Four Aspects of the Biblical Concept of God[\*](file:///\\Users\bobjohnson\Desktop\God..#_ftn1)

Based on *Comparative Religion,*  book by Harry M. Tiebout, Jr.,

Stipes Publishing Company, Champaign, Illinois, 1963

# *The Concept of Deity*

## Four main elements in the Old Testament concept of deity, each of which is significantly different from the Eastern conception.

# 1.      God is creator and ruler of the world.

# Monotheism

# Biblical religion:  symbol is “creation”, and ruler, and owner...

the world is not god’s body...it is not his “playing” (lila)

It is an artifact.  It is not God himself, or any part of him.

**Pantheism and polytheism are impossible here.  The world is not sacred.**

The sacramental, magical, view of nature is weakened or even lost with this view.  The mystery of nature is gone.  It is a realm of inert things...not a realm of spirit.  Jahweh makes the world, like a cabinet maker.

## The scientific, engineering, technological spirit is the result in the West,

while in the East, where nature is not an object created, but rather the holy itself, science has been slow to develop.

Old Testament monotheism is an ally to science & technology.   Later, in the theology of John Calvin, nature was stripped of every shred of deity.  The scientific spirit was able to expand rapidly in Protestant countries.

The Creation Myth does not entail supernatural events and miracles.

But it does deny the absolute sufficiency of scientific explanation.

It holds that there remains an area of creativity and mystery which cannot be dispelled by science.  And, Man himself cannot be reduced to a meat machine.

Both Nature and Man are thus elevated in the Creation story beyond mere mechanisms.  God the creator establishes order in the universe (the material of science), but also holds fast to the ultimate unexplainable mystery of creation, and the importance of humanity.

# Another aspect of monotheism:  the created world is fundamentally good, and it is under his control.

(In Hinduism, the world is Maya, or illusion, and error, and pain.... escape or release from this world, from samsara, is the goal of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Western religions maintain that Life is good, the world is good, regardless of how much evil and suffering abound.  God is in control.  Salvation consists in overcoming Evil and in establishing a good life within the world.

This can be debated...Christianity’s message, for example, is that it is Heaven that counts, not this life.  All should be forsaken of a worldly nature for the sake of future salvation.

# 2.      Personal God

Biblical view of God is metaphorical:  god as a man, only bigger!  He is pictured as having a body.  But God is Spirit.

If you reject the picture of god as man with a beard, then it is hard to make sense out of Biblical idea of a personal god.

# At least these four things are intended:

1.        He is not sub-personal, cosmic force, nor is he supra-personal, as the Nirguna Brahman or the Dharma-kaya.  He is not to be pictured as a sacred object or tree, nor a pure void or pure consciousness.  Hence, it is a human being that we picture him.

2.        I-Thou relationship to God.  He listens to our prayers.  He is not some force that does not listen or hear us.  Not some power to be feared.

3.        There is design or purpose in the world.   So god is a craftsman, an artist, or a statesman.

4.        Laws of nature are the manifestation of a personal will.  Nature is not pure mechanics.  Hence, will, mind, soul are the essence of nature, and so human nature partakes of these qualities, and cannot be reduced to mechanical physics.  Man is free, as nature, the expression of god’s will, is free.  Grace and miracles are part of this “nature”.

# 3.      Moral God

God is just.  His will is the source of morality.  His ten commandments are the expression of his moral demands.

There are two main attributes of God’s moral nature:

Loving kindness, and wrath....god’s love & god’s wrath.

For modern man, god’s love means that in giving up selfishness and in following the moral and ritual laws, one feels a sense of well-being, a sense of being forgiven, and of being given a fresh start.  Also, communion with the ‘beyond’, gratitude, peace of mind, happiness of some kind.  Gratitude to this “beyond” is the essential factor.

God’s wrath:  a sense of being doomed, of being in the wrong, of being condemned for our moral violations.  This is a psycho-logical, physical, personal and national disaster that befalls us.

God is just.  Virtue is rewarded, and evil punished.  And yet, God is merciful.  The repentant is forgiven...given another start.  Justice without mercy spells doom for all.  Mercy without justice spells chaos...anything goes...all is forgiven!

God’s justice, however, transcends human moral law.  It is beyond, it is a mystery, as in Job, how God dispenses justice.  Job needs a faith in God’s “higher justice”... else it seems he is being treated as a laboratory rat.

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# 4.      Living God

Dependence of man upon god...even beyond physical death.

In most of the O.Test., death is taken to be the end...kapoot!

But in some of the last passages of the OT, the idea of the resurrection of the dead appears.

The Pharisees accepted this idea...it became important to them.  Christianity and Islam took over this idea;  later Judaism de-emphasized it.

The biblical idea of the **importance of the Individual** is here encapsulated, and at the same time, the **complete dependence of man on God.**

NB:  Greek and oriental idea of the immortality of the soul is a different, contrasting idea to this of resurrection of the dead.

Resurrection of the dead -- eternal life is not a natural power, but a gift from God.  (1)  value of physical existence and  (2)  value of individual personality is implied in this idea.

Two contrasts:  resurrection versus immortality

                                   flesh versus soul

body & personality of individual ........... flesh

egolessness (Indian), or rationality (Greek) ............  soul

“fellowship with God”:  expressed in the symbol of the covenant.

# 4 covenants:

1.        Adam & Eve              general cov’s...for all mankind

2.        Noah

3.        Abraham  (election cov.)

4.        Moses (moral cov.)

Covenants are not between equals.... God is King;  men are subjects.

Man disobeys.......his “nature” is to disobey.........

**therefore the problem of “Sin” arises....**

[\*](file:///\\Users\bobjohnson\Desktop\God..#_ftnref1) Based on *Comparative Religion,*  book by Harry M. Tiebout, Jr., Stipes Publishing Company, Champaign, Illinois, 1963