

**The Inescapable God**

“... we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter” Isa 28:15

*Part 2.4***An Inescapable Reality**

The foundation of any worldview is its view of origins. What a person accepts as ultimate will shape everything else. The biblical worldview is grounded in its doctrine of creation, which, in contrast to naturalism’s irrational and indifferent universe, has explanatory power for a world in which *rationality* and *responsibility* exist. It supplies two crucial pre-conditions for such a world:

*First*, ultimate reality has its ground of being not in the mindless realm of matter, but in the infinite rationality of the personal<sup>1</sup> Triune God who is the Creator and Governor of all that is. God was “In the beginning” (Gen 1:1); that is, before time and space ever was, God existed. While beyond human comprehension and experience, it is a categorical proposition that the material universe is not self-originating or self-existent, but is derivative, dependent and determined by God. It draws a distinction between the being of God – the uncreated, eternal triune Person (Ps 90:2; 103:17; Isa 40:28) – and the temporal world that exists by his command (Gen 1:3; Ps 33:9; Heb 11:13; 1:3). God is transcendent—a different order of being to all created things. He alone is self-contained, self-sufficient, and self-consistent. He is therefore not contained, changed, or limited by his creation. Rather “all things serve him”, manifesting his wisdom, holiness, righteousness and power (Ps 119:91; Acts 17; Rev 4:11).

While transcendent, God is also immanent; he is not distant from his world. As the Creator-God he governs the cosmos and history according to his own will. In contrast to naturalism’s impersonal chance universe, denying it an ultimate purpose by which all things cohere, God’s mind and purpose provides the unifying source directing all things. His triune nature determines a necessary and meaningful connection between all facts, events, conditions and people in creation; a world of ‘unity-in-diversity’ where the multiplicity of created things have their proper definition and meaning in relation to God. He is the final authority in all interpretation of the facts of this time-space world. Every aspect of history, every moment of time, and every atom of creation move according to God’s purpose by his personal government; for “[he is] God, and there is no other; there is none like [him], declaring the end from the beginning... saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ ... I have purposed, and I will do it.” (Isa 46:9-11).

God’s all-wise and all-powerful counsel necessarily comprehends all things: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps 24:1). As the Creator he is the Lawgiver, governing the cosmos – the *natural* order (the physical world) and the *moral* order (human history) – by his purposive law. This means that the universe is not an impersonal closed system. God’s laws, natural and moral, are expressions of the absolute goodness of his person and purpose—his wisdom, holiness and righteousness in action. Thus the universe is totally personal, moral, and meaningful. Wherever man faces any fact in creation, he is face to face with the personal God. There is no morally or religiously neutral corner of the universe to escape from him (Ps 139:7-12). Rather there is an *inescapable reality* that is confronted when man turns from God’s order. Just as man does not determine the physical laws, such as gravity, but is subject to them *for his good*, so also man does not determine the moral laws, but is also subject to them, *for his good* (Deut 6:24). To refuse God’s law, as the way of *life* (Lev 18:5), is not to escape it, but to experience its consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to God as a personal being, in philosophical terminology, refers to “a conscious agent with the capacity to think, feel, choose, and act—in contrast to an unconscious principle or substance that operates by blind autonomic forces (such as the forces of nature). The existence of personal beings constitutes evidence that they were created by a Personal God, not by any non-personal cause.” Nancy Pearcey, *Finding Truth: 5 Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism and Other God Substitutes*, (CO: David C Cook, 2015), 29.

*Second*, and consequently, man is God's creature. He is dependent on and determined by God. He can only relate to God and the world on God's terms. The determinative factor for understanding man's distinct nature and purpose within the created order is that he is made in the image of God (Gen 1:27). While man shares an affinity and interdependency with the natural world, formed from the earth to live harmoniously in a vibrant eco-system (Gen 2:7), man is uniquely created to relate to God as a personal being, a rational and moral agent. It is on this basis alone that human consciousness and free will are not reduced to irrational illusions. In contrast to naturalism, man is not an impersonal product of chance, evolving from non-rational organisms; rather the entire fabric of man's being is intentionally constituted to know God and his world and embody his moral character (Rom 2:15). Man, made in God's image, can be sure that his mind corresponds rationally to his Creator – albeit on a creaturely level – and rationally to the world around him. Hence the reality of God is not just a 'possibility', he is "ontologically and rationally necessary" to explain the human experience.<sup>2</sup> Man's knowledge and freedom, in antithesis to autonomous man, is not found in escape from God's order but in coherence with it—in living how God has created him to function. It is a creaturely freedom. Therefore while man has genuine agency, having the capacity to choose to obey or disobey God's order, he can nevertheless not escape the divine sanctions resulting from those choices.

Further, while man is not free to determine his own nature, he is also not a victim to environmental factors. God made man in his image "to have dominion" over the earth, under God's rule (Gen 1:26). Hence while man is not supreme, he has been given delegated authority and responsibility for his environment. God creates man, in his image, to live in terms of an *inescapable purpose*—to serve and glorify God through his moral governance of this earth. This purpose is practical and concrete. It is not realised in escape from the responsibilities of the real world, but by fully inhabiting it: to "be fruitful and multiply and *fill* the earth and *subdue* it" (Gen 1:26-28). It is a twofold mandate to develop the *social* world, through families, education, governments, laws, the arts, etc., and cultivate the *natural* world, through agriculture, infrastructure, science, technology, etc. This cultural directive is basic to man's purpose. All human endeavour, whether familial, political, educational, judicial, economic, scientific, ecological or otherwise, reflect man's purpose to "fill the earth and subdue it". Man is purposed to produce and protect the earth, cultivating a world that embodies God's righteous government (Gen 2:15).

This basic nature and purpose mean that man is revelatory of God in all that he is and does, whether he chooses to be or not. Hence man's problem is not *intellectual* – that is, that he is ignorant of God – it is *moral*. Faced inescapably with God's purpose, hard-wired in his own being, man seeks 'to be like god', determining reality on his own terms. While Adam and Eve's representative disobedience morally corrupted mankind, biasing man's intellect and will in a trajectory away from God, it did not destroy man's inherent nature or purpose. It simply perverted its direction away from the God-orientated goal for establishing the government of God on earth, toward the humanistic-orientated goal for building the government of man. Humanistic man inescapably carries out his mandate to govern the earth. However, he does so in moral enmity against God and in intellectual denial of his design, inevitably perverting, misconstruing, and exploiting his mandate. Even so, the status of human life is not removed from its dependence upon God; the terms of the relationship are changed from blessing, ensuing from obedience, to judgment, issuing from disobedience (Eph 2:3). Man cannot escape God and his law. He is either a law-keeper or a law-breaker. In refusing to be subject to God and his law for his highest good (as the way of life) man has consequently been subjected to its judgment and its sanction of death (Gen 2:17; Deut 30:15, 19; Rom 6:23).

Thus contrary to naturalism, not even death provides an escape from the moral universe and its consequences: "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Heb 9:27). As the Creator and Lawgiver, God is also the Judge of all the earth, having "fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness" and set to rights all things (Act 17:31; Jas 4:12; Isa 33:22). As the sum of all moral perfection – the source and standard for justice – God cannot look equally on kindness and cruelty. The impeachable character of God makes judgment a necessity. Made in the image of God, man is not ignorant of God's laws. He is conditioned to know his Creator in the world around him and within his own humanness. Far from demonstrating a vindictive and capricious God

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<sup>2</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 727. "Ontology", derived from the Greek word for being, is the philosophical study of the nature of being, becoming, existence or reality, and the basic categories of being and their relations.

who punishes man unfairly, the ultimate judgment of man upholds the fact of a moral and personal universe. Therefore, in contrast to naturalism, justice and man's sense of right and wrong is not an illusion. This is *good news*—the *confident hope* that, in the midst of a fractured world fraught and frustrated by man's injustice, God's justice will prevail. All things will ultimately be rectified. Not only will those, for example Hitler, who have perpetrated immeasurable evil and escaped judgment on this earth be held to account, but also the vast billions of people who have suffered unjustly will ultimately find justice. For God is a Just Judge who will “judge the world in righteousness ... [and] execute judgment for the peoples with equity” (Ps 9:8; 98:9).

The problem is therefore not with God's law and his prosecution of justice. Rather, the problem is that all people alike have fallen short of God's irreproachable ethical standard and are subject to God's judgment, which is clearly “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). In the face of this clear revelation through creation and conscience, man suppresses this knowledge to escape his moral culpability—thus becoming his own judge and ‘justifier’, the determiner of right and wrong. As the ancient Latin poet Lucretius confessed in his introduction to *De Rerum Natura*, materialism appealed to him because it appeared to prove that death ends everything, relieving all fear of punishment for sins.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, modern man may have appeared to escape his ultimate judgment *conceptually*, either through his philosophical naturalism or existential theology, but the *reality* remains that all people function within a moral and personal universe created and governed by God. Made in the image of God, all people inescapably think and reason in terms of that image, “Even when their epistemological arguments repudiate [that reality].”<sup>4</sup> Man is totally accountable:

No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:13

All man's intellectual quests and reasonings, his attitudes and actions, things seen and those hidden, in the conduct of his life are always and everywhere moral and personal responses to God.

Man lives in an inescapably revelatory environment.

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<sup>3</sup> Referred to in David Gooding, and John Lennox, *Key Biblical Concepts*. (Coleraine, Ireland: Myrtlefield, 2013), 44-45

<sup>4</sup> Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*, 436.