



## “He Is Our Peace”<sup>1</sup>

*His name will be called  
“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”  
— Isaiah 9:6, RSV.<sup>2</sup>*

BEFORE THERE WAS a created universe, there was the ultimate relationality of the Godhead. The One God existed as the threefold relationality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is therefore Three as One and One as Three.<sup>3</sup> The manifestation of relationality is known as “otherness.”<sup>4</sup> For example, when the Scriptures represent a seraph as crying “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3), the angel is in fact crying in Hebrew, “*Kaddosh, kaddosh, kaddosh!*” In English this threefold exclamation means “Other, other, other!”<sup>5</sup> The One God is ultimate, threefold Otherness.

“In the beginning” (Genesis 1:1) the threefold Otherness of God, known in Hebrew as *Elohim* (plural), determined to create in the image of the Creator’s own Otherness. In the course of Creation, God therefore created mankind (male and female) “in his own image” (Genesis 1:26, 27) — in the image of a Relationality, an

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Otherness that cannot be possessed. And when he had created mankind, God rested on the “seventh day” (Genesis 2:1). What does it mean for God to complete Creation with the emergence of mankind and then rest with that Creation?

There are various interpretations and explanations given. . . . [O]ne . . . is built upon the recognition that the Hebrew word, the verb “to swear a covenant,” is literally built upon the Hebrew term “to seven oneself.” I remember back in Hebrew class in seminary, the Hebrew professor giving out a vocabulary list and I saw the word, “to swear a covenant,” and then there was a comma or “to seven oneself.” I raised my hand and said, “Professor Huggenberger, which is it? Is it to swear a covenant or is it to seven oneself?” And he said, “Well look, the verb to swear a covenant is built upon the number seven.” . . . [T]hat explains why God’s creation is depicted in seven days,

because what is God doing in the act of creating the cosmos? He's swearing a covenant to his world. He's not just master. We're not just slaves. He's not just creator and we're creatures. That's true, but it doesn't go far enough. If he had stopped on the sixth day, we would be creatures, slaves and private property [possessions] of God. But he went on and blessed the seventh day and took a rest and invited us into that rest because that represents the covenant relationship that he establishes with his creation. . . .

When God creates in seven days, he creates a house. He builds himself a home that he can move into so that he can dwell in our midst as a father, not just a creator. So we are not just creatures; we are his children.<sup>6</sup>

## The "Fall"

In Creation, God granted those whom he had made "in his own image" the radical freedom to accept or reject "otherness." History testifies that, in the exercise of freedom, mankind chose to reject *otherness* in order to achieve *possession*. Mankind thus determined not

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to be a creature to the Creator, a slave to the Master, or even a child in God's family, but to possess God himself (see Genesis 3). As the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, asked, "Is it not true that by definition the other is my enemy and my 'original sin' . . . ?"<sup>7</sup> For mankind otherness became the adversary. Relationality and resultant relationships became the "original sin."

Because of the will to possess, mankind denied the very reality of all otherness, be it referential, outer or social, or inner reflective otherness.<sup>8,9</sup> Only the imagined possession of an uncreated substance, essence or "ousia" — sometimes called "soul," "spirit" or "divine spark" — was thought to constitute true reality. Thus, reality was assumed to be "essential" rather than covenantal or relational. It was presumed that human reality was derived from the possession of some pre-existent, self-authorizing, self-governing, autonomous wave, pulse or particle rather than the manifestation of created, relational otherness.

## Consequences

There were baleful consequences to defining human reality as the possession of some solitary, autonomous essence. There was the social exclusion of others, the political and systematic dispossession of others, and the religious alienation of others from divinity. Yet the individual alone could not satisfactorily accomplish this exclusion, dispossession and alienation of others. Thus, those who saw themselves as "like" or "similar" acted as groups to either possess or remove the "unlike" or "dissimilar" — that is, otherness.

**Mythology.** After the "Fall" every closed society imagined that its god(s) had risen above and apart from Creation and then radiated or emanated downward to possess certain privileged ones through the indwelling of the divine substance, essence or

“ousia.” This unique possession of uncreated divinity had to be maintained at all costs, since it alone would assure continued existence. Each society therefore organized itself *socially* to exclude all others. Each society also organized itself *politically*, under law and order, to violently dispossess and exterminate all others. And finally, each society organized itself *religiously* to invoke its god(s) for protection against the reciprocal violence of all others. This protection was typically invoked through sacrificial violence designed to appease the god(s) of the society. It was on these foundations that the ancient imperial civilizations emerged and dominated.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the late Bronze Age (ca. 1200 BCE), however, violence had either destroyed or threatened to destroy the existing cultures and civilizations.<sup>11</sup> It was concluded that the gods above had become so rapaciously possessive that nothing and no one were secure. In this setting mankind desperately searched for new approaches to deal with the enemy — the other.

**Philosophy.** The Western world finally determined to resolve the violence of the mythical gods by redefining deity itself. Thus, beginning in Greece, the gods were redefined as unapproachable, immovable and impassible. This was intended to prevent the gods from engaging in their mythological predations against humanity. Some philosophers restricted the gods to the sky *above*. Other philosophers believed that the gods could only be found *below* in the chaotic “ground of all being.” Still other philosophers saw the gods as silently present *in* everyone and everything (panentheism) or *as* everyone and everything (pantheism). The Gnostics (“knowers”) even claimed that the true gods had been imprisoned in and possessed by the created order at Creation.

Regardless of where philosophers located deity, they agreed that the gods consisted of a primal essence and could only manifest themselves in the minds of mankind through such possessive modes as consciousness, ideas, thoughts, words, energy and reason. Furthermore, it was believed that, ultimately, the manifest essence of the uncreated gods would return upward or downward, inward or outward, to the original divine oneness and thus abandon the profane order of Creation itself.

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However, this philosophic effort to avoid violence toward and from the enemy proved to be a delusion. The “other” still remained the enemy and our “original sin.” As a result, such philosophic civilizations as Greece and Rome, which emerged before the common era (BCE), remained committed to social exclusion. They remained committed to the body politic and to the predatory violence of war, dispossession and enslavement against/of the “enemy.” And they retained the sacrificial aspect of religion designed to prevent reciprocal violence from the enemy. Such exclusionary violence not only constituted the history of the great philosophic empires. Ultimately, this violence resulted in their inevitable decline and fall.

## Monotheisms

Finally, from the ashes of ancient philosophy, there rose the phoenix of three mature monotheistic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each claimed to possess or be possessed by one supreme and universal God. Each believed that it was destined to possess the entire world. The success of this possessive global outreach was seen as inevitable because of the power and presence of the One Supreme God. Furthermore, those who persistently refused to be possessed by God were viewed as subject to dispossession, exclusion and termination as the enemy — the other. As an added advantage over the other monotheisms, Christianity believed that it was covered by the sacrificial blood of God’s own Son, shielding it from reciprocal violence of the enemy “other.” Christianity thus possessed both ultimate power and immunity. And as Lord Acton (1834-1902) observed, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”<sup>12</sup>

In the face of the enemy “other,” all three monotheistic religions — but especially Christianity — used the body politic and the “ministry” of violence against demons, apostates and irreconcilable opponents. For nearly two millennia Christianity in particular has demonstrated an infamous intolerance, animosity and exclusion toward the other.

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Whole continents have been soaked with the blood of the enemy through the violence of rack and pinion, noose, fiery bier, the Crusades and Inquisition, colonial imperialism, the pogroms, the Holocaust, and other horrific genocides.

Eventually, the possessive *mythology* of the monotheistic religions received enough exposure that a reversion to *philosophy* became evident in the emergence of modern movements. These included such movements as the Renaissance, humanism, the Enlightenment, and Marxism. But again and again, the “other” remained the enemy — an enemy that was repeatedly dispossessed by unfettered violence.

## Postmodern World

Now that the world is fully capable of suicidal global violence, there is not only a growing recognition that the mythology of traditional monotheism is dead. There is also a growing awareness that philosophy and humanism are dead as well. In their place mankind has begun to ponder two polar options.

**New Age Movement.** On one hand, the New Age movement is desperately scraping the dustbin of such defeated and discarded notions as pantheism, panentheism, Gnosticism and atheism — all involving mankind’s supposed possession of divinity. Claiming to abandon hierarchical or vertical domination and violence, the advocates of such notions attempt to promote the democratic, horizontal possession of their own uncreated divinity. Nevertheless, because they remain committed to *possession*, they inevitably remain committed to the abuse and elimination of their

enemy — *otherness*. Moreover, because they are committed to the supposed ultimate reality of their own uncreated divinity, they are inevitably committed to the termination of what is regarded as the “fallen” created order.

**Repentance of Christianity.** On the other hand, a spirit of repentance has begun to permeate ecumenical Christianity at this time of crisis. With this repentance there is an emerging return to the covenantal (relational) truth first revealed to patriarchal Judaism and preserved in the scriptural canon. There also is a return to the true God — YHWH — who himself constituted the covenant. There is thus a return to the One who covenantally created the universe, the world and humanity — the One who proceeded to “seven” himself by covenantally resting with mankind as his own family.

### Covenantal Truth and the Christ Event

At last, the time has come to recover the genesis truths of the covenant. Throughout the patriarchal era God renewed his covenant with Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, calling them into covenantal fellowship with himself. Then, in the wilderness of Midian, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Here he used “the causative form of the verb ‘to be’” to declare himself as YHWH. “It is . . . as though YHWH said, ‘I am still becoming who I will become’” (Exodus 3:14).<sup>13-16</sup> Following this theophany, YHWH led his people out of Egypt to the foot of Mount Sinai. His constant Presence was with them to protect, to succor, and to instruct in the moral and ethical principles essential to fellowship with “otherness.” YHWH as the Relational Presence of Otherness nullified all possessive religious, political and social structures.<sup>17</sup>

However, in the time that followed, the chosen people failed to grasp the significance of the divine Covenantal Presence. They failed to understand the implicit metaphoric promises of their own tabernacle services. They failed to comprehend their own prophetic witnesses. Like the nations around them, they regarded the “other” as their enemy. They constructed their own social, political and religious power structures as walls between themselves and others, isolating themselves from others and, whenever possible, eliminating others through sacralized violence.

In the setting of the chosen people’s final decision to regard “otherness” as the enemy, the fullness of time arrived (see Galatians 4:4) and God himself came to reveal that “otherness” is not the enemy but the Savior, Creator and Friend of all. This revelation occurred in what has been called the “Christ event.” Yet the Christ event has been profoundly misunderstood and distorted. The true “historical Jesus” was not simply an illiterate, itinerant Jewish peasant-philosopher. He was not merely a revolutionary liberator. He was not just a prophet, priest or king. Nor was he just a rabbinical scholar, teacher or preacher. He was not an anointed (Messianic) man destined to restore the Temple, Jerusalem and the chosen people to their anticipated global status. He was not even a blood sacrifice to atone for the sins of the human race.

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Jesus (*Yeshua* = “YHWH saves”<sup>18</sup>) was no less than the human manifestation of YHWH — a manifestation long before and repeatedly promised. The covenantal God himself invaded the created cosmos to complete the work of Creation, making his eternal resting place with the created order and with mankind.<sup>19</sup> In the Christ event the Godhead covenantally determined to “seven” itself with mankind. Furthermore, the Godhead chose to “seven” itself with the chosen people — those who, despite their failure to understand, had long held the truth of the covenant over the error of possession. For God to thus join Creation was a declaration that the created order — long regarded as profane, frail, contingent and disposable, eventually to be extinguished in order to achieve cosmic oneness — was not to be terminated but transformed. The Christ event was YHWH’s own act of final self-abandonment (*kenosis*) in which the Godhead left its self-existent divinity and entered into full relationship with the created order and humanity. And all this so that God and mankind might enjoy eternal and mutual fellowship and friendship — God with mankind, mankind with God, and mankind with fellow mankind. Because of the Christ event, the “other” is no longer the enemy. Rather, the “other” is the friend (see John 15:15).

Yes, there was a baby born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger, but this baby was the human manifestation of YHWH. Yes, a carpenter’s son grew up in the village of Nazareth and traveled to Jerusalem for Passover, but this son was the human manifestation of YHWH. Indeed, the anointed Jesus recruited disciples and pursued his loving ministry, but this was the manifest ministry of YHWH. Finally, Jesus was apprehended, tried and crucified on the charge of blasphemy — for at least implicitly claiming the “Unnamable Name” of YHWH — but that trial and execution were the trial and execution of the human manifestation of YHWH. The totality of the Godhead hung on the cross of Golgotha. The totality of the Godhead was slain as the final sacrificial act of Creation on Friday.<sup>20</sup> The totality of the Godhead rested in the tomb to “seven” itself with all mankind. And on the third day Jesus rose from the tomb as the manifestation of the Human One, and that One as Three.

The humanized Godhead will forever rest with Creation. The created order is not profane, contingent, expendable. Rather, time and space and history have become the theater for all further actions of the Triune Human One. Those actions will finally, eternally and irrevocably conquer the violence of possession and dispossession toward “otherness.” They will eternally replace the violence of sacrifice.

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In the Christ event the Godhead did not possess Creation nor was it possessed by Creation. Rather, the Godhead was present with, for and to Creation — to all “others.” In the Christ event the Godhead participated in Creation and achieved an eternal, irrevocable covenantal relationship with Creation in history. He “has broken down the dividing wall of hostility [*m’chitzah*]” (Ephesians 2:14, RSV). His Presence was, is and will be the end of all possessive and dispossessive exclusion, power structures and violence. YHWH/Adonai, therefore, is our Peace.<sup>21</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. Ephesians 2:14.
2. The term “The Name” or “Ha-Shem” is a “euphemism for God” and hence is “Y-H-V-H.” — David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament: A Translation of the New Testament That Expresses Its Jewishness* (Jerusalem and Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1989), p. 365.
3. See “Full Disclosure,” *Outlook* (Prequel 1999.11).
4. See “The ‘Other’ Question,” *Outlook* (July/August 2004, originally published as a January-March 2000 prequel to subsequent online *Outlook* articles and therefore not duplicated as an online *Outlook* prequel).
5. See Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 41.
6. Scott Hahn, “Salvation History: One Holy Family,” at [zuserver2.star.ucl.ac.uk/~vgg/rc/aplgtc/hahn/m2/slvhst1.html](http://zuserver2.star.ucl.ac.uk/~vgg/rc/aplgtc/hahn/m2/slvhst1.html).
7. Quoted in John Zizoulas, “Communion and Otherness,” at [www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/liturgics/john\\_zizioulas\\_communion\\_otherness.html](http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/liturgics/john_zizioulas_communion_otherness.html).
8. See J. Allan Cheyne and Donato Tarulli, “Dialogue, Difference and Voice in the Zone of Proximal Development,” at [www.researchgate.net/publication/227441377\\_Dialogue\\_Difference\\_and\\_Voice\\_in\\_the\\_Zone\\_of\\_Proximal\\_Development](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/227441377_Dialogue_Difference_and_Voice_in_the_Zone_of_Proximal_Development).
9. “Everyone talks about alienation. But the worst alienation is not to be dispossessed by the other but to be dispossessed of the other, that is to say to have to produce the other in his absence, and thus to be continuously referred back to oneself and to one’s image. . . . In fact, the paradoxical limit of alienation is to take oneself as a focal point [*comme point de mire*], as an object of care, of desire, of suffering, and of communication.” — Jean Baudrillard, “Plastic Surgery for the Other,” at [cttheory.net/cttheory\\_wp/plastic-surgery-for-the-other/](http://cttheory.net/cttheory_wp/plastic-surgery-for-the-other/).
10. See Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1997).
11. See George E. Mendenhall, “The Suzerainty Treaty Structure: Thirty Years Later,” in Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss and John W. Welch, eds., *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 85-100.
12. John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1980), p. 615.
13. “As the causative form of the verb ‘to be,’ Yahweh means He Who Creates (Brings Into Being).” — *Britannica Online*, s.v. “Moses: Years and deeds: The formative Years: Moses in Midian,” at [www.britannica.com/biography/Moses-Hebrew-prophet/Years-and-deeds#ref12588](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Moses-Hebrew-prophet/Years-and-deeds#ref12588).

14. "I am still becoming who I will become." — Bernard J. Lee, *The Future Church of 140 BCE: A Hidden Revolution* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1995), p. 40.
15. "Many scholars believe that the most proper meaning may be 'He Brings into Existence Whatever Exists' (Yahweh-Asher-Yahweh)." — *Britannica Online*, s.v. "Yahweh," at [www.britannica.com/topic/Yahweh](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Yahweh).
16. See R. Kendall Soulen, "YHWH the Triune God," *Modern Theology* 51, no. 1 (January 1999): 25-54.
17. "The Sinai covenant . . . marked the beginnings of a systematic recognition that the well-being of a community cannot be based merely upon socially organized force, nor can the political power structure be regarded, as in ancient pagan states, as the manifestation of the divine, transcendent order of the universe." — *Britannica Online*, s.v. "Covenant: The origin and development of biblical covenants: Judaism: The covenant at Sinai," at [www.britannica.com/topic/covenant-religion/The-origin-and-development-of-biblical-covenants-Judaism#ref34048](http://www.britannica.com/topic/covenant-religion/The-origin-and-development-of-biblical-covenants-Judaism#ref34048).
18. "Etymologically the name *Yeshua*' is a contraction of the Hebrew name *Y'hoshua*' (English 'Joshua'), which means 'YHVH saves.'" — David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament* (Jerusalem: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 4.
19. See Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*: A Review Essay" (*Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (2000): 99-101).
20. "Any sacrifice is, in turn, the repetition of the act of Creation . . ." — Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 11.
21. ". . . [T]he word '*Adonai*' had, out of respect, been substituted . . . for God's personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yud-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as 'YHVH,' 'Yahweh' and 'Jehovah.'" — Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 4.