

## **Introducing My Story**

A journey into seeking out truths from an ever-growing knowledge explosion is alluring but not easy. Much labour is called for, but the outcome is gratifying: perplexity is diminished and understanding increased. Having been given a starting foundation makes it a little easier. I consider myself privileged in having been brought up in a home with a basic religious worldview that has given meaning to me and guided my young life and thinking. As I grew up and interacted with individuals and groups of similar and dissimilar worldviews, both within and outside Christian circles, I began to reflect upon the differences among these worldviews. This has led to my worldview being modified several times so as to bring it more in tune with and truer to Christian Scripture — as I understood it progressively — than with traditions. I discovered that traditional beliefs, accepted at face value and learnt in a second-hand way without checking the original or quoted sources for myself cannot be fully trusted. In the process, much of what had been to me paradoxes and mysteries were resolved. In their place, I found a worldview that is sensible, internally consistent and satisfying to the mind and the heart. This is a personal journey of spiritual growth and understanding in this modern (or postmodern) scientific and spiritual environment.

In searching for an understanding of the nature of reality, and to bring about utmost consistency and coherence to my own beliefs, I tried to be honestly self-critical, being aware that any predisposing psychological bias could lead me into a line of reasoning towards a particular notion, preconceived or otherwise. In so doing I tried to find out if there was a way in which I could reliably test whether my own preconceived ideas of God and also those of others (insofar as they had an influence on my own) are sound, coherent, holistic, reverent and scriptural. In this exercise, I realised that a means was indeed available to me without my having to delve deeply into voluminous literature on the subject — a task well nigh impossible for me to do. What I had to do was to re-examine as rigorously as possible the rudimentary terms and concepts which are the presuppositions upon which the foundations of knowledge (as in theology and science) are built. In the process I discovered unrecognised “little errors at the beginning” or “little errors of the past” (to borrow a phrase or two from the late philosopher, Professor Mortimer J Adler) which might have contributed to and influenced

the development of these disciplines. Some of these I had been taught or simply absorbed and believed as true without much critical thought. Such “little errors” could, if left unrecognised, have prevented me from seeing the truer and broader picture of things. My own views had also had occasion to run into little wrong turns and needed redirection. In this search I told myself to keep an open mind and to proceed on the basis of reviewing, as and when I encountered them and as fully as possible, the bases of truth-claims. None were immediately rejected as outright errors even though at first glance, they were at odds with those of my own. Keeping an open mind meant, to me, willingness to have one’s views examined and re-examined any number of times, as this is a sure way of honing them and bringing them ever closer to often elusive “ultimate truths.”

Would such an open search lead me to the possibility of becoming an agnostic or even an atheist? Would I be sceptical of all worldviews after my whole endeavour? Such questions did cross my mind and I was prepared to see where such a “venturesome” journey might lead. The prospects of agnosticism and atheism did not however appeal to me as they seem to provide the least satisfying approach to understanding life’s manifold mysteries. Living a life of scepticism is difficult for me to envisage. “The unexamined life is not worth living.” These words from the early philosopher Socrates of the pre-Christian era still make a lot of sense to me in this age. Having a meaningful worldview, however tentatively held is clearly preferable. It keeps a check on a closed or rigid mind. Nevertheless, reading book reviews and commentaries by sceptics or those with opposing views on any issue was most helpful in that it lent a hand to clearing away some cobwebs in thinking. Sceptics and atheists are not, in any event, totally free from untangled thinking. A close examination of some of their materials reveals their predisposed stand against theism. Insightful remarks on religion from sceptics or any other party can nevertheless help to show up flaws of particular aspects in a line of reasoning. Attempts to find solutions to such flaws (and solutions can be found) kept me on the side of the believers, and helped me to retain an enhanced worldview which differs not insignificantly from the traditional one I had initially been exposed to. Even though it was incomplete, I am glad to have been given this initial foundation. Thus, being fortunate enough to be able to break free from the fetters of traditional thinking, I have attempted to develop and progress in my understanding of a biblical worldview

along the lines of simple common sense and basic science. This does not mean that all things fall into place accumulatively through reasoning alone. Serendipity plays a role too, just as in the sciences. I am also fortunate in having been able to travel a long way since my early religious upbringing.

The voyage had not been altogether a smooth sailing one; it was not expected to be so. A couple of storms were encountered. One such storm was a personal crisis, which resulted in deep soul searching. This was but the natural consequence of having to make a change from entrenched thinking when confronted with newly discovered major new truths which conflict with old ones. The change undoubtedly had a reflex action or ripple effect on the relationships and fellowship which I had with dear ones (particularly my parents) who were committed to their faith. Although unspoken tensions were felt at times, attempts were luckily made by all parties to live in peace with one another. Love managed to overcome doctrinal differences. Let each one be persuaded according to his understanding. I remember the comforting words of a late uncle of mine: "If you cannot please everyone, then by all means please yourself." This advice I naturally heeded to keep my sanity and integrity. As is said, time heals. And so it did, to a large extent in my case. The other storm was the discovery among other things that when new doctrinal discoveries were brought up for discussion by one of its theologians, truth was deliberately misrepresented and suppressed by the leadership of the new organisation to which I was attached.

Jumping from the frying pan into the fire? Maybe so, but I believe with hindsight that a little roasting was good! As someone said, "toasted bread tastes better." It helped me to learn. I came out of it all still alive and, unlike those involved in the Jim Jones tragedy, unaffected in any damaging way, except for useful lessons learnt. There were some poignant encounters but I value the priceless lessons. There was no shipwreck for me. There was no total disillusionment with religion. Quite surprisingly, these events did not turn me into a sceptic, much less an atheist. Perhaps I did not try hard enough to be either. There was a brief period of uncertainty and a loss of direction in the midst of the storm. In the stillness after the storm, the sky became much clearer. On the other hand, some of my friends were not so lucky; they "switched off" from religion altogether. Their turnaround was not however unexpected. Despite

the traumas experienced, I found myself undeterred in the compelling search for truth and understanding. I acquired sharper eyes and a clearer mind – and now approach viewpoints with a tinge of “healthy scepticism”. Why did this happen? How could I know if I was or was not deceived or deluded in my old beliefs or even in the new ones? How could I know what is true? What is truth anyway? These were some of the usual questions I naturally found myself asking. What is the meaning of such encounters with faith and reason? Ironically, answers can be glimpsed from within the same Bible upon which conflicting doctrines can and have been derived by different groups of believers (large or small) who defended them sometimes almost at all costs. Such is the irony of religious faith. Sadly, the effect on the lives of believers has at times been costly.

The key problem, as I see it, lies in the claim of an organised institution that its sets of beliefs or creeds are the only true ones and there is no room for tolerance of different viewpoints. Any member who disagrees with “the church’s official teachings” is considered a heretic. Disagreement is unacceptable within such a group.

Within a given denomination or wing of Christianity, there is usually a consensus about who is a Christian and who is not. However, there is often some agreement between members of different faith groups on a common definition of “Christianity” or a “Christian.” The usual basic definition of a Christian is someone who believes in God and who also believes in the historicity of Jesus Christ, son of God, who came into the world, lived, died and resurrected, and who is his personal saviour. He also believes in divine revelation as represented by the Bible. I would like to believe that I fall within this category.

A group may insist that to be a Christian, further specific doctrines must be believed in. Another group may differ in doctrines and only a member of this group qualifies as a Christian. There are many doctrines, varying in details and nature, found among different Christian faith groups. Conflicts arise on many an occasion because of differing definitions. Whatever definition one may wish to adopt for his purpose, there is one definition given in the common Christian bible which (I believe) cuts across every definition ontologically. A Christian is someone who has the spirit of God residing in him, however much or little of Christian truths he has yet learnt in his

journey of personal growth\*<sup>1</sup>. The total collection of these spirit-indwelt persons forms what is biblically known as the “church” meaning “called-out ones” or “*ekklesia*” in Greek and known as the spiritual Body of Christ. The invisible spirit portion deposited in a true believer is what ontologically qualifies him as a member of the Body of Christ or the Church Universal. Who these persons really are, mercifully, nobody but God alone knows. He has kept this knowledge from definite access by fallible man. There is no brand mark on their foreheads. No one can see the invisible spirit deposit in a true believer except by way of its external “fruits”. Christians are exhorted to yield forth good fruits, i.e. real spirituality resulting from the indwelling of the spirit (*Gal 5:22-26*). No one it must be admitted has yet attained the desired perfect state. We would do well therefore to withhold firm judgement as to who is or is not a Christian and grant liberal acknowledgement to one who shows at least some of the “fruits of the spirit” (described as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). Any claim by an institution to be the sole “true church” is therefore inaccurate and out of place. Such organised “true churches” are at best *part of* the invisible Church Universal.

What some might insist as “doctrines essential for salvation” may not from a broader perspective be that essential. After all, as the apostle Paul said, we “know only in part” at this time. I would like to believe that there are many fellow Christians in different wings of Christianity (and individuals who are not associated with any wing at all) scattered around the world, who may or may not agree with me on some issues. It is in friendly open dialogue that we can grow in understanding and respect for one another as fellow believers. I humbly offer this thesis for evaluation by my believer friends and others who may be interested.

With the understanding of hindsight, more than 30 years after encountering some traumatic events, I can see that narrow theological views tend to, more often than not, give rise to incoherence, divisiveness and unpalatability in some way. These, among other things, are what sceptics take issue with. I have to put my own house in order if I am to share with others the coherency of my own beliefs or a worldview. It is not difficult, as I discovered, to believe in one thing and to live and act, without recognising the dichotomy, as if it is not true.

The results of my task seem to yield a possible broadest worldview which can accommodate in harmony the gems of truth which sprang from the yearnings of the human heart. Such gems can be found scattered among various faith-traditions or systems of thought — including those with which I had direct experience. Thinkers have through the centuries made numerous attempts to understand God and the nature of reality. Theology has arrived in the main with the dominant classical concepts of God. As can be seen in the writings of proponents of Process Theology (or Panentheism) and Open View Theism (also known as Free Will Theism), some of the old concepts are being challenged in recent years by modern thinkers. I have had more than half a lifetime of exposure to Bible studies and informal theology, a fourth lifetime in reading natural healing sciences and in practising homeopathic medicine, and the same amount of lifetime reflecting on the harmony and differences between these areas of studies. With these exposures and my varied experiential encounters, I believe I am reasonably entitled, if not qualified, to participate in discussions on theological issues at least for my own satisfaction and to crystallise my own thoughts. In this exercise, I reckon I have not encroached onto exclusive or restricted domains. After all, every believer who engages in reflections and study of God is a theologian, and every person who reflects on life's ultimate questions is a philosopher. Anyone who tinkers with his toys in his backyard is, even if in a small measure, a scientist.

When I find something which is satisfying I, like many others, naturally wish to put my thoughts to paper and share them with kindred spirits, believing not so much in the worthiness of my thoughts but that any ensuing interaction may help all of us to grow. Iron sharpens iron, they say, no matter how sharp (or blunt) a piece of iron may be. My studies involve largely what may be called family squabbles within the Christian fraternity, but these squabbles may not altogether be different from those of other religious communities. Attempts at resolving them may differ. Interested readers are invited to listen in. After all, many people are perhaps already quite aware of these issues. They are certainly being given a voice through the readily accessible *Internet*. I believe moreover that I have derived a moderate and sensibly broad Christian worldview to share with my readers. I do not consider myself aligned to any particular sect or “-ism” but consider myself, at any stage of growth, rather as an “open nondenominational Christian” always working towards achieving a more accurate understanding of the

yet-to-be-fully-fathomed Christian Scripture. This for me must have priority over formulated dogmas. My primary presupposition is that the Bible represents God's revelation to mankind throughout time on life's ultimate questions. It is not possible in this essay for me to go into a defence of this view. Many competent people have done this for me, and I thank them for it.

Reading some of the research work of men of renown, past and present, has been a privilege. It has given me the opportunity to enter into their labours. And, standing on the shoulders of such great men, and so honouring their work, to see perchance further afield into our common search for understanding of the ultimate source and meaning of life. What I discovered has been enormously satisfying to me. Finding missing pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of life always satisfy the spirit. What then is the broadest possible worldview which can be derived or developed from a review of initial presuppositions of theology and science, which are compatible with important aspects of religious traditions? A holistic worldview should provide a meaningful vista linking a glimpse into the most distant past (the ultimate origin of things which one can possibly deduce) and a glimpse into the most distant future (the ultimate end of things, which of necessity, one gleans from revelation). Such a panoramic view could possibly reflect all of human reality with its (past and current) differing ideologies, with all its hopes and aspirations, sufferings and joy, despair and hope. Will such a broad holistic perspective permit a harmonisation of "underlying truths" culled from the different systems of thought or religious traditions? Will this elicit a positive picture that can satisfy the deepest yearnings of the human heart?

In this essay, science and religion are taken as complementary, the former providing many answers to the "how" of things and the latter, many answers to the "why" of things. It is assumed that neither science nor religion can each alone provide a fully satisfactory solution to mankind's search for total meaning. "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." These oft-quoted words of Albert Einstein must be true. Where two views are at odds with each other, the solution frequently lies somewhere in middle territory or even somewhere beyond either territory. Occasionally, such views, especially if they are true opposites, cannot be reconciled, and that which is selected must be the one which best fits harmoniously into the broadest view or perspective seen by the honest seeker at the

time. To him, there is no controversy. It is an attempt and no less a struggle to place in position an overall coherent picture, as perceived by him, from the best of the jigsaw pieces which both science and religion have created and offer. Pieces which cannot yet be fitted together should not be discarded immediately but kept aside until such time as they can be reviewed again. They may be potential pieces of a bigger picture yet to emerge.

Many attempts have been and are being made, especially by individuals rather than institutions, to harmonise or reconcile differences in worldviews in the present era of greater openness in dialogue among proponents of different systems of thoughts. Resistance however is still encountered especially from established positions, whether in science or in religion, and it will take time for new concepts to be accepted or adjusted into the mainstream of thought. No one human person or institution by virtue of his or its inherent fallibility has a monopoly on truth, whatever may be its nature. Every seeker or believer would do well to bear this in mind. It will lessen any "shock" which he may experience as a result of discovering new truths which conflict with old ones cherished as "absolute truths." In fact, progress in the acquisition of truth can be and have been stalled by dogmas. History has shown us that many dissidents of orthodox religious thoughts of the day were stifled, if not suppressed altogether. Some of their proponents were even silenced at the stake. This may be why scientists and even some religionists believe that science and religion do not overlap and that these disciplines should be kept separate in public institutions of learning.

Nowadays, criticisms of opposing views are offered more constructively and we are more reflective of ourselves and our creeds. Few of these are admittedly infallible. Many which were once revered have now fallen by the wayside. We are on the road towards greater progress in understanding ourselves, our world and the universe. Whether or not fully understood or accurately interpreted, the "paradigm shifts" in scientific knowledge as mentioned by Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* have obviously helped, one way or another, to bring about this more congenial environment. The voice of truth need not necessarily come from statements pronounced by prominent and influential individuals or institutions. It may yet lie hidden within one's own system of thoughts as the occasional "still small voice" that nudges one to probe further



along in one's own quest. It may also be hidden in a nagging hunch that tells us when we engage in critical reflection that something in what we have inherited as truth may not be quite the whole truth. Here, we accept a guiding hand from science and from religion. The seeker of truth may travel along whichever path truth may lead him to. These may be many. There may even be paths which might be considered taboo or heretical. Past explorers never laid claim of having exhausted their enquiries along such paths. One may still hope to discover nuggets of gold around old gold mines.

Attempts to go into first principles, the roots of concepts, to review one's beliefs will necessarily yield up once-unrecognised inconsistencies in one's own "established" beliefs and adjustments have to be made to these beliefs if one is to be true to an honest pursuit of knowledge. In so doing, a person cannot be said to be trying to challenge the spiritual or scientific stalwarts of the past and present. In the spirit of humility, he attempts to look again, for the sake of his own inquisitiveness and deep personal interest, into some of the first principles, some of the very rudimentary assumptions upon which popular tenets, particularly of theology and science, are based. In so doing, he hopes to broaden his perspective on the nature of things. Culling from contributions made in the fields of natural and healing sciences and dialogues in religion and science, he wants to find, if at all possible, new perspectives which may humbly contribute in whatever small way, towards the harmonisation of concepts within theology and between theology and science. This could perhaps lend a hand to the dismantling of some barriers and provide a fresh look at things. The author's experience forces him somehow into a willingness to examine questions freely, thinking beyond restrictive dogmas. The purpose of sharing my spiritual journey with my readers is not to instruct but to engage and stimulate.

Science and theology can hold hands and forge a way forwards together. This possibility of genuine co-operation may not, at least not on the individual level, be a naïve assumption. Some institutions are already seriously involved in science and religion dialogues, others are also involved in inter religious dialogues and discussion forums. To move towards a common understanding of ultimate reality, each party must however be willing and ready to make revisions in its teachings in the light of new information or resurrected old ones re-examined under new angles of light. I have no doubt that such a

co-operative action is already working, in many minds apart from mine, towards finding a broad harmonious worldview. This will undoubtedly lead to some healing of tensions as differences (intra and extra religious conflicts) are resolved.

In the spirit of this endeavour, I submit my essay in the hope that readers will share in the same spirit of openness and humbleness of mind with which it was written. I stand to be corrected in this personal sharing of my views. Hopefully, no offence will be taken by any reader from what is said in candour. Any particular view that is contrasted with other views is offered purely to illustrate a point so as to bring sharp contrasts to particular positions into focus. Treating discussion points with gentle nuances is difficult if clarity is to be retained. No criticisms are directed against proponents of any concepts. If anything, the concepts alone are at issue. No caricatures are intended. A brainstorm approach in an open manner (including “playing the devil’s advocate”) is popular and effective among business circles. Why then, I asked myself, can this approach not be applied to religious or theological pursuits? It can, as I have found, be most helpful. I believe Christian author C S Lewis adopted such an approach in his famed *Screwtape* Letters and other writings. This essay is after all just my private thoughts. The reader engages in them no doubt at his own risk, but to do so can lead only positively to his accumulating a little more data for his own contemplation. I believe that my story is coherent, defensible and Christian. “Inference to the best explanation” seems to be the hallmark of science. Applying this worthy axiom has enlightened me in my own spiritual quest. Basically, this is one man’s search as a believer to make sense of scientific discoveries and diverse theological and philosophical interpretations which confronted him.

In my quest for a greater view of reality beyond “the God hypothesis” I saw a great sincerity behind the thoughts of many seekers of truth. I also saw many presuppositions. These have not been reviewed as thoroughly as one would have liked or had time for. Many of these had not been recognised when religious dogmas were defended. It is only in a frank and honest dialogue in a relaxed atmosphere of openness, that gems of truth will present themselves and shine forth to the credit of all dialogue partners. Attempts must be made to face issues head-on without flinching. It is all too common to react in defending one’s own beliefs when it comes to discussing or exposing them in a dialogue. Little wonder, as truth spoken is seldom pleasant

to the ears or the heart unaccustomed to receiving it. This natural inclination I have tried to overcome.

In the obstacle-ridden journey of discovering truths (and values), one must be willing to examine and re-examine long-cherished beliefs and be able to break free from them if they are found lacking. Going back to basic axioms and building (or rebuilding) from them is always a safe bet at any point in a search for understanding. My efforts may duplicate those of others and I may have discovered errors already discovered by past explorers. I nonetheless hope that undiscovered gems have been found along the same path now illuminated by improved tools including readily available commentaries and reviews of the search methods and discoveries of past explorers.

Underlying many an attempt to discover answers to searching questions raised by seekers of truth over the years, is the belief that no one has yet found all ultimate truths. If so, could it be that some of one's cherished beliefs may be errors? Any infallible dogmatism will be out of place. With this attitude, one will be the more prepared, I found, to face and embrace, without emotional hiccups, new truths discovered along one's spiritual journey. Religious tolerance will also improve appreciably. From my experiential encounters, I realised that no single group of believers has "all the truths" so to speak, no matter how advanced its knowledge of the Bible or science may be. Humility from all parties will provide the opportunity for each to extract insights from other diverse groups of believers and to learn from one another. Such interactions may even lead to a broader harmonious worldview.

The exercise of re-examining my own beliefs as vigorously as possible from first principles, the natural sciences and the Christian Scripture has opened up for me new windows to understanding which I never before realised or thought possible. I have been led over an extended period of time to understand and appreciate the real attributes of a deeply personal, loving and sovereign God. My journey led me to understand better the purpose of life. Naturally, my journey led me to re-examine the basic doctrines that I have been taught, such as the doctrines of the soul, spirit, heaven and hell, the problem of evil and the nature of God. It led me onward to understand the relationship between and the realistic meaning of the much-debated concepts of freewill, foreknowledge and predestination, and, among yet other doctrines seriously reviewed and wholesomely understood,

to more than a glimpse of the ultimate awesome destiny of all mankind. Given the nature of the topics discussed in this study, my discussions are of necessity exploratory or speculative, even controversial to some extent.

The Christian Scripture is used as the spiritual base because this is the only scripture familiar to me. Attempting to resolve issues around this base provided me with deeply meaningful enlightenment. In using this base, only the long lost original manuscripts are taken as inerrant (without errors in their original languages as divinely inspired). All Bible translations available today are not altogether perfect in that they, as recognised by Bible translators, inevitably carried over personal and denominational biases in translation and interpretation. These translations are also overlaid upon by mistakes of the early copyists and translators, not to mention deliberate attempts at modifying scriptures to fit partisan views in Christological controversies of the past. Valiant attempts have been and are being made by researchers to “restore” the Scripture as best as possible to its original intended meanings. In the current age of computers, research tools are easily available for anyone to verify (as best as possible, and better than in any bygone age) the accuracy of Bible translations. Careful explication of Scripture concordantly (looking up and comparing all verses containing the same root word or phrase) becomes necessary if a consistent, holistic and harmonious view is to be achieved. Discoveries made in the natural sciences can lend a helpful hand in this exercise.

My journey begins with a review of very basic terms like *space*, *time*, *nothing* and *something*. It proceeds to the fundamental axiom *ex nihil, nihil fit* (out of nothing, nothing can be made). This then leads logically to *Creation ex-Deo* (Creation out of God) as the beginning of enlightenment for me at least. This last concept is marvellously explanatory, reconciling and unifying. The results are presented in this book for the reader’s evaluation.

*Making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

*(Proverbs 2:2-6, RSV)*

Footnote:

*\*1. (John 6:44, Rom 8:9-10, Eph 1:13-14, 2Cor 1:22, 5:5)*