful indeed that, apart from Christian influence, later Mazdaism would have ever arrived at the idea of good ultimately triumphing over evil. Even in the Pahlavi books, Ahura Mazda is never viewed as the creator of Ahriman, only as his conqueror after a long and difficult struggle. He is not even viewed as far stronger, only as barely strong enough to finally win the victory over Ahriman, his living antithesis.

In the New Testament it is made clear that Satan is only allowed to remain for a time. This is due to God's plan of redemption and the future glory he has prepared for all his people for all eternity (Tsanof 1931, 28–29). What is also lacking in Mazdaism is a history of God dealing with humanity, or establishing covenants that would eventually lead to a relationship so deep, that the creator of all things would come to indwell humanity and make of all his faithful ones a Holy Temple. But I will have much more to say in the pages to come about this covenant making God.

This kind of deep intimacy with God finds its fullest and clearest expression in the New Testament, but is nevertheless tasted, promised and foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament (See Hebrews). As Jesus said, the entire Old Testament testifies to his coming and his finished work on the cross (John 5:39–40).

In Mazdaism, we have, at best, a fragmented understanding or foreshadowing of the God of Israel who is the only true God, and is present and active all through human history. He is making a people for himself to be a part of his family for all eternity, and accomplishing this through the cross, the deepest expression of how much we are loved by him. He loves us so much that he died for us on an actual cross to bring us into a wondrously intimate relation with him, one grounded in mercy and grace. Mazdaism has nothing to equal this.

In the Judeo Christian tradition, this triumph over evil is heavily promised and foreshadowed in the Old Testament, and accomplished in the cross. Here Christ fully triumphs over Satan and over death, and all that remains in history is the time God allows for all His people to come to him. Satan and collective human evil have already lost, because Christ overcame the power of death, which was Satan's prime power against humanity.

Those who are in Christ already have eternal life. They simply wait for the shedding of their present physical bodies at death, and the receiving of their eternal resurrection bodies that comes after the death of these mortal bodies. But in the new resurrection body the same mortal self is present, not some disembodied soul having nothing to do with the actual person whom God knew in history. Rather, the actual person is part and parcel of this new resurrection body, but no longer plagued by evil inclinations, or by a war within himself that is between his evil tendencies and his new nature in Christ (First Corinthians 15).

Despite Mazdaism's shortcomings, it must be acknowledged that it does contain, at least the idea that I have argued is too deep for human understanding to reach unaided: the perception of a God who loves all human beings, and to whom all human beings are truly precious. So, in this way, Mazdaism does have teachings that goes against the grain of typical religion which teach us that the human mortal self is no more than a temporary entity or illusion destined for extinction. In light of Mazdaism's fragmented understanding of God, and its inability to extricate itself totally from Polytheism, it is far more likely that it was Judeo Christian thought that affected Mazdaism rather than the reverse. This seems particularly evident, when one considers the fact, that outside of Mazdaism, Judaism, and Islam, no other religion shares the Judeo Christian view of the human self as precious to God. However, none of the three religions claim that their conclusions regarding the value of human life were arrived at unaided by the divine, quite the contrary.

The suggestion that Mazdaism was influenced by Israel finds its strongest evidence in Cyrus the

Persian, conqueror of Babylon. It was, according to the Old Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who gave Cyrus the Victory. Indeed the Old Testament writings refer to him as the servant of God. Indeed, Cyrus himself is recorded as saying that God has given to him the responsibility to watch over the welfare of Israel (Ezra 1:1–3).

One thing seems certain. Long before Israel ever became captive to either Babylon or Persia, the prophets and other writers of the Hebrew Bible spoke of a day to come when all humanity, all nations, will be united under one God and Savior, one who would be “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

Perhaps, though unknown or only faintly understood by his prophets, God nevertheless loved both Jew and Gentile. Therefore he died for both so that we could become his adopted sons, and daughters, and he could welcome us into his eternal family. This eternal family, when the Savior returns, will never again know tears or sorrow. This God, this savior, will love us then, even as he does now, so much so that he will wipe away all tears (Revelation 21).

## ***Conclusion***

Let the reader recall that the thesis of this chapter is that when we hear of a God who says that we are made in his image, and that each of us are precious to him, we are face to face with a transcendent idea that goes against the grain of natural religious patterns which time and again devalue the human being. We have now discussed the religion of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Islam and Mazdaism. We chose them because they contain certain teachings that at least approximate an approachable God who loves human beings. Mazdaism surpasses Plato, because Ahura Mazda is portrayed as loving human beings. He is not like Plato’s divine craftsman who has to make deals with matter and essentially negates that part of the human self that has feelings and emotions. However, Ahura Mazda’s love for humanity is nevertheless fragmented and hindered by polytheism and the limitations of Ahura Mazda himself. Besides this, it shows evidence of being heavily influenced by Judaism for the reasons early noted.

The God of Aristotle is a composite of good and evil and is as ready to annihilate humanity as to preserve it, for the unmoved mover of Aristotle moves all things by love. There is no hint in such a God that every human being is loved and precious. As for Islam, in most persuasions Allah wills all things. This puts a major Islamic doctrine in the same category as Aristotle’s unmoved mover. Socrates, on the other hand talks about being guided by a Spirit. Unfortunately, beyond that we know little or nothing of Socrates’s view of God or of humanity at large. What we do know of Socrates we know only through Plato.

Yet, None of these other religions, not even Mazdaism speak of the truly transcendent idea of a

God in whose image we are made, or of a God who loved us so much he died for us and adopts us into his family as sons and daughters Neither do they speak of a God who so loved human beings that he became one of us, lived among us, healed the sick, raised the dead, and died for each and every one of us.