MY PROBLEM WITH THE BIBLE

It took me more than 21 years of reflection, plus another twenty one days of a sabbatical to produce this paper. There is a lot of thinking, prayer, meditation, and research that went into it. I have thoroughly researched what I have said here. This paper; however remains a human construct with flaws, like any other human construct. I apologize and deeply regret the pain that the contents of this paper will cause some people. I pray that no religious zealot will go for a sledgehammer over what I have to say here. I pray no one will reject, ostracize, persecute, and treat me badly for being my authentic self here. What you are about to read here is truth as I have now embraced it. Please do not persecute me for what I perceive to be truth. I have, however, come to terms and accepted as part of my new quest; that I will be criticized, misunderstood, misquoted, and even verbally abused by the close-minded, fearful defenders of the God of yesterday. I also now know that, if persecution does not come, I will not have the strength for the road ahead. I write as a postmodern mystic. Jesus was a Jewish mystic. I request that if my utterances and revolutionary actions are different from what Jesus did to the Jewish Religion of his time, please, help me somebody! If what I am saying and doing, differs from what was said and done by the Jewish mystic, 2000 years ago, help me somebody! Show me where my actions and sayings differ from the actions of a Revolutionary Jewish mystic I follow. I promise to repent! I do not say this lightly! I know this is a very tricky request; having studied the biography of this Jewish Revolutionary. I am inspired by this Revolutionary! I was born and raised in the Evangelical Church all my life. My early childhood was shaped by a scrupulously religious Evangelical upbringing. Both my Mother and Father’s parents were devout Evangelical preachers. They both came from Evangelical backgrounds. I was not raised by my biological parents but by the devout Evangelical Grandparents on my Father’s side. They injected me with an Evangelical awareness in my childhood. My ship and the way of viewing the world took off under this banner. I had a “born again” experience (I now call it awakening and awareness) at the age of 17, the year was 1979. The Evangelical experience with its accompanying biblical explanation was a real brain-soother for me. The “born again” phenomenon is a strictly Evangelical experience that came with the birth of the Evangelical movement in the Great Awakening that began in 1710, in Europe. The “born again” window was a truly edifying window of my evolutionary upbringing. I did not know there were other windows of viewing Ultimate Reality. I never knew that my spiritual journey would unfold this way. I didn’t even anticipate living today.

ME AND THE BIBLE

I LOVE THE BIBLE. I love the Bible as a religious and historical book; I love it as a human invention. I respect and inspect the Bible as a human invention. I love my cars, aeroplanes, and cruise ships; human inventions that give me meaning. I spend my life in cars, aeroplanes, cruise ships, and my Bible. I also love the internet, books, my blackberry, etc. The Bible’s mythical stories have mediated meaning for millions of people living in a vast and uncertain world. The myths in the Bible remain the Christian’s trustworthy guide to faith and practice. I do not trust the Bible all the time though. I do not believe that God ever intended that the Bible be a trustworthy guide to physics, calculus, dynamics, oceanography, ancestral DNA, anaesthesiology, biology, geology, astronomy, quantum physics, etc. We no longer see the world with spectacles borrowed from the Bible, we actually read the Bible with spectacles borrowed from science. The title of my article is self-explaining. I know understand that it is not that self-explaining though. Some people, reading this, may wonder why I have a problem with the Bible since they do not have a problem with the Bible. After all is said and
done, I will still have a LOVE/HATE relationship with the Bible. I love the Bible for the prose, poetry, ancient wisdom (what scholars have referred to as Sophia – Christ), stories, and stories behind the story of Sophia. I now understand that all holy writings are based on the wisdom of Sophia - Christ (logos). I hate the politics, propaganda, human biases, and personal agendas in the Bible. Like all other holy books, it remains a wisdom book with flaws. In the name of the “inerrant and inspired Bible”, we have over the centuries, fought wars, tortured people and whole towns, excommunicated one another, hated one another, competed against each other, and banished one another to hell for eternity. There is no doubt that the Bible is a book that is misogynist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, and we have used it to justify all sorts of horrendous acts of suppression over the ages. I don’t impose my Bible views on anyone. I do not want you to believe what I believe about the Bible. Believe your own Revelation, if it makes life worthwhile and fulfilling.

It is my opinion that we have confused “the word of God” with human words or textual words in a book. If “the Word was in the beginning” (John 1:1) then the WORD is bigger than human words or textual words. THE WORD precedes all words by 15 billion years, at least! My teacher and 14th century mystic, Meister Eckhart said, “every creature is a word of God and a book about God.” this carries us far beyond the overly anthropocentric idea of the Bible alone as the “word of God”. I go to book shops (secular and religious), magazines, libraries, radio talk shows, etc to find “the word of God”. Many Christians are not aware that the notion of ‘the Bible alone’ (sola scripture) being the “word of God” emerged with the printing press after the Reformation. We today find the word of God in science. We go to Psychologists, even ‘secular’ ones, to discover the “word of God” that saves our marriages. The science inspired events that occurred after the Reformation, have changed our uninformed, unquestioning, and ignorant approach to reading the Bible. My own mystical experiences over the past three years have also made me wary of beliefs that emerge from mystical encounters. Look at the chaos caused by the gory revelation of John (or the one who says He is John), in the book of Revelation. There was once a time when “everyone” accepted the Bible as the word of God; we are now living at a time when “everyone” is questioning the Bible as the word of God. There was a time when it was a cardinal sin to question the Bible; it is now no longer a sin to question the Bible. You, reader, may not be the “everyone” mentioned here. I’m hopeful that as you read this article, you will find it engaging and thought provoking, even if you do not necessarily agree with it. Anyone who claims that a Religious book is perfect is making a statement of faith, not a statement of fact. The Bible, like all literature, is the work of religious genius produced by human hands, and has the imprints of those human hands upon it. I used to believe the Bible was perfect until I studied it. I’m certain that anyone who engages in the detailed textual studies of the Bible, exactly like I have done, will come to the same conclusions that I have arrived at. Ultimate truth can never be captured in propositional statements at any point in human history: not in superstitious holy books, not in creeds, not in doctrines, and not in statements of beliefs. This has compromised Christianity so much! Let me start on a positive note.

THE VALUE OF THE BIBLE

In addition to reading the Bible devotionally, there is value in reading it historically. A historical reading of the Bible can show many of its shortcomings – discrepancies, contradictions, faulty claims, impossible statements, and harmful ideologies. A historical reading of the Bible can also open up new horizons and new vistas in our understanding of the Bible. Even those who do not believe in the Bible can learn from it. The Bible is a book that should be read and studied, not just as a document of faith but also as a historical record of the thoughts, beliefs, experiences, activities, loves, hates, prejudices, and opinions of the people who
stand at the very foundation of our civilization. The Bible can help us think about the big questions of life – Who are we? Why we are here? What should we be doing? Where are we going? How will those coming after us live, etc? The Bible can warn us and inspire us by its examples. It can urge us to pursue truth, to fight oppression, to work for justice, to insist on peace. It can motivate us to live a life more fully while we can. It can encourage us to live more for others and not ourselves only. In this sense, the Bible is a very good book.

I have said all the above because I wanted my readers to understand the value and importance I put on the Bible. I have read the Bible all my life since I gained self-consciousness (more than forty years!). I read the Bible backwards and frontwards in my early Pastoral years. I studied it both constantly and deeply when still running a church. I have read it on differing levels at different stages of my life. I now read it as a scholar and critic. I have shaken my conception of the Bible as an “authority” and I read it from the point of entering into the experience of its writers. It then works as a “word of God” for me. It also then works as an inspired devotional book for me. It is my humble opinion that we need to use our intelligence to evaluate what we find to be true and untrue in the Bible. This is how we need to live our lives in general. Everything we hear and see we need to evaluate – whether the inspired writings of the Bible, Koran, Hindu holy writings, or the inspired writings of Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Dalai Lama, Buddha, Ghandi, or Muzi Cindi. Facts and sound judgement, not just beliefs, should drive our zeal. As the Buddha said it so well 2500 years ago:

“Believe nothing because a so-called wise person said it. Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held. Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books. Believe nothing just because it is said to be of divine origin. Believe nothing just because someone believes it. Believe only what you – yourself – test and judge to be true”.

Now that I have clarified myself, it is now time to raise very serious problems I have with the Bible:

**BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP**

The Bible was written by at least 150 different people, in dozens of different places at different times, many centuries apart, and for different reasons. The biblical authors were human too! They had likes, dislikes, opinions, views, prejudices, biases, perspectives, and so on, like the rest of us; and all these things affected how they saw the world and wrote the scriptures. This simple fact is widely ignored by Christians. The focus of my critique is the New Testament. It is an irony that Jewish people do not take the Old Testament literally but Christians take the New Testament literally, though the New Testament is mostly interpreted from the non-literal Old Testament. I did not know that what Jews, Catholics and Protestants call “the Bible” are different books. I did not know that this book I call “the Bible” has been changing from century to century, with various books being included and excluded depending on the theological climate of the time. There was no Bible in the second century CE (only the OT). The book of Revelation was only included in the fourth century. The books of 1st Clement and the Apocalypse of Peter were removed in the third century. The list goes on. My intensive study of the Bible has unearthed a self-contradictory mishmash of arcane rules and prescriptions belonging to a world that is no more. For example, the Gospels were not written by the disciples. They were written two to three generations after the death of Jesus in 33 CE. They were written 35 to 70 years after the death of Jesus. Mark was written in 70-72 CE, Mathew in 82–85 CE, Luke in 88-93 CE, and John in 95-100 CE. Mathew copied 90 percent of Mark into his gospel and Luke copied 50 percent of Mark. Gospels are human constructs interpreting the person and wisdom of Christ in human language.
They were written in a language that neither Jesus nor his disciples could speak or write, namely Greek. Paul’s genuine epistles were written between 51-64 CE. Paul’s forged epistles (1 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians) were written well after Paul’s death (around 65 CE), but were contemporaries with the Gospels. Pastoral epistles (1 & 11 Timothy, Titus) were written between 90-100 CE. The Epistles of John (I, II, III), and Revelation were also written between 95 CE and 105 CE. 1 & 11 Peter, James, and Jude were all written in the second century. There are, of course, hundreds of other books that did not make it into the canon when it was finalized in the fourth century. No one has the original manuscripts of any of the books of the New Testament, but only copies – over 5000 copies, just in the Greek language in which these books were originally written. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has revealed lots of textual mistakes in the Hebrew Bible that was used to interpret the New Testament. Some of the most familiar verses of the New Testament were not originally part of the text, but were added by scribes, after the Reformation, when the Bible went to English-speaking lands. The following are some of the verses (not bad verses anyway) that originally were not part of the New Testament (check the footnotes on your own Bible):

- **1 John 5:7** – There are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. (our popular Trinity proof-texting verse)

- **John 8:7** – Let the one who is without sin among you, be the first to cast a stone at her.

- **John 8:11** – Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.

- **Luke 22:44** – In his anguish Jesus began to pray more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.

- **Luke 22:20** – And in the same way after supper Jesus took the cup and said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

- **Mark 16:17** – These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons and they will speak with new tongues.

- **Mark 16:18** – And they will take up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any poison it will not harm them, and they will lay their hands on the sick and they will become well.

- **John 5:4** – For an angel of the Lord at certain times went into the pool and disturbed the waters; and whosoever was the first to step in when the water was disturbed was healed of whatever disease he had.

- **Luke 24:12** – But Peter rose up and ran to the tomb, and stooping down to look in, he saw linen clothes by themselves. And he went away to his own home, marvelling at what had happened.

- **Luke 24:51** – And when Jesus blessed them he departed from them and he was taken up to heaven.
The Jesus Seminar; a much disliked group of Biblical Professors from Universities and Seminars around the world (more than 500 of them), have, after six years of minutely reasoned debate concluded that Jesus said only 20 percent of the things attributed to him in the Gospels. The percentage decreases to 14% when non-canonical (more than 500 books) sayings of Jesus are included. You, reader can do your own research on the internet and make up your mind. There are thousands of papers (pro and anti) on the internet, on the findings of The Jesus Seminar (www.religioustolerance.org is one neutral source). Burn the midnight oil on them before you pass judgement. Evangelical Professors hysterically disagree with the findings of the Jesus Seminar Scholars. I like it when Professors wrestle over the Bible. Only time will tell who is right and who is wrong. After much burning of the midnight oil, I have made my stand – I agree with the Jesus Seminar!

THE BIBLE AS AN IDOL

For the majority of Christians, the only concept of God that can be known is the one defined by the “inerrant Bible”, as they understand the Bible. This is regardless of the fact that, the same Bible defines God as utterly unknown, unknowable and beyond reach by mere mortals. This God has suddenly become known and knowable because the same Bible says so. A literalized Bible parallels the idolatry of the Old Testament. We will have to acknowledge that all Bibles, creeds, doctrines, prayers, poems, and songs are just religious art created to allow us to speak of our God experience at an earlier point in our history. If we do not do this we end up having a Bible which is nothing but an idol we worship. How can finite human beings use a human language that is limited, finite, and altogether incapable of defining Ultimate Reality? God is TOO BIG to be contained in any holy book. The claim that finite human beings can fully define God is idolatry, if not outright blasphemy. All that we human beings can know of God is that we cannot know him / her / or it. What God is, surpasses all human understanding. God transcends the capability of human speech and is beyond every assertion and beyond every denial. Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa wrote, “God is incapable of being grasped by any term, or any idea, or any other device of our apprehension, remaining beyond the reach not only of the human but of all super-mundane intelligences, unthinkable, unutterable, above all expression in words”. The term ‘God’ falls short of that towards which it is supposed to point. The moment we use a ‘book’, any book, as a tool for pointing towards God, we are engaged in idol worship. The battles that have ensued over “truth” claims over the past two thousand years have shown us that, sometimes Christians can be anything but Christian. Someone said that Christianity would probably not have survived had it not become institutionalized and that it might not survive because it did become institutionalized. Institutions always subvert the truth to institutional needs. We used the “inerrant Bible” to develop irrational power claims like, “There is only one true Church” and “it is mine”, or “No one comes to the Father except through my Church or my faith tradition.” I’ve renounced all these beliefs. I remain a faith person though!

THE BIBLE AND PSYCHOLOGY (SCIENCE)

I define myself as a science loving religious person. One of the greatest frustrations in my life has been observing the anti-science fundamentalism amongst bible believing Christians. Psychologists are frowned upon by Evangelical Christianity. Anti-science fundamentalism leaves many Christians hypocritical, proud,
and blinded to scientific evidence. As a result, many Evangelical Christians find it very difficult to relate to big ideas about human nature found in psychological science. The insights of psychological science are too challenging for the majority of the people of faith. Many have tried to bridge the gap by bringing in people now referred as ‘Christian Psychologists’. I do not have family members in this discipline, but do have friends. I always counsel them to stay from religion. They are Psychologists period; not ‘Christian Psychologists’. How does a ‘Christian Psychologist’ counsel a Moslem and Christian couple intending to get married? Do they use the science of Psychology or the science of the “inspired, inerrant Bible”? There is just no way in which the science of Psychology and the science of the Bible can be married. Psychological (and other) science and biblical scholarship offer a surer path to God than the Bible. The late discovery of quantum science amazes even hardened scientists. The “word of God” is definitely with good Psychologists and, that is the “word of God” that will save a lot of Christian marriages from the tragedy of divorce. Christianity will still pay a huge price (through Christian divorces) as long as it rejects the “word of God” coming out of the mouths of good Psychologists, and instead opt for the “word of God” spoken before the advent of Psychological science. One of the leading Psychologists said that religious people judge science by nuclear warheads and pollutants; while scientific people judge faith by the vulgar caricatures of religious faith. I do not need an “infallible Bible” for my marital problems. I need a qualified clinical Psychologist. Read on; to understand why I say so.

**FORGERIES AND DISPUTED AUTHORSHIPS**

I was shocked to hear from scholars that, many of the books of the New Testament were not written by the people to whom they were attributed (Matthew and John amongst others) or by the people who claimed to be writing them (2 Peter, 1 Timothy). Most of these books appeared to have been written after the apostles themselves were long dead. 1 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians were written long after the death of Paul and forged in his name. The Gospels were written forty to seventy years after the death of Jesus. All of the writings were from oral history of conversations that kept going from forty to seventy years after Jesus died. There were no eye witnesses. It came as a shock for me, to discover that only eight out of twenty seven books are almost certain to have been written by the people traditionally thought to be their authors. This is after more than 350 (three hundred and fifty) years of debates, council after council, by early church fathers; after removing and adding books; after checking for forgeries an authentic apostolic authorship; going back to council after council; then removing and adding in a list of more than 500 scriptures. After all this effort – we end up with only eight out of twenty seven books, whose authorship cannot be disputed. Only eight! Even in the eight books, some chapters were later added or modified after the original apostle had died. For example, the Apostle Paul’s original letter to the Roman church (Romans 16) had women who were church organizers, deacons, and even apostles. We suddenly have the same Paul tell a different story in the forged letter called, 1st Timothy. A later scribe inserted words to Paul’s letter to the church (1 Corinthians 14:35-36), which claims that women should always be silent in church. After 350 years of arguments we ended up with the nonsensical gothic book of Revelation added to the canon, amongst other gore filled books.

Forgeries were rife during the writing of scriptures. Forgeries were so common that the author of the Book of Revelation threatened damnation to anyone who “adds to” or “takes away” words from the text.
(Revelation 22:19); regardless of the fact that his “Revelation” is just a piece of gothic nonsense. Some forgeries had good intentions while others had ulterior evil motives. There was rivalry and competition in the churches Paul founded. Later on (after Paul’s death) a scribe inserted chapters into one of Paul’s letter of 1 Corinthians, which now claimed Paul was now saying women should always be silent in church. What about the one who forged Paul’s whole letter of 1 Timothy; which insists that women remain silent, submissive, and pregnant (1 Timothy 2:11-15)? I was shocked (again!) when a popular theologian in our country corrected my assumptions about Paul. This was after I criticised Paul’s utterances in my previous book. This theologian said to me, “Muzi you are wrong to criticize Paul, these were not his utterances”. But the Bible says it was Paul! Women were disenfranchised for 1800 years in the name of Paul. Paul did not write this! Sorry Paul! THE BIBLE SAYS it was you who said these. I was shocked (again!) to discover that most theologians know these things. Why the silence? Are Pastors (who are theologians) afraid that people will lose their faith? I have attached a long list of contradictions at the end of this article. Before this, let me list the reasons why I see the Bible as a human book (with human genius, like art and poetry), constructed by human beings; why the Bible does not deserve the, “the Bible says” authority:

- There are flat-out mutually exclusive contradictions amongst the books of the New Testament. Sometimes these discrepancies can be reconciled if we work hard enough at them with our imagination. Some contradictions cannot, in my opinion, be reconciled, however hard we try. Jesus is born in Nazareth and Bethlehem (geography). Jesus dies on different days in Mark and John. Jesus is crucified before the Passover in John and after the Passover in Mark. The literal resurrection happened in Galilee and Jerusalem. Was Jesus in doubt and despair on the way to the cross (Mark) or calm and in control (Luke)? Did Jesus’ death provide atonement for sin (Mark and Paul) or not (Luke)? Did Jesus perform signs to prove who he was (John) or did he refuse to do so (Mathew)? Must Jesus’ followers keep the law if they are to enter the Kingdom (Mathew) or absolutely not (Paul)? Did Jesus have his own house (Mark) or not (Luke)? Everyone had an own personal agenda.

- There were lots of other Gospels available to the early church, as well as epistles, Acts, and apocalypses. Many of these claimed to have been written by apostles, and on the surface such claims are more or less believable than the claims of Revelation and 1Timothy amongst others. This raises the question of who made decisions about which books to include, and on what grounds the books were included. It is possible that non-apostolic books were included by church leaders who simply did not know any better. It is also possible that books that should have been included were left out. Again, I am pleasantly surprised that theology scholars are aware of these truths but keep quiet about them. Which books would we include and exclude, if given a chance in our 21st century?

- Who actually went to the tomb? Was it Mary alone (John 20:1)? Mary and another Mary (Mathew 28:1)? Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Mark 16:1)? Or women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem - possibly Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “other women” (Luke 24:1; 23:55)? Had the stone already been rolled away from the
tomb (Mark 16:4)? Or was it rolled away by an angel while the women were there (Matthew 28:2)? Whom or what did they see there? An angel (Matthew 28:5)? A young man (Mark 16:5)? Two men (Luke 24:4)? Or nothing and no one (John) what were they told (more contradictions)? If they tell someone, who do they tell (more contradictions)? What did the (contradictory) people who were there told do (more contradictions)? Did they not believe the women because this seemed to be an “idle tale” (Luke 24:11)? Or do they go to the tomb to see for themselves (John 20:3)? What happens next (more contradictions)? They all commented to further their own personal agendas.

- **Did the Apostle Paul lie?** After his Damascus conversion, did Paul go directly to Jerusalem in order to confer with those who were before him? In Galatians 1:16-20 Paul himself says He did not confer with anyone and He (Paul) did not go up to Jerusalem to “those who were apostles before me”. He then says, “In what I am writing to you, before God, I am not lying!” Was Paul lying when He said, “before God, I am not lying”? Was He lying before God? Only God knows! Really? Only God? According to Acts 9:9-30, Paul headed directly to Jerusalem where he met with the Apostles of Jesus. Did Paul spend time with other Christians immediately (Acts) or not (Paul)? Did Paul go straight to Jerusalem (Acts) or not (Paul)? Did Paul meet with the group of apostles (Acts)? Or just with Peter and James (Paul). Did the churches in Judea know Paul (contradictions)? Did Paul go to Athens alone (contradictions)? How many trips did Paul make to Jerusalem (contradictions)? Did Paul get his beliefs from Jesus? Even the cursing, name calling, and the complicated theological system of sin, judgement, and redemption? Paul cursed those who differed with his beliefs and even called them dogs (Phil 3:2; Gal 5:12; Gal 1:9). Some were called “liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:13). Those opposed to ‘sound doctrine’ are called “immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, and perjurers” (1 Timothy 1:10). OH! What name calling! Is this inspired? It is said, ‘As oxygen is to air, guilt is to religion’. Did Paul’s punitive theology come from Jesus? Paul’s theology (like anyone’s) is a mixture of half truths and heresy. As a 1st century person; I find the 1st century, Roman occupied, 2nd temple, Post Jewish culture perspective of Paul appalling (pardon the pun). Many scholars, while they appreciate the value Paul brought to the message of the Gospel, also accuse him of being a theologian who turned the message of Jesus Christ into a complicated set of doctrines and imposed his own orthodoxy on everybody. Paul was a die-hard fundamentalist who formed a religion out of the figure of Jesus Christ. Only die-hard fundamentalists treat him like an icon and spread his propaganda as “the word of God”. **He was a man of his times, not our times!**

- **Jesus lived and Jesus died.** Beyond these two undisputable facts, everything else is a myth and ambiguous midrashic recreation by the followers of Jesus. Myths can be immensely edifying. No scholar worth his/her salt can tell us exactly why Jesus died. Best scholars have failed to understand the re-created midrash on the reasons. Jesus’ death was not a myth, but the idea that it was a death that brought about salvation is a myth. The idea of the virgin birth of Jesus, his literal resurrection, literal ascension, and literal second coming, are all myths that have mediated meaning for the past two thousand years of Christianity. The idea that He died for our sins is a myth. The idea that He
paid our price is a myth. The idea of “a God who sent his only Son” is a myth. The idea of ‘the fall’ is a myth. The idea of a ‘rescue’ from the fall is myth. Why did Jesus die then? The death of Jesus is now seen as an act of self-giving love. Jesus was willing to live, and die, for the sake of others; to teach us to do the same. I find this noble and ennobling. I find it as an idea and example worth emulating. The resurrection (not the literal one) of Jesus is a both a mythical statement about God and the world. There is life beyond this world. Evil does not have the last word; God has the last word. Death is not final. God triumphs over all, including death itself. We can no longer speak of the “Mythianity” of the fall, atonement, Jesus dying for our sins, etc. We live our lives on the other side of Charles Darwin, Isaac Newton, Nicolas Copernicus, Galileo, Albert Einstein, and Sigmund Freud. We have to choose between literalized biblical claims and the scientist’s “word of God”.

- **Was Jesus God** (Yes says John, No says the apostles)? When did Jesus become God? Before the foundation of the world (John); when Mary was impregnated by the Holy Ghost (Luke); when He was baptised (Mark); through Adam (Mathew); through David (Paul). Jesus ate fish (after the resurrection). He appeared and disappeared through walls. What happened to the fish He ate; when He disappeared? For more than 350 years before the Bible was finally approved, council after council deliberated on these questions. Church Father after Church Father was excommunicated for heresy. Much of the Christian Church was divided over the issue of whether Jesus was of the same substance as the Father. Did God die when Jesus died? If Jesus was God then who was in heaven? So, the literal resurrection and ascension took God back to heaven? Shoooo! Similar God or same God? The Greek terms were *homoousias* (same substance) and *homoiousias* (similar substance). My authentic self just can’t read Church history and come to terms with the fact that; for 350 years, people were killed, humiliated, hated, rejected, excommunicated, and even split the church; just over the letter “i” that separated the two words? Early Church Fathers; Tertullian, Athanasius, and others gave us the ‘clever’ theology of Trinity as a compromise. After 2000 years, we are still trying to make sense of this ‘clever’ theology of Tertullian and co. We then had Trinitarian Christians and non-Trinitarian Christians, similar to Darwinian Christians and Creation Christians of today. The show goes on! In future (500 years from today), the controversy will be on whether scientifically cloned people are made in the image of God or in the image of scientists? Are they going to heaven or hell?

- **Other questions**: when Jesus entered Jerusalem, how many animals did He ride (one says Mark) (two says Matthew). Why does Matthew quote the wrong prophet (Mathew 27:9-10; Zechariah 11:3)? What did Jesus tell the high priest when questioned at his trial (Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69)? When was the curtain in the Temple ripped (Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45-46)? What did the Centurion say when Jesus died (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47)? Was Jesus naked when He left his tomb (Matt 27:35; Jn. 19:23)? Did the Churches in Judea know Paul (Gal. 1:21-22; Acts 8:1-3 / Acts 9:1-2)? Why did Paul and Peter not see eye to eye? Is the Bible a reliable book to tell the full story of Jesus or is it a book that tells the story through a POOR mirror (1 Cor. 13:12)? What? Why? When? My questions multiply the more I study this book, as interpreted by Jews! What is Christianity about really?
My spiritual and intellectual mentor, Bishop John Shellby Spong, has summed it up so eloquently:

*Christianity has (through the “inerrant Bible”), given us a God who caused the death of his son, the damnation of disbelievers, the subordination of women, the bloody massacres of the Crusades, the terror of judgement, the wrath toward homosexuals and the justification of slavery. The Father God embodied in the creeds is a deity who chooses some of the world’s children while rejecting others. He is the father of wrath, the father of male domination and female submission, the father of literal and spiritual slavery.*

**THE BIBLE AS OUR LIBRARY – A BIBLIO (FUTURE SCENARIO)**

As a book deeply influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is very easy for us who were raised in this tradition to think that Jews or Christians have a copyright on God. There is no book in the world that has deeply influenced the Church and Christian culture. Theologians and Ministers of the gospel have always read into the Bible the kind of things people of their time and culture wanted to hear, or perhaps, the only things that, within their culture, they could hear. We have all been challenged by things we have read in the Bible, but this is different from then saying the Bible is in reality the supreme authority the way the Pope was. Any church or faith community that makes the Bible or any holy book its supreme authority ends up being the supreme authority itself. When Pastors say the Bible is authority, they actually mean that they or their church is the supreme authority. All people who make these claims will never subject their claims to the enquiry of biblical scholarship because such claims will crumble in the light of deep biblical scrutiny and enquiry. Biblical fundamentalism has never, and will never, survive a genuine study of the Bible. I love the Bible and continue to use it as my map to go to truths that are deeper than the “literal truths” of the past two thousand years. It is the non-literal truths and the mythical truths in the Bible that makes it “the word of the Lord” for me. I love the Bible for the inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and contradictions, hyperbole, and midrashic elements that makes me enter into the ancient life and think deeply on the experiences and thought life of those who wrote it and how the concept of God and spirituality has evolved since then.

The Bible has to be kept as it is, with all the original language, inconsistencies, propaganda, politics, and contradictions, or else we will lose the value of entering into its ancient thought life. There is a time to read the Bible as the word of God. There is a time to read it NOT as the word of God. There is a time for everything (Eccl.7:1). God is just too big for us to put our arms around him, so to speak. It is impossible for anyone to say for sure what God says or thinks. People who say they know God’s thoughts are usually just trying to get a little divine backing for their own views. The Bible was written between 2000 and 300 years ago. Do you know anyone who thinks that absolute truth can be captured in a 2000 to 3000 year old textbook on any subject? Would you go to a doctor who practiced medicine out of a 2000 to 3000 year old medical textbook? Can we study astronomy, geography, chemistry, biology, physics, oceanography, anesthesiology, geology, psychology, psychiatry – and the new quantum physics out of a book that old? Can such a book be used to judge other faiths as a yardstick? There are new discoveries in all fields of faiths and science that can teach us a lot about the mystery and wonder of God’s creation, yet we still have Pastors in the 21st century talking down psychologists and psychiatrists. To add salt to the injury, we also have Pastors talking down all biblical scholars, who are scientists in the field of theology. If the Bible is found wanting in its account of creation (the genesis of everything), how can I be sure of it anywhere? The utterances in the Bible (or any book written by a human being), should – I emphasize should, and will undergo revision. Nothing is
cast in stone (not even Moses’ writings on tablets). This is what the best of scientists believe and practice. Only deluded religious people think that what is written in holy books is cast in stone. Let us have God at the centre, not any holy book! Let God be the mountain that all religions climb from all sides; Religious Pluralism. **Christianity is no longer at the centre of life.** God / Ultimate Reality; however defined; is at the centre of life.

Here are just a few (in a very long list) mutually exclusive contradictions in the New Testament (when read them as literal events):

The announcement of the special birth came before conception. Lk.1:26-31.
The announcement of the special birth came after conception. Mt.1:18-21.

Jesus’ parents were told of their son’s future greatness. Mt.1:18-21; Lk.1:28-35.
Jesus’ parents knew nothing of their son's potential. Lk.2:48-50.

The angel told Mary. Lk.1:28.

Jacob was Joseph’s father. Mt.1:16.
Heli was Joseph's father. Lk.3:23.

Jesus was tempted during the 40 days in the wilderness. Mk.1:13.
Jesus was tempted after the 40 days in the wilderness. Mt.4:2-3.

The devil first took Jesus to the pinnacle, then to the mountain top. Mt.4:5-8.
The devil first took Jesus to the mountain top, then to the pinnacle. Lk.4:5-9.


Jesus cured Simon Peter's mother-in-law after he cleansed the leper. Mt.8:1-15.
Jesus cured Simon Peter’s mother-in-law before he cleansed the leper. Mk.1:30-42; Lk.4:38, 5:13.

James and John were with Jesus when he healed Simon Peter’s mother-in-law. Mk.1:29-31.
James and John were not with Jesus when he healed Simon Peter’s mother-in-law. Lu.4:38-39; 5:10-11.

The people were not impressed with the feeding of the multitude. Mk.6:52.
The people were very impressed with the feeding of the multitude. Jn.6:14.

After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus went to Gennesaret. Mk.6:53.
After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus went to Capernaum. Jn.6:14-17.

Jesus cursed the fig tree so that it would not bear fruit. Mt.21:19; Mk.11:14.
It wasn’t time for the fig tree to bear fruit. Mk.11:13.
The "Lord’s Prayer" was taught to many during the "Sermon on the Mount". Mt.6:9.
The "Lord’s Prayer" was taught only to the disciples at another time. Lu.11:1.

Jesus had his own house. Mk.2:15.
Jesus did not have his own house. Lu.9:58.

Divorce, except for unfaithfulness, is wrong. Mt.5:32.
Divorce for any reason is wrong. Mk.10:11-12.

Do not take sandals (shoes) or staves. Mt.10:10.
Take only sandals (shoes) and staves. Mk.6:8-9.

Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees". Lk.12:1.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees". Mt.16:6-11.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod". Mk.8:15.

Jesus heals one named blind man. Mk.10:46-52.

The cock crowed once. Mt.26:74.
The cock crowed twice. Mk.14:72.

Peter makes his first denial to a maid and some others. Mt.26:69-70.
It was only to the maid. Mk.14:66-68; Lk.22:56-57; Jn.18:17.

Peter’s second denial was to another maid. Mt.26:71-72.
It was to the same maid. Mk.14:69-70.
It was to a man and not a maid. Lk.22:58.

It was to more than one per Jesus is given a scarlet robe. Mt.27:28.
Jesus is given a purple robe. Mk.15:17; Jn.19:2.
Jesus is given a gorgeous robe. Lk.23:11.

Peter’s third denial was to several bystanders. Mt.26:73-74; Mk.14:69-70.
It was to one person. Lk.22:59-60.
It was to a servant. Jn.18:26-27.

The chief priests bought the field. Mt.27:6-7.

Judas threw down the money and left. Mt.27:5.
Judas used the coins to buy the field. Acts1:18.
Judas hanged himself. Mt.27:5.

Jesus is given a scarlet robe. Mt.27:28.
Jesus is given a purple robe. Mk.15:17; Jn.19:2.
Jesus is given a gorgeous robe. Lk.23:11.

The centurion says, “Truly this was the son of God”. Mt.27:54.
The centurion says, “Truly this man was the son of God”. Mk.15:39.
The centurion says, “Certainly, this was a righteous man”. Lk.23:47.
There was no centurion. Jn.19:31-37.

Upon their arrival, the stone was still in place. Mt.28:1 2.
Upon their arrival, the stone had been removed. Mk.16:4; Lk.24:2; Jn.20:1.

There was an earthquake. Mt.28:2.
There was no earthquake. Mk.16:5; Lk.24:2-4; Jn.20:12.

The visitors ran to tell the disciples. Mt.28:8.
The visitors told the eleven and all the rest. Lk.24:9.
The visitors said nothing to anyone. Mk.16:8.

Jesus first resurrection appearance was right at the tomb. Jn.20:12-14.
Jesus first resurrection appearance was fairly near the tomb. Mt.28:8-9.
Jesus first resurrection appearance was on the road to Emmaus. Lk.24:13-16.

Some doubted. Mt.28:17.
All doubted. Mk.16:11; Lk.24:11-14.

Jesus said that his blood was shed for many. Mk.14:24.
Jesus said his blood was shed for his disciples. Lu.22:20.

Simon of Cyrene was forced to bear the cross of Jesus. Mt.27:32; Mk.15:21; Lu.23:26.

Jesus was offered vinegar and gall to drink. Mt.27:34.
Jesus was offered vinegar to drink. Jn.19:29-30.
Jesus was offered wine and myrrh to drink. Mk.15:23.

Jesus refused the drink offered him. Mk.15:23.
Jesus tasted the drink offered and then refused. Mt.27:34.
Jesus accepted the drink offered him. Jn.19:30.
Failing to notice this, the women bought spices to prepare the body later. Mk. 16:1; Lu.23:55-56.

The body was anointed. Jn.19:39-40.
The body was not anointed. Mk.15:46 to 16:1; Lk.23:55 to 24:1.

The women bought materials before the Sabbath. Lu.23:56.
The women bought materials after the Sabbath. Mk.16:1.

Jesus was first seen by Cephas, then the twelve. 1 Cor.15:5.
Jesus was first seen by the two Marys. Mt.28:1, 8-9.
Jesus was first seen by Mary Magdalene. Mk.16:9; Jn.20:1, 14-15.
Jesus was first seen by Cleopas and others. Lu.24:17-18.
Jesus was first seen by the disciples. Acts 10:40-41.

The two Marys went to the tomb. Mt.28:1.
The two Marys and Salome went to the tomb. Mk.16:1.
Several women went to the tomb. Lu.24:10.
Only Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. Jn.20:1.

An angel sat on the stone at the door of the tomb. Mt.28:2.
A man was sitting inside the tomb. Mk.16:5.

Two men were standing inside the tomb. Lk.24:3-4.
Two angels were sitting inside the tomb. Jn.20:12.

Peter did not go into the tomb but stooped and looked inside. Lk.24:12.
Peter did go into the tomb, and another disciple stooped and looked inside. Jn.20:3-6.

After the resurrection, the disciples held Jesus by the feet. Mt.28:9.
After the resurrection, Jesus told Thomas to touch his side. John 20:27.
After the resurrection, Jesus said that he was not to be touched. Jn.20:17.

The disciples were frightened when they saw Jesus. Lk.24:36-37.
The disciples were glad when they first saw Jesus. Jn.20:20.

Twelve disciples saw Jesus. 1 Cor.15:5.
Eleven disciples saw Jesus. Thomas was not there. Mt.28:16-17; Jn.20:19-25.

Jesus ascended on the third day after the resurrection. Lk.24:21, 50-51.
Jesus ascended the same day as the crucifixion. Lk.23:42 43.
Jesus ascended forty days after the resurrection. Acts1:3-9.

At the time of the ascension, there were about 120 brethren. Acts1:15.
At the time of the ascension, there were about 500 brethren. 1 Cor.15:6.
The ascension took place while the disciples were seated together at a table. Mk.16:14-19.
The ascension took place outdoors at Bethany. Lk.24:50-51.
The ascension took place outdoors at Mt. Olivet. Acts1:9-12.

The Moneychangers incident occurred at the end of Jesus’ career. Mt.21:11-12.

Zacharias was the son of Jehoida, the priest. 2 Chr. 24:20.
Jesus said that Zacharias was the son of Barachias. Mt.23:35.
(Note: The name Barachias or Barachiah does not appear in the Old Testament)

The coming of the kingdom will be accompanied by signs and miracles. Mt.24:29-33; Mk.13:24-29.
It will not be accompanied by signs and miracles since it occurs from within. Lk.17:20-21.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin. Mk.3:29.

The Holy Spirit was with John from before he was born. Lk.1:15-41.
The Holy Spirit was with Elizabeth before John’s birth. Lk.1:41.
The Holy Spirit was with Zechariah. Lk.1:67.
The Holy Spirit was with Simeon. Lk.2:25.

Jesus is the Son of God. Jn.6:69; Jn.20:31.
Jesus is the Son of Man. Mt.18:11; Lk.21:27.

LIVING WITH THE BIBLE AS IT IS
The above information should be proof enough (I hope) that the Bible was not meant to be read as a literal book depicting factual history. Jewish people (who wrote the Bible) knew this very well. Most of what we find in the Gospels; are actually sermons and plays delivered in the synagogues for thirty five to seventy years after the death of Jesus. These were plays that Jewish Christians re-enacted (for up to seventy years) as they remembered Jesus Christ after his death. They brought their art, independent thinking, and genius into telling the story. No Gospel writer will tell a story similar to the other one. Contradictions, even mutually exclusive contradictions are thus normal and acceptable as a mythical way of telling the story of Jesus. A myth is a story with deep explanatory and symbolic significance. Christian mythology is a story that explains or symbolizes Christian beliefs. Myth is very important for the mediation of meaning this side of the universe. Sermons, worship songs, hymns, choruses, and even fiery sermons should be seen as a part of mediating meaning. They are part of poetry and art to help us find meaning in a confusing world. They help us find security for our souls. They are not about literal truth. They should not be interpreted as literal events.

Christian, and other, mythology has a lot of value. Myth is there, not for truth, but to offer security to our fragile lives. Mythology (Christian and other faith’s); has helped a lot of people across all religions to build within them a haven of peace that enables them to live creatively with the sorrow of life. Religious myth has been called a primitive form of psychology. However, we cannot spend the rest of our lives on myth. We need to get off our strollers and talk like adults. We need to outgrow our myths. We need to outgrow our
childhood stage and walk. How do we evolve from religious myths (*mythos*) to truth (reason)? The dilemma that Church leaders have had to deal with throughout Church history is this; *if the Church provides truth it cannot provide security; conversely – if the Church provides security, it cannot provide truth.* Human religious systems have never been primarily a search for truth; they have always been first and foremost a search for security. Religion, because it seeks to provide human security, always seems to have a need for certainty and to literalize a supposedly inerrant source. Many adults have not moved beyond their childhood religious fantasies, so they do not know how to cope with hard human realities. They then seek comfort in the simplicity of yesterday. They look for security in the protective arms of a heavenly parent. This is what forms our theology about God. We feel lonely, insecure, helpless, in a vast and exceedingly insecure world. We need to re-learn what it means to live by faith alone. **There is no, divinely revealed and eternal truths.**

**THE CULTURE GAP**

Many Christians are not aware that they view the Bible as an infallible authority because they are not aware that there is another way to view it. We no longer view the Bible with the innocence of earlier generations. The post-enlightenment era gave us the freedom to read the Bible critically and to think freely. We no longer accept biblical claims without questions. Our culture gap has widened. Images like shepherd and sowing seeds; have become remote for those living in cities. Society is today organized in a totally different way. How do we talk about “the Kingdom of God” in a world where kings and queens are now rare and democracy is regarded as the ideal form of government? How do we continue using the language of superstitious, simple minded cultures like, the burning bush, legged snakes, ‘apples’, whales that vomit people, and talking donkeys? How do we continue talking about God as a King sitting on a throne when our culture no longer understands thrones? What does the “word of God” mean in a culture in which people are encouraged to think for themselves? In a culture where atheists have spiritual encounters? In a culture where Buddhists (who do not even use the God language) demonstrate “Godly” virtues that are better than Christians? In a culture where new ideas are presented as points of discussion rather than decrees to be obeyed? In a culture where LOVE is found amongst those not using ‘holy books’ and the one’s using ‘holy books’ are, unloving, bigoted, judgemental, ostracizing, and punitive? Christianity has to enter the emerging postmodern world to survive.

How do we talk about commandments in a society that only understands values? A culture where beliefs are just a product of their contemporary culture and are changing all the time? Many people are today aware that if they had been born in a different country, or even into a different family, they would probably have a quite different set of beliefs and values. We need to give up the idea that the Bible has a “message” – that is; one message for us as Evangelicals. Our religion, as a human response to God, is a system constructed by human beings. Religions (like everything in our universe) are human constructs. Their scriptures are human constructs, written by humans and kept, treasured, loved and interpreted by humans. Their theologies, doctrines, creeds, are human constructs, expressed in human language of a particular time and place; and using the human categories and concepts of that particular time and place. Over time, they develop in response to change; and their scriptures are revised and revised again; sometimes slowly and smoothly, sometimes fast and abruptly. Sometimes they are revolutionized by people like Muzi. Sometimes their core fundamentals, pagan assumptions, primitive beliefs, and dated creeds are challenged to their foundations by the changing scientific world. **Change is the only constant in life!** Just don’t resist it!

We just have to read the Bible as it is and let it speak to us as it may. I’m currently researching African Spirituality and the scientific origins of *Ancestral Veneration*. It is scientific research and not my cultural upbringing that is leading me back to my cultural roots. We need to shake off our conception of the Bible as “authority”. **Our interpretation** of it is “authority”. We need to allow those who hear “the word” to retain
some measure of objectivity. We may not agree with the other person’s interpretation of their experience, but can recognize the reality of their experience and of their perception of it. We do not have to accept what has been handed down and simply obey it; we can and do argue with it! We can no longer, like old “John”, threaten with removal from the book of life (Revelation 22:19), those who add or subtract from the scriptures. If old “John” threats were true, it means all those who revised and revised the gothic utterances of old “John” were removed from the book of life long ago. Is this the reason why William Tyndale was killed (or removed from the book of life) for translating the first Bible into English? I imagine poor Shangaans; with all the errors in their Bible! The path of the future is towards a post-Bible – post-Christianity! A post-Bible, post-Christian world is a tradition that provides a focus of meaning for life in our new global world. This is the reason for my paper on the Bible, in case you are still wondering.

My biological Father was a non-religious person. He never went to Church (he missed the evangelical net that caught me). He never judged my Religion. He never judged anyone. He loved jokes. Did He have flaws? Did He have a dark side? I do not know - maybe. He loved books, he loved reading newspapers. The week He died, He asked me to read ALL books. I have since buried my head in books. Books are my BIBLE (library). One virtue I will always remember my Father for is KINDNESS. He was a very kind person. He was kind to everyone. KINDNESS was his religion. I will always remember my Father for KINDNESS. I will always keep him alive by being a kind person. In memory of my kind Father – MY NEW RELIGION IS: - KINDNESS.

MY QUEST

I heeded my Father’s call to read books and am reading a lot of them. There is nothing more meaningful. I read all kinds of books (especially the forbidden ones). I’ve taken a short break from dibuka tsa batho basiphiri (those found in evangelical book shops only). DO NOT GO WHERE I’VE BEEN! I’ve travelled extensively in search of truth (God) over the past ten years. I even went inside the Vatican (saw the evangelical pope). There is no country I wanted to visit, that I did not visit. In China, India, Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia, I got exposed to a scholarship world that I never knew existed. The combined scholarship in these five countries is greater that Christianity’s scholarship world. For geographical insight, I visited Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Bethlehem, Galilee, Jerusalem, and other biblical cities to see the distances myself and not be swallowed up in propaganda (despite the lies from tourist guides). In Israel we were taken to at least three places where Jesus is said to have been buried (good tourist market for non biblical scholars). Two years ago we went on a wedding anniversary vacation to Greece (where all the trouble began). Greece is an 80% Christian orthodox country. We visited the Isle of Patmos where John (or the one who said He was John; after dieting on mushrooms and “weed”) got the “Revelation”, while he was exiled. Our ultra Greek Orthodox tour guide took us to the “famous house” and showed us the “place” where “John” was sleeping, the “stone” where He put his head on, and “listened” to the “voice”, the “old crack” on the roof from the “voice of God” etc. Mind you, this is said to have happened 2000 years ago! Our Greek guide (with a very dim view of Catholics, a worse view of Protestants) got us to switch off our cell phones as we were about to enter a “very holy place”. The guy spoke as if the incident happened a few decades ago. The guy was so certain of his story; it would have been a fruitless effort to even question him (how could a lowly post-evangelical like me question such an ultra orthodox guy?). I and other Western tourists just shook
our doubtful heads and went back to our cruise ship, in one piece. Lastly, I need to say that my manifold spiritual experiences are not negotiable, debatable, and need not be proven to anyone. They are mine and mine alone. My life experiences have formed my spirituality over the years. They are undeniable.

In May I visited Kenya, to view the largest fossils museum in the world. Got to see and touch two million year old fossilized human bones. This week (Aug 2010) I am on my way to Ethiopia to do more research on primitive African Spirituality in order to compare with what scientists have said about genes (amadlozi), DNA, and the meme virus (similar to the religious virus connected to my hate emails). From there I will be visiting some Buddhist Mystics in Thailand; just to sit at the feet, and be lectured by Buddhists mystics. Buddhism is a very important religion going forward. It is the only religion that has evolved without God. **China will be a Superpower by the year 2025.** Christianity will evolve like Buddhism (our mythical Abraham was called from Buddhism). I need to know the power that has made Buddhism so attractive to Western Middle class people. In my last lecture, a Buddhist monk compared “Ultimate Reality” to a mountain that all of us are climbing. We can have the best shot of the Mountain, find fulfilment and meaning in our climbing, and even get to believe that this is the only side for climbing the mountain. Believe that “our way” of climbing the mountain is the only way. This is fine, until we discover multitudes of people in different parts of the same mountain climbing also. We then have to define the “the other” as the work of Satan, at worst. Some mystics say God is the air we inhale. Some inhale it with cologne, roses, perfume, incense, aroma, spices, fragrances, etc. There is a supermarket of ways and symbols whereby the God concept can be defined. I have given up trying to know God. All I know is that science has displaced God from His / Her / It-s original position.

**IMAGO DEI**

I need to say again like before; I am not a sad person. Some Christians are very sad about the developments in my life; that is very sad indeed, but as for me; I am not a sad person. I sleep well at night. I am a very happy person (I think) who has found meaning and purpose in life. This is the most happy and fulfilling time I have ever known. It is a moment of self-actualization and loving being – and being human. I am a happily married man, with a loving wife and three happy kids. We enjoy life to the fullest. We pray, play, fight, joke, go on overseas vacations, write books, write this paper, agree, disagree, talk over things, learn, meet new people, and are enjoying our abundant life to the fullest. We do not take life too seriously. We embrace life, with all the ups and downs, its aching loneliness, the road less travelled by. We embrace all the seasons of life as they come our way. Life has become very meaningful and purposeful indeed. I write as an apostle (with a small letter a) of the New Reformation. I am creating a new focus of meaning for my generation and the coming generations. This is my calling. Karen Armstrong said it so well; "human beings cannot endure emptiness and desolation; they will fill the vacuum by creating a new focus of meaning…"