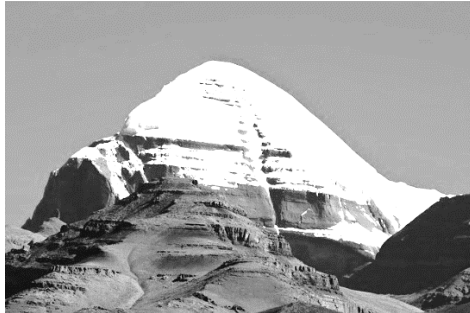


MOUNTAIN RAIN



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RELIGIOUS CONSTRUCTION OF SIN, GUILT, AND SHAME



In this essay, I wish to reflect on, interrogate, and critique the mainline biblical notions of sin, guilt, and shame in the Christian narrative about creation and humanity. This narrative is one that makes the supernatural and objective act of divine atonement and redemption absolute and necessary. In so doing, I propose the thesis that such notions and their corollary event of substitutionary atonement as dominantly conceived are unwarranted and unnecessary for a spiritually-evolving life based on wholesomeness, much less for a fully-evolved life of enlightened wisdom and compassion in the fullness of consciousness.

Sin is usually defined as “falling short of the glory of God” and describes both the original sin of selfish resistance to God’s sovereign rule and disobedience to God through willful transgression of the boundaries of God’s commandments and law. As a result, each person who sins is tainted with objective guilt in the eyes of God and tormented by subjective guilt psychologically. In addition, there is both divine condemnation from above and inner condemnation from within that is connected to a sense of shame. Taken together, these three “undesirables” weigh down on every human being who inherits this tripartite legacy from humanity’s original parents Adam and Eve.

Hence, every human being is born with this original sin (and guilt and shame) deserving of punishment in the form of wrathful penalty of God that is summarily meted out on us. The penalty and price that sinful humanity has to pay takes the form of all kinds of suffering, sickness, finally death, and eternal separation from the presence of God after death. But for those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour who has redeemed them by atoning for this penalty of sin through his vicarious death on the cross, the way is open for eternal fellowship with God in a life free of suffering, sickness, and death, which can be foretasted here on earth but permanently experienced to the full in the post-mortem state or at the

second coming of Christ, whichever comes earlier. A relatively minuscule lifespan of a hundred or so years (mostly less) on earth thus dictates an eternity of either heavenly bliss with God or hellish torment bereft of God. So much for a sense of proportionate justice.

On Origins

Having sketched in brief the mainline biblical concepts of sin, guilt, and shame in relation to the theology of redemptive atonement by Jesus, I am now ready to delve more deeply into how I see these concepts and their psychosocial origin. When I survey world religious memes about the human condition, I see the Judaeo-Christian tradition as being unique in their construction of the notion of sin, which is essentially judicial and legalistic in substance apart from any moral or ethical connotations. Asian spiritual traditions that I am familiar with speak of ethically unwholesome or degenerating activities of body, speech, and mind that lead beings into suffering and pain not as a consequence of transgressing some God-dictated law or injunction but as a natural consequence of cosmic cause and effect. While the Judaeo-Christian tradition insists on an extra-creational God who stands outside the cosmos as its sovereign creator and controller as well as jury and judge over each human being's destiny, Asian spiritual traditions do not admit of such a concept of God. While some Asian worldviews espouse the Divine in various ways (as in strands of Indian subcontinental religion) or not at all (as in the Buddhism of South and Southeast Asia, the Himalayan plateau, and East Asia), God or ultimate reality is inalienable from all persons and phenomena, with the cosmos itself co-extensive with and embedded within God as its deepest or highest reality. An ontologically separate divine reality simply makes no sense to much of Asian spiritual consciousness.

But how did this idea of an ontologically divorced God and a judicial cosmos come about? My view is that it came about not from "above" but from "below," not as an outcome of God's revelation of himself and his ways but as humanity's projection of its judicial consciousness onto the cosmos at large. Given that there is no evidence for the existence of a sovereign creator God outside the cosmos as biblically imagined, and for other reasons that dissuade me from belief in such a God the chief of which is the perennial problem of evil, I would place my bet on an "atheistic" cosmos (if theism is defined in mainline Christian terms) coupled with an epistemologically agnostic stance towards the reality of God (given that God as such may lie beyond the ken of my knowledge and thus not knowable at least for now).

However, if I were to define theism in evolutionary and radically non-separative terms where divinity, cosmos, and humanity are co-extensive in a seamless single fabric of reality,

then I would probably describe my paradigm as that of “panentheism.” This is where the cosmos and life in their totality are in essence God while not exhausting all that God is. In other words, I can accept a God who transmutes itself into the totality of the cosmos and life but who simultaneously extends beyond that cosmos in inconceivable ways. I do so not out of any fear of moral accountability to a sovereign stand-alone God but more because rational and moral reasoning compel me to do so. I am simply not persuaded by available non-evidence and religious apologetics to the effect that such a God as conceived in Abrahamic monotheism exists. Given this skepticism of mine, my view of God would not be one of a sovereign all-controlling and all-powerful God of mainline biblical imagination. Rather it is a God of boundaryless consciousness and non-controlling egoless love integrally entwined with and embracing material and biological realities. This “cosmotheandric” God, to borrow Raimon Panikkar’s term, is not omnipotent but amipotent (following Thomas Jay Oord) — that is, egolessly loving in a non-controlling way which is maximally but not all powerful. In line with open relational theology, I see such a God as open to change with no predetermined outcomes and utterly relational in its fluid evolving nature, thus dynamic and non-substantialist in its fundamental essence.

Jewish Exceptionalism

In light of this cosmotheandric view of God which I do not know to be indubitably true but am persuaded to think as true, my sense is that the dominant Judaeo-Christian view of God or monotheism is a particular cultural mindset writ large. My view is that the ethnocultural people group known as the Israelites over time came to view themselves as privileged recipients of special revelation from their tribal warrior God *Yahweh* identified with their ancestral god of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob called *El*.ⁱ Writer and scholar Karen Armstrong writes informatively about the origins of the Israelite God *Yahweh* and his identification with *El*, ostensibly “the Canaanite High God worshipped by the patriarchs.”ⁱⁱ Armstrong explains as follows:

But who is Yahweh? Did Abraham worship the same God as Moses or did he know him by a different name? This would be a matter of prime importance to us today but the Bible seems curiously vague on the subject and gives conflicting answers to this question. ‘J’ [Yahweh biblical textual account] says that men had worshipped Yahweh ever since the time of Adam’s grandson but in the sixth century, ‘P’ [Priestly biblical textual account] seems to suggest that the Israelites had never heard of Yahweh until he appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush. ‘P’ makes Yahweh explain that he really was the same God as the God of Abraham, as though this were a rather controversial

notion: he tells Moses that Abraham had called him 'El Shaddai' and did not know the name Yahweh.ⁱⁱⁱ ...

This is a brutal, partial and murderous god: a god of war who would be known as Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of Armies. He is passionately partisan, has little compassion for anyone but his own favourites and is simply a tribal deity. If Yahweh had remained such a savage god, the sooner he vanished, the better it would have been for everybody. The final myth of the Exodus, as it has come down to us in the Bible, is clearly not meant to be a literal version of events. It would however have had a clear message for the people of the ancient Middle East, who were used to gods splitting the seas in half.^{iv}

We shall see that Yahweh did not remain the cruel and violent god of the Exodus, even though the myth has been important in all three of the monotheistic religions. Surprising as it may seem, the Israelites would transform him into a symbol of transcendence and compassion. Yet the bloody story of the Exodus would continue to inspire dangerous conceptions of the divine and a vengeful theology.^v ...

The Israelites called Yahweh 'the God of our fathers' yet it seems that he may have been quite a different deity from El, the Canaanite High God worshipped by the patriarchs. He may have been the god of other people before he became the God of Israel. In all his early appearances to Moses, Yahweh insists repeatedly and at some length that he is indeed the God of Abraham, even though he had originally been called El Shaddai. This insistence may preserve the distant echoes of very early debate about the identity of the God of Moses, It has been suggested that Yahweh was originally a warrior god, a god of volcanoes, a god worshipped in Midian, in what is now Jordan. We shall never know where the Israelites discovered Yahweh, if indeed he really was a completely new deity. ... In pagan antiquity, gods were often merged and amalgamated, or the gods of one locality accepted as identical with the god of another people. All we can be sure of is that, whatever his provenance, the events of the Exodus made Yahweh the definitive God of Israel and that Moses was able to convince the Israelites that he really was one and the same as El, the God beloved by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.^{vi}

Be that as it may, there evolved within the mindscape of the Israelites that their God has called them to possess the lands they have migrated to and to flourish there, blessing them with protection and victory as long as they obeyed their God's divine dictates and

commandments. A blood-sealed agreement or covenant between the Israelites that Moses led and their God was thus struck, where the Jews were to worship Yahweh exclusively and give up all traces of worshipping other “strange” gods. The notion arose of God’s law given through their leader and prophet Moses, a set of ten commandments which became later known as the Mosaic law. A covenantal view of the Jewish people’s relationship with their God *Yahweh* or *El* involving legal obedience to divine injunctions embedded their self-identity of divine chosenness and divine entitlement to land rights where they lived. Without going into any detail on the intellectual history of these covenantal ideas and practices, suffice to say that I believe no supernatural explanation needs to be invoked in order to account for Jewish self-understanding of themselves as a people and of their God. My impression is that the sociohistorical forces and pressures on a migratory tribal collective in a hostile environment surrounded by antipathic forces and peoples would suffice to account for the way Jewish thinking and identity is shaped and formed. A warring, vengeful, and seemingly all-powerful God that specially privileges and protects their own tribal kind against their enemies bracketed as the proverbial Other would suit the Jewish purpose of self-definition, self-preservation, and communal security. That there can be strict obligations and laws governing their relationship with their protective war God is not a surprising development. Later Christian thinking would see a selection of ancient Jewish scriptures as a repository of God’s special revelation to the world as complement to the books of the New Testament.

Moving on from Jewish religious identity and history, we are now ready to comment on the emergence of notions of sin, guilt, and shame within the divinely-imposed judicial context of Judaeo-Christian discourse. Mimetic theory in my view accounts for the generation and evolution, imitation and consolidation of the gamut of social and individual desires, necessitating a matrix of structures and rules for social order and control. Out of these strictures and rules, it is not difficult to imagine the emergence of *subjective* feelings of sin, guilt, and shame in tandem with *objective* conceptions of the same when these strictures and rules are seen to be abrogated by members of Jewish society. Thus arose the need and necessity for some psychosocial mechanism to resolve the problem of individual and collective accumulations of sin, guilt, and shame in their personal and collective psyche. This then accounts for the need for violent vindictive scapegoating of an ostensibly populist and innocent victim (vis-à-vis the apocalyptic prophet and thaumaturgic preacher known as Jesus of Nazareth), serving structurally as a psychodynamic release valve for the mass psychic storehouse of sin, guilt, and shame that threatens to boil over and wreck society.

All this means that there exists a potent toxic cocktail of inner traumatic afflictive feelings inextricably entwined with mimetic scapegoating of the morally innocent and a much-needed social psychodynamic release mechanism. This cocktail is concocted based on the worldview of a judicial cosmos presided over by a cosmic legalistic judge *Yahweh* or *El*, a view that is in turn projected and reinforced by their communal acts of faith and multiple acts of falling short of covenantal standards. It is also not too far-fetched to imagine that emotions of fear, stress, and anxiety might be associated with this sense of sin, guilt, and shame, considering the conditionality of God's protection and blessings on people's obedience to the law of God. Thus, a shortfall in obedience would necessarily invoke the wrath of God and the withdrawal of his blessings, if not outright judgement upon them in a devastating way. The emotionally heightened and hyper-pressured crucible of collective sin and guilt needs an outlet. I now draw on Rene Girard's mimetic theory as an approach to teasing out this social release mechanism for the Israelites as found in the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.^{vii}

Interrogating Substitutionary Atonement

The theology of substitutionary atonement is that of vicarious substitutionary punishment on one person for the collective sins of all humanity by having an innocent Other receive sin's penalty in humanity's stead. In Christian belief, this innocent Other is Jesus Christ, the incarnate *logos* who became flesh for the sake of salvation of the world. The dominant belief is that just as the first human Adam sinned against God and reaped sin on all of humanity post-Adam, the second Adam who is Jesus the Christ obeyed God perfectly and thus reaped salvation from sin and its penalty for all of humanity for all time. But the catch is this: each human being is required to personally make the choice to believe in Jesus and receive the gift of salvation from sin in order for them to make it to heaven after death. Failure to do so would result nonetheless in eternal hellish torment. This argument is problematic in its absence of logical symmetry: if it does not require human belief in sinful Adam's rebellious disobedience for subsequent humanity to be tainted with that same Adamic sin and its penalty, why does it then require human belief in sinless Christ's substitutionary atonement for humanity to be saved and redeemed from the same? If, as the logic goes, we are all subject to God's holy wrath as a result of Adam's sin *per se*, then by the same logic, we should all be subject to God's gracious salvation as a result of Christ's saving obedience alone. Applying the same logic, why should the gift of salvation not be universally accessible and actualized rather than requiring an act of selective choice, since the burden of sin was universally applied and hyper-imposed on humanity without any selective choice or even self-consciousness on our part post-Adam?

I submit to you that this theology as commonly touted makes no sense. Looking at it from a moral philosophical point of view, it makes even less sense. I am referring to the problem of evil and suffering. Philosophers have pointed out and many laypeople who reflect a little would soon see that the idea of an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-loving God is not compatible with the presence and persistence of evil and suffering in the world. I have argued my case in other essays and will not repeat those arguments here. Suffice to say that my main objection to the “triple-omni God” as I call it lies in the fundamental logic of “as above, so below” in this sense: if God could allow for free will and have no evil and suffering in heaven, why not have the same on earth? Why allow for free will with consequential evil and suffering on earth? I have not been persuaded in the least by numerous theological attempts (technically called theodicies) to explain away this conundrum. I recently came across this quotation by Catholic woman Julia Sweeney which was cited by a fellow contemplative scholar Eva Natanya. To my mind, this quotation sums up my sentiment on evil and God rather well:

"Why would God create imperfect beings, who He knows will do imperfect things, then punish them for doing imperfect things, and then send Himself (His Son) to suffer and die as a ransom for these imperfect beings, which God had created precisely as only being capable of doing imperfect things in the first place?"^{viii}

In light of this intractable problem of evil, why bother with a convoluted act of substitutionary redemptive atonement that does not universally apply but only selectively effectual for those who either freely choose Jesus (as per Arminianism) or are elected sovereignly to choose Jesus (as per Calvinism)? Either way, whether by free choice or sovereign election (which gives rise to the diabolical problem of double-predestination), the entire theology of substitutionary redemptive atonement seems like a weak partial solution to the problem of evil and suffering, if not no solution at all. Evidence strongly confirm that evil and suffering continue to be rampant and have been so throughout human history. If we accept the scientific and evidence-based narrative of evolutionary biology and fossil science, then even dinosaurs had to undergo suffering in the predatory and violent struggle for existence only to be decimated by earth-damaging and climate-toxic meteors. No life form is spared from suffering and pain. Not in prehistoric and ancient times. Not now. The biblical narrative of substitutionary redemptive atonement sounds rather weak and logically-flawed, more like an ineffectual cold comfort.

Following from the discussion above, I propose that the dominant view of substitutionary redemptive atonement for human sin, guilt, and shame is unwarranted and unnecessary

for a full-blooded spiritual life leaning towards enlightenment. As I have argued, this dominant view is logically flawed and self-contradictory; a psychosocial projection of inner afflictive emotions; morally challenged by the persistent strength of evil and suffering in our world; and based on a psychodynamic construction of sin, guilt, and shame vis-à-vis their tribal war God by a precarious tribal people struggling for survival in a harsh and hostile geography. Instead, what is essential for spiritual evolution and enlightenment is a clear, rigorous, systematic, well-tested, effective, inspirational, and illuminating path of living and practice that liberates the human being from its deluded self-grasping, ingrained afflictive states of mind and heart, unwholesome thought-word-deed, and the bondage of suffering. Trapped in the ubiquitous anguish of unexamined existence, freedom beckons.

On Evolution and Enlightenment

That said, the question can be asked as to why spiritual evolution and enlightenment, and not anything else, should come to be seen as the *raison detre* and *summum bonum* of life. The simple answer is this: spiritual evolution and enlightenment is a natural and logical corollary to our experience as conscious living beings. To be alive is to be conscious, To be conscious is to have the capacity to know and be aware. Being conscious, we experience knowingly or unknowingly an innate longing to be truly and fully happy, permanently and unconditionally happy. To be knowing and aware — being cognizant — is an actuality, not a mere belief. This actuality is at the same time a potential. This potential is for consciousness to be infinitely expanded and unimpeded beyond the confines of its current spatiotemporal, psychological, and moral dimensions. This liberated consciousness also happens to be a state of ineffable, indestructible, and immeasurable happiness that we are longing for from our depths. A congenial mental feeling is happiness. The longing for happiness is the fundamental propensity of all sentient beings. Infinite happiness is bliss (*ānanda*).^{ix} Bliss is none other than the very dynamic nature of liberation (*vimutti*) and enlightenment (*sambodhi*). Enlightenment can be designated as the supreme truth (*paramasatya*) and highest divinity (*paramabrahma*). Hence, the very nature of our consciousness and the very motion of our lives is towards this pristine infinite bliss of enlightenment.

We can see and experience for ourselves that enlightenment is not a mere concept of philosophy or a dogma of religious faith. This caricature of enlightenment as a religious or dogmatic assertion derives from looking at Asian epistemes through a reductive and distortive Eurocentric prism. European Orientalism can inadvertently project western categories of “religion” versus “philosophy” versus “practice” onto unsuspecting Asian epistemes of *dharma* and *sambodhi*, mistakenly stuffing these epistemes into the

conceptual boxes of “religion” or “faith.” Suffice to say that we must be careful not to commit this error. That said, let us examine the notion of enlightenment. Contrary to Orientalist assumptions, enlightenment is not a matter of religion or faith but a practical reality and experience that is open and accessible to each of us. It is a living and breathing reality that we can feel in our hidden depths and everyday consciousness — as that very impulse towards unadulterated bliss and a persistent yearning for freedom.

An enlightened being is a consciousness that is fully liberated from its apparent limitations and shining forth with its full luminosity and warmth. Such enlightened consciousness is ceaselessly responsive in love and compassion without reference points of objectified things or persons. For enlightened consciousness, this happens spontaneously and permanently in an unborn and undying state transcending all words and ideas. It is up to each one of us to decide whether this is something we wish to explore and actualize. Even so, our exploration and practice of methods of realization, direct or indirect, are enacted not from the point of view of a contracted ego but from the view and perspective of unbound consciousness spontaneously enacting its creative dynamism in the form of our practices. The ambience is one of playful and blissful, inspiring and uncontrived expression, not of willful or forced engagement. There is no absolute meaning or purpose to human existence, no inherent goal or direction we have to progress towards. But there is this immense potential for blissful freedom that can be unleashed. Evolution has happened to an extent that not only is the universe conscious of itself through each and every sentient being including conscious human beings, but there is also now an emergence of consciousness becoming reflexively conscious of itself on a planetary scale. For we see millions going into the billions just now becoming engaged in spiritual processes and practices that purify and harmonize body-mind-energy systems; refine and elevate a conscious experience of deeper and higher dimensions of life through subtle meditative states; and dissolve ego-contractions and self-grasping to reveal and liberate consciousness in its primordial and pristine state of blissful freedom. Collectively, this constitutes a real-time mass evolution, perhaps a quantum leap, into cosmic superconsciousness where consciousness is fully and permanently conscious of itself as itself, blissful and free.

Sin and Guilt: Globalized and Internalized

We can story this trajectory of life and consciousness in many ways, mythopoetically or metaphorically or scientifically, but the reality of enlightenment is not a fantasy. It is rooted in our moment by moment, everyday experience. It extends from the ground of our prosaic experience towards the sky of unlimited freedom and bliss. Along the way, there may be obstacles of socially constructed bondages of sin, guilt, and shame. These bondages may be

present even in persons outside the Jewish tribal identity. Historical, sociocultural, and political processes have resulted in a global world order and globalized Eurocentric culture where aspirations and desires are shaped and molded by forces of Judaeo-Christian ideas and values. Not least of which is the pervasive and dominating political economy of neoliberal capitalism with beginnings in the western Industrial Revolution conjoined at the hip with the proverbial Protestant work ethic. Much of modern culture and normative practice has its roots in the Judaeo-Christian worldview, especially given the lasting reverberating impacts of western colonialism and imperialism in much of the majority world. It is not surprising that notions of sin, guilt, and shame would have seeped into collective psyche of the modern industrialized world. Couple this with Asian memes of filial piety and deferment to elders, loyalty to motherland and fidelity to rulers, as lived in the normative Confucian ethics of Chinese civilisation, we then have a potent psychosocial matrix that conduces to unwarranted upsurges of sin-, guilt-, and shame-consciousness among people who fall short of normative standards rightly or wrongly perceived. In such a case, there is a need for a remedial and therapeutic process of resolving this unnecessary and harmful sense of sin, guilt, and shame, quite apart from the profound spiritual processes and practices of contemplation (for example in Buddhist meditation systems and Indian or Tibetan tantric yoga).

Here, the biblical narrative and theological matrix of Jesus Christ as the stainless innocent “lamb of God” who vicariously “takes away the sins of the world” can play a powerful role in healing anguished psyches traumatized by internalized guilt and shame based on wrongly perceived sense of sin. In the poignant narrative of Jesus’ crucifixion and death on the cross, we can discern the mimetic reality of culturally-shaped desire and aspiration (manifesting as normative expectation and value internalized in one’s psyche) and the psychotherapeutic reality of vicarious substitutionary atonement for sin (or shortfall in meeting normative expectation and value that have been internalized) effected by an innocent victim who serves as the divine scapegoat. Taken together, these two experiential realities of mimetic normative desires and psychotherapeutic scapegoating can effectively co-contribute to the real possibility of sin-consciousness remediation and guilt/shame-consciousness dissolution. I suggest that this is indeed the case. Therefore, the power and value of the biblical theo-narrative of Jesus as incarnate Word suffering and crucified for all sinful humanity and creation lies not in its objective truth but in its subjective therapeutic efficacy. This is how I now frame and make sense of my own “personal encounter” with Jesus in 2014.

For me, nothing exists inherently, not even this mind and consciousness, let alone an empirically unverifiable and unfalsifiable deity standing outside phenomenal reality and events in the known cosmos. Yet, conceptual imputation within a consensual linguistic and semantic matrix using a shared system of measurement does make for an experientially viable and causally efficacious “reality” that works. It is in the context of such contingent imputation *qua* emptiness that we find a viable way to see through narratives and yet embrace them as creative acts of playful manifestation. Narrative then becomes a creative act of consciousness modulation in service of pure being, which is liberation. Being is thus not other than becoming and becoming not other than being. We can employ narrative and mythopoetic creativity as part and parcel of the dynamic effulgence of consciousness, in the light of full awareness and transparency devoid of inherent self-making and self-grasping. In this empty manifestive process of consciousness, love overflows.

Excursus: Living Resurrected Lives

Before I conclude, let me take a brief excursion into the notion of Jesus’ resurrection and what that might mean for evolving contemplatives like us, primordially enlightened yet experientially not quite there. The biblical narrative might speak of the resurrection of Jesus as effected by the Holy Spirit upon the will of God the Father. Be that as it may, is it not possible to see the resurrection of Jesus from another angle, as a process of creative-destruction where elemental dissolution of the psychophysical structure (Jesus’ physical and mental body) is followed by elemental emergence in a new enlightened body of intensifying light? In the Dzogchen tradition of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, such a body of light is called the rainbow body, the most sublime version of which is known as the great transference rainbow body (*jalu phowa chenpo*).^x In Tibetan oral history, there are accounts of various highly realized contemplatives who have realized and manifested the rainbow body to various degrees of dissolution. For example, there are instances of the small rainbow body where the dying contemplative dissolves partially into light leaving behind a tiny corpse the size of a few-year old toddler; or instances of the great rainbow body where the corpse has completely dissolved leaving only hair and nails. These events usually take place over a period of time as the dying contemplatives withdraw into deep solitary meditation in the weeks or days prior to death. More rarely, perhaps in two or three instances throughout history, do we hear of the attainment of the great transference rainbow body where the old body dissolves completely without remainder. The Indo-Tibetan saint Padmasambhava and adept Vimalamitra are two salient cases.

In the case of the great transference rainbow body, the contemplative who has fully realized this pinnacle and ultimate state of full enlightenment is able to consciously and completely

dissolve all the elements of their old physical body fashioned by karmic energies into the primordial clear light space of pristine awareness, all this while alive. Such a contemplative does not undergo mortal death as per the rest of humanity but “dies” by dissolving into the primordial clear-light truth body (*dharmakaya*) of buddhahood, nondual from the subtlest energy or wind of that clear-light. Subsequently, a new enlightened body comprising multi-coloured rainbow light is fashioned and manifested out of the primordial ground of clear-light truth body. This rainbow body is also the emanation body (*nirmanakaya*) of the enlightened being (*buddha*). Though made of pure light, this rainbow body can appear as a flesh, blood, and bone body identical to an unenlightened mortal body except that it has the “miraculous” power to disappear at will, traverse through walls, soar through space and time, manifest in multiple places at one time, and even manifest as other life forms (such as various animals or plants or non-human sentient beings in alternate dimensions) or even as inanimate objects (such as books, tables, carpets, water, food etc.) in order to benefit and awaken sentient beings trapped in the cosmic cycle of suffering. In this sense, we can view Jesus as the prototypical instance of the great transference rainbow body that models for us the resurrection potential we all possess to equally manifest the rainbow body at full enlightenment.

Coming back to Jesus, I see the narrative of his resurrection as a possible case of the great transference rainbow body but with a slight twist. For Jesus, following the gospel accounts, it appears that he was already “dead” rather than “dying” by the time he was removed from the cross upon which he was crucified. This may indeed be so but not in the ordinary sense of death as we know it. Unlike the Tibetan examples, Jesus did not have luxury of time and place to prepare for his death in deep solitary meditation. But he needed to effect the dissolution and resurrection process in his own unique way. I think it is eminently possible that for Jesus, his “death” experience on the cross was a case of the deepest level of meditation where all his life energies have fully dissolved into clear light in a fully conscious way, such that all vital signs have gone and external observers would quite easily pronounce his state then as one of “death.” But his death was unlike an ordinary person’s death, in that his was a conscious dissolution albeit rapidly accomplished while a deluded ordinary being would be dying in fear followed by unconsciousness. Following his entombment for two or so days, the entire structure of the old body was completely dissolved into primordial clear-light space of the truth body, even as all the essential elements of matter (earth, water, fire, air, space) and mind (gross and subtle minds and their concomitant energies/winds) were fully transmuted into clear-light. Hence, on the third day, Jesus re-rose as a resurrected being in his new great transference rainbow body replete with all its powers and capabilities. We now know of this as the resurrection body of Jesus Christ. And it is a

potential that lies within all of us, as sentient human beings capable of evolving and maturing into full enlightenment. This potential which is also our primordial ground of pristine awareness is elegantly termed buddha-nature. Perhaps we can read this buddha-nature as the “Christ in us, the hope of glory.”

Hence, illuminated by this profound view of death and its hidden potentials, we can better appreciate the deeper dimensions of our lives here on earth. Moment by moment, there is the potential to awaken to our resurrection potential, which in a sense is already available as a reality to us. This reality is the reality of our primordial nature as empty transparent clear-light consciousness — pristine awareness — nondual from primordial energy, our inner buddha and divine image of Christ. Can we be knowingly awake to this resurrection possibility and reality and live our lives with pure intentionality, recognizing our true nature which is the nature of who we really are and then reverting to our “original face before we are born” in egoless enquiry and quiet surrender with a heart full of love? In this paradigm of the cosmotheandric Christ enjoining us to contemplative evolution and uncontrived enlightenment, I would say that it definitely evokes an “Amen” from me.

Conclusion: An Alternative Imaginary

In conclusion, this essay has extended a reflective and interrogative critique of mainline biblical notions of sin, guilt, shame and their corollary need for substitutionary redemptive atonement by an ontologically separate creator God-incarnate acting as a human being in creation to effect post-mortem entry into a place called heaven. It critiques these notions as unwarranted and unnecessary citing logical, moral, and explanatory problems in their underlying assumptions. In place of these notions, this essay proposes an alternative imaginary and discourse of a cosmotheandric God and alternative mechanisms for the causal efficacy of “substitutionary redemptive atonement” in terms of mimetic, psychodynamic, and therapeutic theories.

It further espouses the alternative empirically-attested vision of spiritual evolution and uncontrived enlightenment in terms of full liberation of consciousness from its apparent limitations, indivisible from and co-extensive with infinite happiness that is blissful freedom. On this trajectory of evolution and enlightenment, what is needed is an empirically verifiable, theoretically and practically rigorous, clear and comprehensive, precise and profound, inspirational and illuminating path of spiritual practice comprising contemplative science, processes, and technology. All of these alternative ideas and discourses are ultimately seen and known by insight as empty of inherent existence, contingent on conceptual imputation within a shared matrix of language, conception, and

measurement system. And emptiness is not a belief or dogma but a heuristic and a fact — a plain fact to be realized for oneself by inquiring into the actual nature of experience to its innermost depths and dimensions.

But even if one is to reflexively critique this alternative imaginary as a meta-narrative in its own right, it is nonetheless an open imaginary that is unafraid to continually readjust and reconstruct itself given its conceptual pliancy derived from the space of sheer contingency and thus emptiness. New empirical findings and fresh logical excavations are more than welcomed in this empty transparent adventure of intellect, intuition, and spirit. This journey of inquiry into truth has no end, like an endless river. Even as it merges into the ocean, the ocean itself is fathomless. Where does it end or begin? Do we dare to embark upon this oceanic adventure, open to the mystery of unknowing? I hope so.

Soli deo gloria. Sarva mangalam. 阿弥陀佛.

ⁱ For a cogent fascinating account of the evolution of God-belief in the Abrahamic faiths, see Karen Armstrong (1993). *A History of God. From Abraham to the Present: The 4000-Year Quest for God*. Great Britain: William Heinemann Ltd.

ⁱⁱ See for example Armstrong, p.21-33 for an account of the origins and early history of *Yahweh* identified with *El* as the God of the Jewish people.

ⁱⁱⁱ Armstrong, p. 21.

^{iv} Armstrong, p. 27.

^v Armstrong, p. 28.

^{vi} Armstrong, p. 29.

^{vii} For an excellent scholarly coverage of Girard's mimetic theory, see Wolfgang Palaver (2013). *Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory*. Translated by Gabirel Borrud. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press.

^{viii} For source of original quotation, see *Letting Go of God*, performance aired on Public Radio International, 2006. CD available at http://www.juliasweeney.com/letting_go_mini/index.html; Internet.

^{ix} The notion of infinite happiness or bliss as being the fundamental propensity of sentient beings is attributed to Shrii Shrii Anandamurti (Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar) whose seminal treatise of *Ananda Sutram* expounds this very idea.

^x For a detailed study on the rainbow body with reference to Christian thinking, see Francis V. Tiso (2016). *Rainbow Body and Resurrection: Spiritual Attainment, the Dissolution of the Material Body, and the Case of Khenpo A Cho*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books.