

Foreword

God without Religion

The central question within this book, and in life itself, is “What is God?” This question has baffled humankind for eons, and it will continue to defy logical understanding so long as we live with the concept that there is Heaven up above, and that God sits there judging all of humanity, punishing those who misbehave. Eminent people throughout history have tried to find logical answers to this vexing question with little success. His Holiness Gautama, The Buddha, one among many, did *tapasya* under a banyan tree for years and ultimately found that God exists within every human heart in the form of love, compassion, understanding and all positive attributes that human kind is capable of but often chooses to suppress. Perhaps, instead of espousing exclusively rational images of God, we would best serve God and one another more faithfully by remaining open to the mystery that transcends our understanding.

This book *God without Religion: Questioning Centuries of Accepted Truths*, by Sankara Saranam, is the result of many years of studying different scriptures. It is a refreshing attempt to provide humankind with a contemporary, up-dated spiritual road map which will aid us in our eternal quest in our “understanding” God.

Since the identity of God is so inscrutable (may even be considered the best kept secret in the world), and the philosophy surrounding this Power so impenetrable, religious leaders representing different religions have most often defined God in ways that raise more questions than they answer. The easiest and the most accepted explanation is *anthropomorphism*, that is, we “see” God shaped by those whom we consider to be God’s anointed human messengers – among Christians, Jesus; among Muslims, Mohammed; among Hindus, Krishna and among Buddhists, Gautama.

Some common threads that weave their way through the lives of God’s messengers are Love, Compassion, Understanding, Commitment and Respect for all living creatures. Each one of these faithful pioneers demonstrated these qualities through their work, their teachings and their lives. It must, therefore, be assumed they were demonstrating to us humans the way our Creator expects us to live.

Although I do not attribute saintly qualities to my grandfather, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, what he said about a week before his assassination on January 30, 1948, seems quite pertinent here. Of the Indian people he said: “They will follow me in life, worship me in death but not make my cause their cause.”

These prophetic words could have been said by Jesus, Mohammed, Krishna or The Buddha. While the stories of their lives have been enshrined into Holy Scriptures—there is a great absence of intention to integrate those lessons into our ordinary lives. This book attempts to give us a different, perhaps a more logical, perspective of God. I hesitate to say that this single perspective is the “right” one, because as mere mortals, irrespective

of our profound scholarship, we cannot fathom the depths of spirituality and, therefore, it does not behoove any of us to arrogantly declare that we have the right way.

I recall the wisdom that my grandfather imparted to us when I was living with him as a young teenager. He said all human beings can only hope toward understanding God and to aspire to reach “salvation,” which he defined as living a life of compassionate service, sacrifice and satisfaction. He believed the greatest religion was to ensure that we “wipe the tears from every eye and bring hope and decency to every life wherever they may be.”

It is important that this service be performed with utmost humility. There are many ways to serve humanity, and so there are many ways to salvation. We must have the magnanimity and the humility to accept and to recognize the many ways to God realization.

I am convinced that at the very root of the spiritual problems we face today is the intense competitiveness which we have injected into religion. Each of us believes our religion is the best and that it is incumbent upon us to save the world by converting everyone to our way of worship. I recall a painfully sad episode that took place a few years ago when I was invited to explain the Hindu way of life to Christian students of comparative religion. Muslim and Jewish speakers were also invited to speak. After my talk a Muslim cleric prefaced his presentation with the remarks which were clearly addressed to me: “We Christians, Muslims and Jews,” he said, “have something in common. We not only have a common source but we are a ‘book religion’ unlike you who are pagan.”

The implication was clear. He believed that the Muslim, Christian and Jewish Word of God came to them in the form of a book, whereas, for the Hindus, the scriptures were orally transmitted. Thus, he concluded that Hindus believe in 50,000 Gods whereas the Western family of religions believed only in one. This is a common misconception in the West. An ancient philosopher once said the easiest way to kill a philosophy is by writing a book. Then the book becomes a dogma and ceases to be a vibrant, living philosophy.

As for believing in 50,000 or more Gods, I responded that the Hindu belief is not that there are so many Gods, but that there are countless images of God. Indeed, there exist as many images of God as there are people of faith! It is this openness in Hinduism, the admission that no one really possesses an absolute true and exclusive image of God. This spirit of openness, I believe, encourages human beings to “pursue” the Truth and not “possess” it as some in the Western religions believe. Pursuit implies humility, acceptance, openness and appreciation, while possession implies arrogance, closed minds and lack of appreciation. Herein lays the vital difference. If we persist in pursuing competition, instead of working in unity to pursue the Truth, we are going to face untold grief and, worse, violence.

When asked what he thought of the meaning of God, grandfather said: “There is an indefinable mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see

it. It is this unseen Power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so beyond all that we perceive through our physical senses. This unseen Power transcends our rationality and our senses. While we certainly do experience God's existence, our attempts to reason it out intellectually will always prove to be a humbling and limited exercise.

Grandfather wrote, "I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever-changing, ever-dying, there is underlying all that change a Living Power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and re-creates. That informing Power or Spirit is God.... For I can see that in the midst of death life persists; in the midst of untruth truth persists; in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, and Light. God is Love. God is the Supreme Good."

– **Arun Gandhi**