

Bible study **1**

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05/08/2023

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Where is God ?

John chapter 1, verses 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Dear friends,

Where is God?

The whole world has already asked itself that question. It is a question which preoccupies the whole world. Ever since signs of human culture existed, we also find evidence that man is looking for a transcendent being in the past, the future and the present, in his environment but also in the entire Universe, a being not limited by frontiers of time, space or spirituality, in short, who 'goes beyond', who is truly 'transcendent'.

In times of crisis, such as now, that call becomes louder, notably on the part of people who don't normally ask to see God.

I am trying to understand this text which John wrote close to 2000 years ago, in our current world. Does it give us an answer today to this question?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

1. Astonishment

As soon as we take our first breath, or even before that, we discover the world, and we are never done discovering it. The world is full of mysteries. The immensity of the night sky amazes us, our representation of the unimaginable. We never stop seeing it and never see it enough. Knowing about the birth of the universe via the big bang, from a state of pure energy which has been constantly transforming itself into matter and giving birth to new stars and causing them to disappear for the last 13.8 billion years. This causes us to ask questions about the inventor and the creator, about the time before the big bang or maybe when time didn't exist. We human beings have discovered the laws of the universe which introduce order into the chaos which was there originally and make the universe what it is, and we ask ourselves who decided on the laws which we are now discovering.

What is the logos or 'word' through which all which was made has been made? The word, the light in the darkness?

Physicists like Albert Einstein or Werner Heisenberg, who were very influential in the field of research on the origin of the universe with the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics are filled with amazement and respect when faced with the harmony of what has happened.

In the hypothesis of a 'big bang', an infinitely concentrated energy was the point of departure. For an unknown reason, a part of that energy, in a fraction of a second, transformed itself into matter - hydrogen atoms - through which the universe was formed. It is probably just before this that **time** also started. The black holes, the galaxies and the stars appear and disappear constantly. What was happening before this new spatio-temporal era? And will there be anything after it?

St John talks of logos, that is to say, on the spiritual level: of spoken word, of dialogue but also of consciousness or of information, so of an infinitely broad knowledge, and by analogy, on the physical level, of an amount and concentration of energy just as unimaginable as the spiritual logos. Einstein and the quantum physicists who followed him teach us to live with the fact that energy is matter, and conversely matter is energy, depending on what the physicist who is researching wants to measure. And in the spiritual dimension? Software? St John says simply: it is all logos and physicists working nowadays prove him right: the order and the laws had to exist so that the universe and we humans could be born of a mass of energy, that is to say, become observable and measurable.

Arnold Benz, emeritus astrophysicist at the federal polytechnic school in Zurich, who is particularly interested in doing research into the sun, has just written a short book entitled 'Astronomical psalms.' I would like to read you one of those psalms:

Fine tuning :

Why is the world the way it is?

The *gravitational constant* determines,
the speed with which an apple falls to the ground.

This constant cannot be deduced.

It is astonishing that it has the value it does.

If it were larger,

the density of the centre of the stars would increase.

Energy would be dissipated more quickly.
The stars would have developed more rapidly,
The Sun would already have burnt out before our time.

It is different for the *weak nuclear force*:
If it were smaller by a fifth,
The source of nuclear energy would not flow out
In the heart of the Sun.
The sun would have been reduced to a ball of cold glass
Long ago.

If the *strong nuclear force* was
double its value,
hydrogen would transform itself
more rapidly into helium.
The nuclear reactor inside the Sun
Would heat up a trillion times more.
The Sun would have been consumed long ago.

At least a dozen constants in physics
With precise values
Seem to be finely tuned
Otherwise
The universe would have evolved differently.
Life as we know it on Earth,
Would not be possible.

So, a miracle?

I do not know.
But it fits with the idea,
that a wise creator created
The cosmos which functions so marvellously well.
A reason to marvel since the dawn of time.

** This is what Arnold Benz thinks.*

God as inventor and creator, a hypothesis thought to be plausible for astrophysicists as well.
A first revelation of God?

2. Life, development, and disappearance, evil

So, 4.5 billion years ago, our sun and the planets existed as incandescent globes. Some gaseous, others liquid. Only one planet developed the conditions necessary for the appearance of the first forms of life, 3.5 billion years ago, unicellular organisms, cyanobacteria which produce oxygen. 500 million years ago the first multicellular beings appeared.

Life on our Earth is, as far as we know, possibly unique in the universe. Until now, we have no evidence that life has appeared elsewhere. Thanks to oxygen, the laws of physics allowed the first cells to transform into multicellular organisms, into plants, animals, and human beings.

St John tells us where life comes from:

"In him (the word) was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

For St John, life was in the Logos, so it was the light of mankind which shone in the darkness. Bernard Rüedi helped me a lot to understand this: the word, this light, is consciousness and information, in other words it connects the informant to the person being informed, it puts them in relationship to each other, gives a shape to the relationship, so creates something, to be precise, life: information which creates harmony, and that harmony is called relationship. Without it, there is no life.

In relationship, that information creating harmony becomes love: incarnate in God's Son, it comes on earth as Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus Christ, God becomes a person embodying love, relationship, and consciousness. As people, we find Him in the love that we bear for each other and in so much more: all is created by the same thing, that is to say by love, by relationship in the spiritual dimension.

Let us remember that matter is created by a maximal compression of energy. An intense relationship between the elemental particles/waves in the physical dimension.

Mankind is charged with giving names to all creatures (Genesis 2 verses 19-20), that is to say to establish a consciously loving and creative relationship with all of Creation and created beings as well as with mankind. But, God has also given to man the freedom to do or to act according to his own judgement. Love is not a command otherwise it wouldn't be authentic. According to Genesis, Adam and Eve should have done this work in paradise, but they wanted to be able to decide themselves between good and evil.

And if we look at what man has ended up doing with creation, we understand with what dark consciousness we live in this world. Cain kills Abel rather than entering into a relationship with him, talking to him and asking him for advice. Would Cain have decided what to do with his wheat and his vegetables in as arbitrary a manner as when he decided what to do to his brother? We don't know. God asks him where his brother is. Cain doesn't reply. And how does God react? Wouldn't it be right to kill Cain as well? No, he takes him under his personal protection despite his crime. He doesn't punish him by killing him but: the land soaked in his brother's blood will no longer yield him anything. Cain cannot treat nature in an autocratic manner any longer.

Where are we today when it comes to the earth and the way industrialised man takes advantage of nature and the weakest of his fellow men? We know the effects of the 'green revolution' in India

and other neighbouring countries: the yield increased hugely for a certain time after which the lands which had been left drained and spent yield very little more than before and the environment has been poisoned. The earth evidently will not permit unlimited exploitation by mankind. Will we find God in the place where we take care of the weakest, of nature, of creation? There where love becomes real instead of domination.

Is God present none the less with another form of justice? Recent studies show that people who live lovingly, who respect the ten commandments, have statistically fewer health problems than those who have less respect and concern for others, for nature, for creation and for themselves. In his book 'Das Gesetz des Ausgleichs' (The law of balance), the doctor Johannes Huber gives some interesting examples. It is, for example, incontrovertible that parents, children, and grand-children benefit health-wise from intact family relationships. Scientific studies have shown that people who lie and cheat are more susceptible to being stressed, to being unable to sleep, to developing hypertension and cardiac problems. Murderers, including those who have pushed people to commit suicide via social media, can suffer greatly because of what they have done, as much psychologically as physically.

It immediately makes me think of the Jesus' saying in Matthew 25, separating people to his right and to his left and reproaching some; 'I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I needed clothes and you didn't clothe me etc' and no-one could remember when or where it had happened.....or in Luke 6 verse 27: Love your enemies, do good and lend without asking to be repaid, and you will receive a rich reward: you will become children of the Most High. (Capitalism ?). On the other hand, Jesus says that sin is not the cause of disease. In any case, we cannot deduce from this a law for God's justice. It is different from ours.

And what does St John say: *'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.'*

To be God's children therefore means being the children of love, of conscience (*tr. or consciousness – the same word in French*), of the word; We come back to the foundations of Médecine de la Personne, which are based on love, on mutual sharing through dialogue, according to Buber: in *authentic conversation, the relation I-thou*. Independently of all church, religion, or vision of the world, we conclude that the person who lives in love follows, consciously or subconsciously, Jesus' example and in doing so receives gifts, those of being the child of God.

Love as a foundation for creation and for life, the second manifestation of God?

3. Praying, living

And so, what does it mean to pray?

To pray is start to resonate with God. The German professor of sociology at Léna, Hartmut Rosa, is doing research into the phenomena of resonance in society.

Resonance is the process between people and groups of people in which there are :

- firstly listening, that is to say paying attention to the *call*; I am aware of a call which is important to me;
- then my *involuntary reaction* as I am affected psychologically and physically: palpitations, sweating, increased respiratory rate;

- thirdly *transformation* by integration of the new elements into my thinking and into my life.
- The crucial thing about this is that this process *is not voluntary*, that is to say it is not the product of my will, but it unfolds as a dialogue between two beings.

Prayer, this resonance with God, is therefore primarily *listening and silence* rather than speech and questioning, becoming aware of what is being said to me or being communicated to me by some other means. This is what Tournier talked about in his short book 'A listening ear.'

It is above all God who talks during prayer.

A third way in which God can show himself.

Finally, a few personal reflections.

Last year, in May, Ruth my wife died after 45 years of marriage, from breast cancer which she had lived with patiently for many years. During Ruth's illness, I asked myself why she had to die so early. I had imagined our life in retirement very differently. And where is the God who would allow that? Of course, I reproached myself for having made the diagnosis too late. Ruth never blamed me. With the children we were able to have a beautiful farewell ceremony with friends and family and I slowly realised to what degree the love of our children, our grand-children, my friends and family in the larger sense were sustaining me. Ruth had always said to me that she had had a beautiful life and that she could die happy. She did not ask why and didn't apportion blame. That knowledge also gave me strength. It was there that I felt the presence of God.

We read together Bernard Rüedi's unpublished article and tried to understand together the new scientific discoveries. Ruth did not want to deepen her knowledge of quantum physics and general relativity. By contrast, it became important to her and to us both to know and to make real the presence of God as person in his creation, that is to say in all that was spiritual and of matter.

All the representations and images of Heaven and of eternity, of God as sovereign and judge, which had in some form or other always been present in Ruth since her childhood and the Catholic school in Vienna, were replaced by the love and the global harmony of the Creator, who would be waiting for her even in death when 'the angel will come to take her'. This greatly relaxed her and brought her peace.

She embodied John 16, verse 22 from Jesus' farewell sermon: '*Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no-one will take away your joy.*'

I struggled to accept this. I realised that I was tense and, on some level, stressed during her illness. I am used to containing and hiding my emotions. That came in useful during the period of suffering and of caring for her. But afterwards, there was a void and I sensed more clearly than ever the love of my children and of my grand-children, of my friends and family as the presence of God in my life. As He said to Moses? 'I am here, I am here for you.'

A purely subjective experience, but clearly perceptible. I realised anew the spiritual significance of healthy relationships.

'Ubi caritas et amor deus ibi est.' (Where charity and love are, God is there).

Faith is just as if when learning to swim, I suddenly notice that the water is **really** carrying me.