

The Mind of God

About one hundred years ago, an English dramatist, George Bernard Shaw, wrote a drama he called "Pygmalion." It is best known to people at the end of the 20th century by the name of "My Fair Lady." You have probably seen a stage show or a film rendition of "My Fair Lady." You are very much aware of the relationship that exists between the two principle characters: Professor Harry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle. Most of you will probably have remembered a scene in which the two characters are together and where Professor Higgins laments: "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"

It has been a number of years now since "My Fair Lady" was set to music, and it appeared on the stage. But with a challenge like that, it can't go unanswered! A few decades later a book appeared: "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus," to try and portray the differences between men and women: why a woman can't be like a man!

In talking of Mars and Venus, we are looking at the gods that were once worshipped by people. Mars was the Roman god of war, as represented by a Dutch master painter some centuries later. You might see the Renaissance view of Venus as the quintessential shampoo/conditioner girl from the end of the 20th century - not quite the way that the Romans saw them! We see casts and bronzes from archaeology and antiquity. Mars now *sans* his sword or spear, but still a man clad in armour, and a diaphanous Venus, sylph-like, almost ready to be blown away by the wind.

Humanity has spent a lot of time trying to plumb the differences between the various aspects of the human mind. We talk about 'y' and 'x'. We talk about "left brain" and "right brain." We talk about ying and yang.

Do you realise something? Very seldom does humanity give much in the way of time to understanding the far greater differences that exist between the mind of man and the mind of His Creator?

I would like to spend some time today looking at this aspect of understanding the mind of God. Can we understand the mind of God? And if so, how do we go about it?

Paul tells us:

Romans 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

He sets up a contrast for us between two mindsets: one that is carnal, that is concerned with the things of this life, and the other, a spiritual mindset. One leads to death. The other leads to life and peace.

Then he makes a very impressive statement, one that each and every one of us are no doubt aware of:

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

The natural state of humanity as we exist today, without another ingredient, is one of hostility towards the idea of God. We are against it. Paul talks about it being enmity. It's an enemy of the things of God.

8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

He talks about the state of mankind, and his lack of a relationship with God and what it is based upon.

I went to a conference recently. One of the presenters gave a rather interesting hand-out which, to a certain extent, sums up the relationship of man with God.

"Here are three wise men. After months of intensive effort, Professor Mortzman and his

fellow theologians finally succeeded in putting God in a box."

That's the way in which humanity sees God: something that can be reduced down; something that can be quantified, and put in a box. You might say it's a humorous way of looking at what the apostle Paul was saying in Romans 8. The carnal mind is hostile towards God.

On the other hand, the Psalmist tells us that there is another relationship that leads us to a totally different result:

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom ...

A certain relationship with God, one which is based on great respect and awe, leads to wisdom.

10 ... A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

So on the one hand we have those who have a mind which is at enmity to God, and on the other hand, those who have a great reverence for God, who start to understand, to understand the things of God and the mind of God.

When it comes to understanding God, unlearning false knowledge is oftentimes more difficult than learning new material. Mr Armstrong talked about this in terms of teaching: how that the most difficult thing in learning is the disposing and discarding of the false knowledge that exists.

The other day, as a result of an article that appeared on the *Vision* web-site about Christmas, a man wrote in and said:

"Does it really matter? The whole world knows that Jesus Christ wasn't born on 25th December, so why worry?"

"I'm just happy that I can celebrate Christ's birth. You can't say it's a lie to promulgate 25th December as Christ's birthday, when the whole world knows He wasn't born then. You people are just majoring in the minors."

But whether you want to argue over the aspect of keeping Christ' birthday on 25th December or any other day, the question is, should you really be keeping Christ's birthday?

The world thinks, "Yes, you should."

God says: "No, you don't."

It's a question of whose mind you wish to be in harmony with - that of this world, or that of God.

So the aspect of unlearning false knowledge can oftentimes be a very major undertaking; for the brain to literally be re-programmed to a new level of understanding. Without God's Holy Spirit that is very difficult.

The problem is oftentimes coupled with knowing the right questions to ask. People ask from the wrong point of reference. They don't have that understanding.

Let's have a look at some comparative thought patterns that cloud the issue for us in terms of understanding the mind of God.

In this day and age very few people are not influenced by the Western world. In some of the remote areas of Kenya there are Internet Cafés! There are motor cars and computers etc., but poverty as well. It is quite amazing the way in which the developments of the Western world have influenced and reached into some of the most impoverished parts of the world.

Two outlooks have shaped Western views and the Western world. They are often referred to in a number of

ways. The first one which we will touch upon today, is that of Hebraic instead of the Hellenistic. Hebraic is that which is derived from the Bible. Hellenistic is that which is derived from the Hellenistic civilisation that flowered after the time of Alexander the Great. It didn't flower based on nothing. It was based upon what had gone before - on the civilisation of the Hellenes, upon the philosophers.

This is oftentimes expressed in terms of the prophetic versus the philosophic. There is another way in which we can express it, which perhaps brings it a little closer to home: the question of revelation versus reason.

These are ways in which the Western world has been shaped. As you will appreciate, the Western world has been shaped by one of these more so than the other. Yet there is an underlying influence by one as opposed to the other.

Let's switch it around. I will use the term "Hellenistic" rather than "Hellene" simply because when the God of Israel, and the people of Israel came into contact with the Greek civilisation of the world, it was the Hellenistic civilisation.

I think one other point needs to be made, as well. This is not to elevate the Hebrew as opposed to the Greek, because ultimately speaking, as you will come to realise, what we are talking about is what has been preserved in the Hebrew. What man did that? It really was the work of God!

It's not the Greeks who have to bear the consequence of all this because our society today is as much Hellenistic in its outlook as society was in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, or Julius Caesar, or any of the other Caesars.

You might say that "Hellenistic" and "Hebraic" are metaphors for the mind of man cut off from God on the one hand, and for the revelation of God on the other. The Hellenistic world worshipped reason. Its whole cause for being was reason. Reason was its god!

On the other hand, in terms of the Bible, it's not the reason of man that is important. It's not the reason of the prophets that is important. It's what God says that is so important. It is His revelation!

Throughout God's word we see time and time again: "And the word of the Eternal came to so and so ... and He said ..."

Who said? The Eternal said, not Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea or anyone else. It was what the Eternal was saying through them. That was what was of importance.

In terms of reason, what was of paramount importance to the society? It was the mind: what the mind could reason.

On the other hand, for revelation, what was of importance? From whom the revelation came! From whom did it come? Did it come from God, or did it come from an idol? If it came from an idol it should have been ignored.

If it came from God, it was to be revered.

The mind gave rise to virtue. We all think of virtue as being a very honourable undertaking. The New Testament talks of virtue, but it talks of it in a different way. Let's talk about virtue for a moment in terms of the Hellenistic world.

Let me read to you from a book that was published on this subject in the 1950s by a well-known theologian in this country. He said:

"The basic fallacy of the Greek philosophers was to regard the rational faculty as the source of virtue ..."

He goes on and describes the way in which it became a fallacy:

"... due to their failure to recognise the ability of the self to use its reason for its own ends."

Society talks of virtue these days. Do we ever stop and think of virtue as being self-centred? That's an interesting point to stop and consider. The mind of humanity driven by reason to create its own virtues can still remain self-centred and self-focused.

The idea of virtue was to create something, a life, that was good for "me" - not necessarily "you"! So we have this fallacy of the philosophers. The rational faculty became the source of virtue and they didn't realise that reason and the rational faculty can lead to self-delusion. They didn't understand that.

On the other hand, God makes it abundantly clear that we are subject to delusion - unless we subject our minds to Him. We have Scriptures like:

***Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.***

We can deceive ourselves. Generations of humanity have deceived themselves.

In terms of knowledge, Mr Armstrong commented that there are three kinds of knowledge required for humanity to live successfully, to accomplish their God-intended role. People had to know how to relate to God. They had to know how to relate to others, and they had to know how to deal with the physical world of which they were part.

Philosophy has had a place within society to inform all three of those types of knowledge: God, others and the world. Yet the apostle Paul, like the rest of the apostles, made some very negative statements about philosophy.

***Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit,
according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not
according to Christ.***

He said you can be cheated out of your salvation! You can be cheated out of your relationship with God and out of your relationship with others that God wants you to have - by empty deceit, and through philosophy. He said we have to be aware of this.

Paul was speaking on this very subject I am talking about in 1st Corinthians 2. He talked about how the Greeks seek after wisdom. For them, wisdom was the ultimate pursuit of the rational mind.

He said that on the other hand, the Jews seek after a sign. He said: "We speak Christ crucified: to the Greeks foolishness, and to the Jews it was something of an absurdity." That wasn't the sign they were looking for.

The apostle Paul was recognising the challenge that existed in the world because of the way in which the world looked at itself.

Does philosophy have a place? It does, because philosophy, ultimately speaking, deals with the physical aspects of life. No matter how much Plato, Aristotle, Socrates and others wanted to deal with abstracts, their abstracts always ended up in a very physical world, because something flowed from their philosophy. From philosophy flowed logic, and from logic flowed mathematics.

Today, we reap the benefit of all those Greek mathematicians. We have computers. We have video projectors. We have cars. There is hardly anyone in this room whose employment is not, in some way, indebted to the Greek philosophers. You use a computer. The rules of logic that your computer uses, date back to the times of Aristotle.

If you work with your hands in carpentry or metalwork you owe much to Pythagoras, Euclid, and people who helped define the areas of plain geometry.

Ultimately speaking, in the physical world, everything we do dates back to, and is built upon, the work of the philosophers. People used to say that you couldn't divide one by zero, that it was impossible. The answer was infinity - until some philosopher came up with something called calculus, and we learned how to divide one by zero. The end result was that we got to the moon. Using calculus and other higher ends of mathematics they now hope to go to Mars, and, who knows, Jupiter?

In other words, the philosophers had a place in helping inform the way in which we deal with physical things. They came to understand mathematics, but as the apostle Paul said, they certainly had absolutely nothing to do with a relationship with God. The result of the work of the philosophers is technology. We owe that to the philosophers. It's handy. It's very beneficial for us.

But the work of the philosophers is not the basis for relations with one another or with God! Earlier this week, Mr Hulme, not knowing what I was speaking about today, sent me a book review entitled: "The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason." The reviewer starts by saying:

"Classical Greek writers, an argumentative group if ever there was one, agreed on one thing: political justice could be achieved in the city state through the use of unaided human reason."

This man goes on to talk about the way in which the world lost its association with reason, the way in which the Greeks looked at it, and expresses a desire to get it back again. "Let's get back to it." There is a desire to have that.

So very clearly, in terms of God's word, the philosophical outlook on life is not the way to have a relationship with God. It is a way in which you can have a relationship with physical things, but even that physical relationship needs to be tempered by something else.

Colossians 2:5 ... rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

***6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,
7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith ...***

This is what Paul prefaces his comment about philosophy with. Continuing, he says:

***7 ... as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.
8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.***

What is it that philosophy is compared to in Paul's mind? What is it that Paul sees as being essential to understand the mind of God?

How do you relate to God and others? Is it by reason? I think we can answer that, and say categorically, no! It's not the reason of the philosophers! Is it not rather repentance, faith and commitment? Is that not what Paul is talking about here? He is talking about repentance, faith and commitment!

Faith becomes the essential ingredient. How do you say it? Faith is not rational! It doesn't equate within a rational mind, or a mind that is driven by rationality! How do you, for instance, take 10% of your salary and tithe, and then take another 10% of your salary for keeping the Holy Days? Is it rational? Yet God says if we do that He will bless us. He makes a promise.

Is healing and asking God to intervene in our lives, and to remove afflictions from us, a rational approach? Not as far as the Greeks were concerned, in any shape or form.

What about the resurrection? Is the resurrection rational? No! That is why the Greeks held to the idea of an immortal soul, because they could understand that rationally! But God doesn't want us to believe in an immortal soul. He wants us to believe in His ability to intervene and do what may seem impossible to our mind. "I am able to resurrect you, no matter how dead you might be."

People have rational arguments about it. Once in Africa when we were having a public Bible lecture, the aspect of the resurrection came up, and at the end of it, a man got up and said: "I am from such-and-such a country, and in our country we have lots of oil wells. Oftentimes they have drilled cemeteries to get to that oil. How will those people be resurrected?"

The person giving the lecture said to me afterwards: "I had been waiting to quote this Scripture to someone for years." He simply said: "Let's go to 1st Corinthians 15 where the apostle Paul said:

***1 Corinthians 15:36 (King James Version) Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:
37 And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be ...***

So he explained to the man that the body which is buried in the grave is not going to be the body that is resurrected. God can create and re-create a new body, whether it be physical or whether it be spiritual, as the particular resurrection needs.

But the resurrection is not a rational aspect of understanding, in terms of the philosophical world, yet it's part of the relationship that God wishes to have with us! God doesn't see our physical life as being the end of it. He wants to resurrect us and have a relationship with us which is going to be an eternal relationship.

We can also talk of the Kingdom of God. God talks of events of the world tomorrow that defy the economic rationale of our world today. How does a ploughman overtake a reaper? How is that possible? It means that you have such surpluses that the poor old farmer doesn't make any money! There is going to be so much food available, that there will not be food shortages.

God's kingdom is not driven and not controlled by the rationale of the human mind. It is controlled by the mind of God which is a far greater mind than anything that we have. We can have an appreciation of it.

Our relationship with God has to be based upon repentance, faith and commitment: on intangibles! As Paul said:

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is (that He exists), and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

It doesn't matter how rational that may seem or not. God is able to reward those who diligently seek Him in a very profound way. The problem is, we live in a world, which as the former writer said:

"The Greek tradition is still preferred to the Hebraic because it displays a neater coherence of the world, of the self, and God.

It's an easier way for us to see it.

But I think there is also another factor that he does not appreciate. It requires God's intervention to really see it in the way the prophets wrote it! It requires a calling for one's mind to be opened.

This particular person, although a theologian, forgot, as the apostle Paul said, that the minds of humanity are blinded at this point in time. In some ways, rationally, it may work out that people see a neater coherence of the world, of the self and of God. But they see it that way because their minds are blinded. God isn't letting them see the rest of the picture at this point in time.

The world, the self and God are all contained within continuities of reason. They are all reduced to reason. They can all be put in a box, and handled that way.

Let us understand a little bit about God. In Exodus 3, *Yahweh* appeared to Moses in the burning bush. A little later we will look at the way in which *Yahweh* revealed Himself to Moses - and not just to Moses, but to Pharaoh and to the children of Israel. Is there something we can learn, that we can appreciate about God, from that? I believe there is.

But before we do that, let's ask ourselves, what is God's self description? How does God describe Himself?

You might say that the very first way in which God describes Himself in Genesis 1:1 is as a Creator.

But if one goes through the creation account, that is not the only way in which He reveals Himself. He reveals Himself as a Creator, but He also reveals Himself as an Instructor. In Genesis 1, verses 26-28, He gives instructions to Adam and Eve as to the way they are to live.

Let's pick up another aspect:

***Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.
2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.
3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.***

So here is a reference to the creation of the Sabbath. What does the creation of the Sabbath say about God? Who was the Sabbath created for? The Sabbath is very important for us. Jesus Christ said:

***Mark 2:27 ... "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.
28 "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."***

So the Sabbath was part of God's creation for the benefit of the creation! But if we look at Genesis 2, what do we notice? How was the Sabbath created? It was created by the Creator subjecting Himself to His own creation by resting! In other words, here is a Creator who wishes to involve Himself in what He has created. He does not want to be detached! He does not want to be removed from His creation as the philosophers said.

To put it in a philosophical term, God entered into time and history! He created time for the benefit of the creation.

So we have a Creator who subjects Himself to His creation, and in the second chapter of the Bible, He sets an example for us to follow, of how we are to conduct ourselves, and how we are to guide our lives.

But more than that, He also provides behaviour on His part that is echoed throughout the Bible. What is throughout the Bible? It is God's desire to interact with His creation to the point of coming as a human being and offering His life for the salvation of humanity; a God unlike any god that the Greeks ever worshipped, a God unlike any god that the Greeks ever knew, because they all existed outside of time and history. They have no place whatsoever in time and history.

So God is defined in the first instance as being a Creator, but He is also defined as being a God who is willing to come within His creation, to share with His created. That is quite a profound statement about God.

It's very important for us because the pagan world saw God at best, as a first cause. If you take them back far enough, they agree there has to be a first cause.

We have people in this world, even scientists, who are prepared to accept that view. Stephen Hawking, who is known for his book, "A Brief History of Time," is such a man. Apparently he is an absolutely brilliant man, yet he sees himself as being a deist - a man who accepts the fact that there is probably a God out there somewhere who set it all in operation, and set up the laws - "but He has nothing to do with us."

That's the whole concept of what deism is about: that God has nothing to do with us.

David Stern, commenting on Hebrews 11:6 made this comment:

"This idea rules out deism; the idea that God started the universe, and now it runs by itself without His involvement.

Genesis 2 tells us that God wants to be intimately involved with His creation. He is not a detached God! We can't be deists! We have to have another view of God. We have to have an understanding and appreciation of God other than Someone who is far off.

From the beginning of their revelation in Genesis 1:1, the members of the God family have sought to reveal themselves as involved with the created. That's what they are concerned about. This is a different God than the rest of the world serves.

How does the Book end? It starts with the Eternal God keeping the Sabbath, and it ends (in Revelation 21 and 22) with the Father and the Son being with the creation - all together. That's a very different view of the world.

The apostle Paul talked about God's desire for His people:

Romans 9:22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

God has exercised patience with His creation. Why?

23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

God has a great future for humanity, and He takes a very intimate, a very patient, and a very caring approach to it. He is not a petulant God who, like Mars or any of the other gods, could have thrown out a few thunderbolts and destroyed it, and said: "I'm going to start all over again."

No. He preserved it, for His ultimate glory, and for the glory of His creation.

In Exodus 19, the children of Israel are gathered before the Eternal at Mount Sinai just before the Day of Pentecost. The Eternal said to them:

Exodus 19:4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians ...

"You've seen how I've intervened on your behalf. I can rescue people!"

4 ... and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

He said: "I want you to be a treasure of mine. I want you to be something that I can appreciate. And not only that, I can use you as an intermediary between Myself and the rest of humanity ..."

6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' ...

"You are going to be an intermediary, to bring the rest of My creation back to Me."

6 ... These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

This is why the mind of God is so very important for us to appreciate because Israel never succeeded in that, and the challenge has fallen to those whom God has called to be part of His Church! In our own way, we are called to be a kingdom of priests, as intermediaries between God and the rest of humanity, to convey the good news of God's desire and God's plan for them.

God says: "You've seen the miraculous events I have done. They are not rational."

Yet it is so fascinating because people are always seeking to understand how these things took place. "How did these plagues of Egypt occur? How did the Red Sea open?"

In the commentaries, we see one attempt after another to rationalise the mind of God! But God is not restrained by human reason. He is not restrained by the mind of man!

The way in which God delivered Israel, brought them to the wilderness and gave to them a covenant, is stupendous. It is beyond the comprehension of the human mind to take a group of slaves, and seek to use them to convey a great message to the rest of humanity!

The same is being done through us! As Paul said, we are the weak of the world. God has not chosen the powerful. He has not chosen the people of great intellect. He has not chosen the people of great persuasive power or great charisma. But He has chosen us - each and every one of us - to do His work, with the aid of His Holy Spirit.

Does "Christianity" in the larger sense understand this? Of course not. What is the religious response to Exodus 20?

- "It's legalism, to be avoided."
- "It's buying favour with God."
- "It's earning salvation."

People write it off. Yet what did God say?

Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying:

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"This is what I have done for you!"

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

"You are not to get into idolatry."

What follows? What we refer to as the Ten Commandments are the least human response that is possible for what God has done. Oftentimes we follow the Protestant line when we talk about the Ten Commandments. We say: "What's the first commandment?"

We answer: "You shall have no other gods before Me (verse 3)."

But that's not the way God said it! It leaves out the MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT of the Ten Commandments! The Ten Commandments exist BECAUSE of what God has already done for us, and they are a RESPONSE for what God has already done for us. They are a response to God, in recognition and appreciation of what He has already done.

So how is God revealed? God is revealed to us firstly by His involvement in our lives - by the fact that He wants to share, He wants to help. He wants to intervene!

But what happens? Who stops Him intervening? Most times it is we ourselves. We stand in the way because we don't have the faith we should have, or we don't have the level of repentance that we should have, or we don't have the level of commitment that we should have in terms of God. You might say it's the constant lesson of Scripture.

Let me share with you a couple of verses from John's gospel. At the Passover, Jesus realised the sense of anguish that the disciples were about to experience. Talking about His own betrayal and death, He said:

John 14:18 "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

"I'm still going to be here with you. I'm going to continue this relationship. You don't need to fear about not having a relationship with Me. I will still be here. I will still be able to have that relationship."

He continued by saying:

23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

"We will tabernacle together with him." So this is not just Jesus Christ, but the Father also! "We will have a relationship together." That is the way in which God desires to be known, by the relationship that He has.

Let's now go to Exodus 3 and ask ourselves: how does *Yahweh* reveal Himself to Moses, so that Moses can reveal Him to the leaders of Israel, and to Pharaoh? Did He reveal Himself as the Creator? No, and probably for good reason - because the Egyptians had a god of creation as well. Did anyone know very much about him? Probably not. But that was not the way in which God chose to reveal Himself to Moses at that time.

Exodus 3:13 Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"

14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

15 Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.'

16 "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt;

How is God revealing Himself to Moses? How is He revealing Himself to the children of Israel? How was He to be revealed to Pharaoh? As "the God of the fathers"! This was the Being that intervened with Abraham, that did irrational things with both Abraham and Sarah's bodies, and gave them a child, when they were past child-bearing age!

This was the God of Isaac, who intervened and helped Isaac and provided children for Rebekah when she could not have children!

This is the God who intervened for Jacob, who appeared with Jacob at the brook of Jabbok.

These people had a relationship with God, and God said: "I want you to understand Me in terms of the relationship that I desire to have with you. I want to relate to you." It's a very powerful statement.

14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" ...

That is an expression from which we derive the name, "*Yahweh*". Commentators have used a lot of ink to try to define the name, "*Yahweh*." What does it really mean? What is the real meaning of that name? How can we understand it?

How is the Hebrew expression, *Eheveh asher Eheveh*, to be understood? Do you understand it philosophically? In fact, most translations of the Bible understand it philosophically. Most commentators understand it philosophically. They don't understand it in the way in which God desired it to be understood.

It is a matter of God's self-description. Consider the translations of this word *Yahweh* by two prominent Jewish writers. These people lived at the end of the 11th century, and the beginning of the 12th century: a long time ago. One desired to become a Greek philosopher. The other simply sought to understand the God of the Scriptures. His interest was that of the Scriptures.

One of the writers was Maimonides who is perhaps known to posterity for writing, "A Guide to the Perplexed." This book leaves you even more perplexed by the time you have finished reading it! It doesn't help in any way whatsoever, but apparently it's brilliant, so he must be a philosopher, a little like Wittgenstein and his discussions about words. Even the philosophers aren't quite sure they understand what he is saying by the time he has finished. Maimonides was of the same school.

Halevi was another Jewish scholar who did not wish to espouse the Greek ideals of rationale etc.

Let's look at it from Maimonides' point of view to start with. Maimonides, like Philo, tried to match the Bible to philosophy. He wanted to syncretize the two; make the two equal to one another. He wanted to understand the Bible through philosophy.

So he translated that expression *Eheyeh asher Eheyeh* as being, "I am the Being whose existence is not contingent on anything. I am the First Cause." I guess you can express it as: "I am the self-existent One."

You might say the very term "the Eternal" that we have used within the Church over decades, really owes more to Maimonides' interpretation, than the rest of Exodus 3:14-15. It focuses upon the self-sufficiency of God. "I'm okay. I don't need anyone else."

Halevi on the other hand, had a very different description of those Hebrew words. His description is: "I will be present for you in the future as I have been in the past." He translates those three words in terms of what the rest of Exodus 3:14-16 is saying: that God wants to be present with us! He wants to be involved in our lives! He wants to help us! He wants to strengthen us! He wants to fight our battles for us! He wants to help us overcome this world, just as He overcame this world!

In a longer expression, Halevi would describe Yahweh as being:

"... the One who is present, who will be present with you when you seek Me. So let them not seek any greater proof than My being found together with them."

If you want a proof of God, the ultimate proof of God is that God can be with you! You don't have to get around it rationally in any other way. You don't have to create some great statement as people in Europe did in the 12th and 13th centuries - trying to come about with the ultimate proof - the one that "knocks all the philosophers for six," so that the philosophers have no argument with which they can discount the existence of God.

Theologians in the 12th and 13th century got themselves into all sorts of convoluted arguments to try to prove God's existence. Halevi, living a little before their time, said: "It's not necessary. The only proof you need of God's existence is the fact that He wants to be with you - if you seek Him." Seeking Him becomes the operative theme.

Halevi presented a view of the name of God which was very, very different to that of Maimonides: worlds apart, or, even better still, minds apart!

You might ask yourself, how do we read the Bible? Do we read the Bible as a philosopher would? Or do we read it as one who seeks to understand the mind of God, and realise that it can be understood? I am sure the latter is the case.

Do we read the Bible as a philosopher or, on the other hand, as seeking to have a relationship with the living God who wishes to be involved in our lives? That is the God we serve!

We have just looked at one aspect. We have touched upon one thing in terms of the mind of God. In terms of what is paramount, is it reason or revelation? Clearly it is revelation. The very existence of the revelation shows that God wants to have a relationship with us.

But it's not just reason that the Western world has built its culture upon. There are many other philosophical

ideals that they have used to distance themselves from God. Humanity's idea of the creation is diametrically opposed to God's view of the creation as revealed through God's word.

We don't have enough time today to look at the creation and the view of time. How does God view time as opposed to how the philosophers viewed time? All these things are so totally different. Yet these ideas shape and form the society of which we are a part. They shape our relationships one with the other. They shape our relationship with God if we are not careful.

Earlier, we looked at the aspect of Mars and Jupiter. We also looked at the aspect of virtue. But virtue, being based on reason, can be self-centred. If we look at the way in which humanity has gone about trying to create means whereby men and women can have a relationship together, we have to say: "Yes, there are differences. But are the ways in which the differences are presented really God-centred, or are they really self-centred? What is the basis of it?"

The basis of everything in our lives has to be the basis of outgoing concern. It has to be the basis of God's care for us. That has to be our concern for one another. Yes, we need to recognise the differences that may exist between a male and a female. We should be aware of those; not from the point of view of self-centredness, but from outgoing concern for the other person.

The same should be true in terms of our technology. We don't have time to deal with this to any great extent, but look at the way in which so much of our technology is for very destructive ends, rather than constructive ends. Technology can be a wonderful servant, but it can also be a very, very hard master, as this nation in the Western world is finding out now. Having developed miniaturised nuclear devices, now people live with great fear of a nuclear device falling into the hand of a terrorist and being used to hold a nation to ransom.

What is required overall is the mind of God; the mind of God which is one that is outgoing, that seeks to build a relationship, not to destroy, that seeks to give and not to get.

Notice a very telling Scripture in terms of this world:

***Isaiah 55:8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.***

What does Isaiah preface that with?

6 Seek the LORD while He may be found ...

The responsibility for each and every one of us is to seek the Eternal, the One who wishes to be found by us, to seek to understand His mind, and make His mind the paramount importance within our lives; a mind which will give itself, that will share, that will seek the best for others, rather than something that is self-centred and inward looking.

... Peter Nathan
17 Dec 03

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