

Jesus Helps Us Finding God in Unexpected Places

“Do not stop to find Jesus and God at the dusty halls and Sunday routines. God’s presence isn’t confined (only) to church walls.”

In the section 2 and 3, we also discuss, a culmination of the “*Men and Women*” series, weaves together narratives from various fields, aiming to create a richer tapestry of human experience.

Maranatha

Mid April 2024

Victor Christianto & Florentin Smarandache

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V. Christianto & Florentin Smarandache



April 2024
Eunoia Publishing
East Java, Indonesia

*Jesus Helps Us Finding God
in Unexpected Places*

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by

V. Christiano & Florentin Smarandache
(with assistance of large language model / AI)

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Preface

Welcome, reader, to a journey that explores the dynamic between men and women throughout history. More than that, we choose an overarching theme, Jesus help us finding God in unexpected places, to imply that actually Jesus as representative of God Almighty Himself, shall not be found only in rituals of Sunday (although that may be true) or in church buildings, but during our interaction with humans and non-humans everyday. Yes, everyday matters and everyday can lead us to meet God, just as Jesus taught us with His parables at Matthew 25, for instance. In other words, learn to grow spiritually not only through centripetal church model, but also through centrifugal church practices.

Jesus, a beacon of God's love, beckons us to open our eyes. While houses of worship hold sacred space, this book delves deeper. It explores the unexpected encounters with the divine – in the depths of human connection, in the beauty of nature, and even in interactions with the world around us.

Prepare to see the ordinary transformed into the extraordinary. Within these pages, you'll discover that every day holds the potential for a divine encounter. Join us as we embark on this exploration, a testament to the truth that God is waiting to be found in the most unexpected places.

Allow us to summarize in the following phrase:

“Do not stop to find Jesus and God at the dusty halls and Sunday routines. God’s presence isn’t confined (only) to church walls.”¹

In the section 2 and 3, we also discuss, a culmination of the *“Men and Women”* series, weaves together narratives from various fields, aiming to create a richer tapestry of human experience.

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1 See also cf. Jim Petersen. *Church without walls*.

2 A humble servant of Lord Jesus Christ, visit our channel: <http://bit.ly/ApocalypseTVContents>

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Source of image: www.reddit.com

How Jesus Helps Us Finding God in Unexpected Places (a postcolonial reading of Matthew 25)

The King and His Unexpected Flock: An Exegesis of Matthew 25

In the closing chapters of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus unveils a powerful parable found in Matthew 25:31-46. This parable, often referred to as the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, offers a profound message about encountering the divine in the seemingly mundane aspects of our lives. Let's delve deeper into this parable, word by word, to glean its transformative message.

Verse 31: "Now when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on

his glorious throne.” This verse sets the stage for a grand celestial judgment. The “Son of Man,” a reference to Jesus himself, arrives in his full majesty, accompanied by angels. A throne symbolizes authority and a coming verdict.

Verse 32: “Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Here, the focus shifts to humanity. All nations, representing all people, stand before the judge. The image of a shepherd separating sheep from goats evokes a scene of sorting and distinction.

Verses 33-36: “And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me,

I was in prison and you came to me.’” These verses reveal the surprising basis for the separation. Jesus, as king, identifies himself with the most vulnerable: the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned. Those on his right, the “sheep,” are recognized not for their piety or religious practices, but for their acts of compassion towards these vulnerable ones.

Verses 37-40: “Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you

as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” The righteous, initially bewildered, question when they encountered Jesus in such circumstances. Their good deeds seem to have been done unknowingly.

Verses 40-46: “And the king will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ Then he will also say to those on his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ And they will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Jesus clarifies: serving the “least of these” is akin to serving him directly. Those on the left, the “goats,” are condemned not for overt sin, but for their neglect of the most vulnerable.

The Unexpected Measure

This parable dismantles the traditional notion of encountering God solely through religious rituals. Instead, Jesus emphasizes the transformative power of everyday

acts of compassion. Our interactions with the marginalized become opportunities to connect with the divine

Centrifugal vs. Centripetal: A New Model for Spiritual Growth

Traditionally, “centripetal” church models focus inward, emphasizing worship and activities within the church building. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats encourages a “centrifugal” approach, urging us to extend ourselves outward, actively seeking opportunities to serve those in need. This outward movement becomes a vital aspect of spiritual growth.

Matthew 25:31-46 reminds us that God is present in the most unexpected places, particularly in the faces of those most in need. By embracing a centrifugal approach, where our faith spills out into acts of service, we not only encounter the divine but also fulfill the core message of Jesus’ teachings. Everyday truly matters...

Section 1 – Fictions³



3 Source of image: www.reddit.com

A Postcolonial Reading of the Sheep and the Goats: Slowing Down in a Frantic World

Through a postcolonial lens, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats takes on an even deeper meaning in today's world. The relentless pursuit of progress and individual achievement characteristic of many postcolonial nations can often lead to an egocentric and hurried existence. This frenetic pace can blind us to the suffering of others, particularly those on the margins of society.

The parable serves as a powerful critique of this modern malady. Jesus doesn't ask us for grand gestures or elaborate rituals. Instead, he calls for a simple act of slowing down, of noticing the "least of these" around us – the homeless person begging on the street, the overworked cashier at the grocery store, the lonely neighbor struggling with isolation.

These encounters, often fleeting in our fast-paced lives, become opportunities for divine connection.

The Centrality of “Seeing”

The parable emphasizes the importance of “seeing” the vulnerable. The righteous, initially bewildered, ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?” (Matthew 25:37). This question highlights the need to move beyond a self-absorbed gaze and truly see the humanity in those around us. In a world obsessed with efficiency and productivity, slowing down allows us to witness the suffering of others and respond with compassion.

Beyond Charity

A postcolonial reading also pushes us beyond a simplistic understanding of charity. The parable is not just about offering a handout, but about recognizing the systemic inequalities that create hunger, homelessness, and imprisonment. By serving the “least of these,” we are not only alleviating immediate suffering but also working towards a more just and equitable world.

Conclusion: A Counter-Narrative to the Rat Race

In conclusion, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats offers a powerful counter-narrative to the pressures of our time. It reminds us that true fulfillment lies not in accumulating possessions or achieving personal success, but in acts of service and solidarity with those most in need. By slowing down, seeing the unseen, and working for

justice, we not only encounter the divine in the everyday, but also contribute to building a world that reflects the compassion embodied by Jesus

Chesed and Racham: Pillars of Love in the Old Testament

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Introduction

The Old Testament lays the groundwork for a rich tapestry of religious thought, and woven throughout its pages are two essential threads: *chesed* and *racham*. Often translated as “lovingkindness” and “mercy” respectively, these Hebrew words express distinct, yet intertwined, aspects of love that form the bedrock of God’s relationship with humanity and serve as guiding principles for ethical behavior.

Chesed, appearing most frequently, carries a multifaceted meaning. It encompasses loyalty, steadfast love, and a commitment to act on that love. This isn't just a fleeting emotion; it's a covenantal love that translates into action. In Micah, a prophet known for his social justice pronouncements, chesed appears repeatedly. For example, Micah 6:8 declares, *"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy (hesed) and to walk humbly with your God."* (NIV) Here, chesed isn't just about feeling love for God, but actively demonstrating it through righteous actions and social justice.

Racham, on the other hand, leans more towards compassion and empathy. It's the visceral feeling of sorrow for another's suffering, coupled with a desire to alleviate it. Think of a mother's love for her child – a fierce protectiveness and a deep well of compassion. While chesed emphasizes action, racham speaks to the emotional core of love.

The beauty lies in their synergy. Chesed, the steadfast love, motivates action based on the emotional connection formed by racham. Together, they paint a picture of a loving God who is not only deeply compassionate but actively committed to his people's well-being.

These cornerstones extend beyond the divine realm. The prophets consistently call for the people of Israel to embody chesed and racham in their own lives. Micah 6:8, quoted earlier, goes on to say, "to love mercy (hesed)"

– a clear call for humans to model God’s love in their interactions with each other.

In conclusion, *chesed* and *racham* are not mere words; they are the beating heart of the Old Testament’s message of love. They remind us that true love requires both unwavering commitment and a deep well of compassion. By embracing these values, we not only strengthen our relationship with God but also weave a more just and loving tapestry for the world around us.

Chesed in Action: Lovingkindness for Neighbors and Foreigners in the Old Testament

The Old Testament isn’t just a collection of historical narratives and laws; it’s a blueprint for a just and compassionate society. Woven into its very fabric is the concept of *chesed*, often translated as “lovingkindness.” *Chesed* goes beyond mere feeling; it’s a call to action, urging us to extend love and care to those around us, especially the vulnerable. This principle is particularly emphasized in how Israelites are instructed to treat their neighbors and foreigners residing among them.

The books of Exodus and Leviticus provide clear examples of *chesed* in action. In Exodus 23:4-5, encountering an ox or donkey belonging to an enemy struggling, the Israelites are commanded not to ignore their plight: “If you meet your enemy’s ox or donkey straying, you must return it to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you struggling under a load, do not walk away; be sure to help him with it.” This instruction extends beyond

personal animosity; it's a call to recognize the inherent value of all living beings and act with compassion. Similarly, Leviticus 19:33-34 reinforces *chesed* towards foreigners: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated like one of your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (NIV) Here, the Israelites are reminded of their own history as foreigners in Egypt and instructed to extend the same kindness they desired to those seeking refuge within their borders.

These verses highlight that *chesed* isn't selective – it extends to all, regardless of origin or social standing. The poor and the marginalized are especially singled out for care. Leviticus 23:22 specifically commands leaving a portion of the harvest for the poor and the foreigner, ensuring they too have access to basic necessities.

The emphasis on *chesed* in the Old Testament isn't merely theoretical; it's a practical guide for building a society based on love and compassion. By extending lovingkindness to neighbors and foreigners, the Israelites were not only fulfilling their covenant with God but also fostering a more just and equitable world.

This message transcends time. The call for *chesed* continues to resonate today, urging us to recognize the inherent dignity of all people, regardless of background or circumstance. By embracing *chesed*, we can create communities built on empathy, inclusivity, and a shared sense of humanity.

Racham implies strong friendship beyond storge and philia: A Biblical Case for Friendship, Against Misinterpretation

The Bible offers a multifaceted tapestry of human relationships, including profound examples of love and friendship. The story of David and Jonathan, chronicled in the books of 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, stands as a testament to the enduring power of male bonds. However, some interpretations attempt to read a romantic subtext into their relationship, a misreading countered by a deeper understanding of biblical love and the concept of racham. Modern theological discourse recognizes various forms of love. The influential 20th-century Nordic theologian Anders Nygren identified four types: storge (familial love), philia (friendship), eros (romantic love), and agape (selfless love). While some, like Nygren, elevate agape as the highest form, the Bible portrays a richer tapestry.

In the case of David and Jonathan, their bond transcends familial love (storge). Theirs is a philia – a deep, covenantal friendship forged in shared experiences, mutual respect, and unwavering loyalty (1 Samuel 18:1-4). Their connection is emotionally charged, but this intensity doesn't equate to romantic or sexual love.

The Hebrew word “ahavat” is used to describe their bond, signifying a powerful emotional connection, but not inherently romantic. Racham, another key concept, emphasizes compassion and empathy, which undoubtedly fueled their friendship. David and Jonathan's love finds its truest expression in their commitment to each other's

well-being, culminating in Jonathan's selfless sacrifice (1 Samuel 20:1-42).

Misinterpreting this powerful friendship through a lens of modern sexuality disregards the historical and cultural context of the text. Same-sex relationships in the ancient world often signified deep friendships or mentorship, not romantic or sexual partnerships.

The LGBTQ+ community's quest for representation in scripture is commendable. However, imposing a modern understanding of sexual identity onto an ancient text risks distorting its original meaning. The Bible offers a wealth of stories about love, including profound examples of male friendship like David and Jonathan's. Recognizing these rich expressions strengthens our understanding of the human experience without resorting to misinterpretations.

The enduring power of David and Jonathan's story lies in its celebration of a deep, selfless love between two men. By appreciating the full spectrum of love in the Bible, we gain a richer understanding of the human experience and the enduring power of friendship.

A Word-by-Word Look at Ezekiel 37: A Calling to Breathe Life into the Dry Bones

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Introduction: Background and writer of book of Ezekiel

The enigmatic vision of Ezekiel 37, a desolate valley transformed by the breath of God, has captivated readers for centuries. But who was the man behind this powerful message, and how does his historical context inform our understanding of the text?

Delving into this passage is particularly relevant for ministers today. As we navigate a world where many feel spiritually disconnected, the image of the “dry bones” resonates deeply. Ezekiel’s vision offers a potent metaphor for the individuals and communities yearning for revival.

Before we explore the profound implications of Ezekiel 37 for modern ministry, let’s turn our attention to the book’s author himself. Who was Ezekiel, and what historical backdrop shaped his prophetic pronouncements?

Word by word exegesis

Ezekiel 37 presents a powerful vision, using the metaphor of dry bones to represent the spiritual desolation of the Israelites. Through a word-by-word analysis, we can not only grasp the depth of the metaphor but also glean a vital message about our calling to minister to those feeling spiritually dead.

Verse 1:

- ~ **“The hand of the Lord came upon me...” (ESV):** This opening emphasizes the divine origin of the vision. Ezekiel is not a mere observer; he is an instrument chosen by God.

Verse 2:

- ~ **“He set me down in the midst of the valley...” (ESV):** The valley symbolizes a place of despair and hopelessness, mirroring the spiritual state of the Israelites.

- ~ **“...it was full of bones...” (ESV):** Bones represent death, both physical and spiritual. The Israelites are depicted as devoid of life, disconnected from God.

Verses 3-4:

- ~ **“Son of man, can these bones live?” (ESV):** God’s question challenges Ezekiel, and by extension, the reader. It compels us to consider the possibility of revival, even in seemingly hopeless situations.
- ~ **“I said, O Lord GOD, you know...” (ESV):** Ezekiel acknowledges his limitations. Humanly, the situation appears bleak, but he trusts in God’s power.

Verses 5-6:

- ~ **“Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord...” (ESV):** God instructs Ezekiel to speak, not to a physically dead audience, but to those spiritually depleted. The act of prophesying signifies the power of God’s word to bring life.
- ~ **“Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.” (ESV):** This is the crux of the passage. God promises revival. The breath represents the Holy Spirit, the life force that can rekindle a connection with God.

Verses 7-10:

- ~ **Ezekiel faithfully follows God’s command, prophesying over the bones.** This act highlights our

role. We can be instruments of God's word, speaking life and hope to those who feel spiritually dry.

Verses 11-14:

- ~ **The vision progresses, depicting the bones coming together, being clothed with flesh, and finally receiving the breath of life.** This symbolizes the process of spiritual renewal. Through faith and the Holy Spirit, individuals can be transformed from a state of spiritual death to a vibrant connection with God.

Our Calling as Ministers to the Dry Bones: Ministering to the Dry Bones in a Modern Context

The evocative imagery of Ezekiel 37 – a valley filled with dry bones brought back to life by the word of God – resonates deeply with ministers today. While the historical context speaks to the Israelites' despair after exile, the message transcends time, offering a powerful guide for those called to shepherd lost souls. Let's delve deeper into the meaning of this passage for modern ministry.

The Dry Bones: A Familiar Sight

We encounter the "dry bones" metaphor frequently – individuals and communities feeling spiritually desolate, disconnected from faith. This disconnection can manifest in a variety of ways:

- ~ **Loss of faith:** People who once held strong beliefs may find themselves questioning everything, grappling with doubt and disillusionment.

- ~ **Moral apathy:** Apathy towards spiritual matters can leave individuals adrift, lacking the purpose and direction faith can provide.
- ~ **Hurt and disillusionment:** Negative experiences within religious institutions can leave scars, making individuals hesitant to re-engage with faith. As ministers, recognizing these signs of spiritual dryness is crucial. Just as a doctor diagnoses an illness before treatment, we must discern the root causes of spiritual depletion.

The Minister as Instrument: Prophesying Life

The passage in Ezekiel emphasizes the power of the spoken word. Ezekiel, acting as God's instrument, prophesies life to the dry bones. Similarly, ministers today are called to be instruments of God's word, offering hope and renewal through:

- ~ **Preaching and teaching:** By sharing scripture and theological insights, we can illuminate a path for those seeking reconnection.
- ~ **Compassionate counseling:** Creating a safe space for dialogue allows individuals to explore their doubts and anxieties, fostering a sense of acceptance and belonging.
- ~ **Encouraging acts of service:** Engaging in acts of charity and social justice can reignite a sense of purpose and connection to something larger than oneself.

Beyond Words: Embodying the Message

While the spoken word is a powerful tool, ministry extends beyond mere pronouncements. Our actions speak volumes:

- ~ **Living a life of faith:** Ministers are called to live by example, demonstrating the transformative power of faith in our own lives.
- ~ **Compassionate presence:** Being present for others in times of need, offering a listening ear and a non-judgmental space for healing.
- ~ **Building a welcoming community:** Cultivating a faith community that is inclusive, supportive, and celebrates diversity can be a beacon of hope for those seeking reconnection.

Hope for Revival: A Call to Action

Ezekiel 37 reminds us that God's power to breathe life into the spiritually dry is ever-present. As ministers, we are entrusted with the privilege of being instruments of that revival. By recognizing the signs of spiritual dryness, using the power of the spoken word, and embodying the message through our actions, we can help others rediscover the life-giving force of faith. The valley of dry bones need not remain a desolate landscape; through our ministry, it can be a place of transformation and hope.

Concluding remark

The vision of Ezekiel 37 is not merely a historical anecdote; it carries a timeless message. We encounter people in our lives who feel spiritually lost, disconnected from God. They are the dry bones, yearning for revival.

This passage reminds us of our calling:

- ~ **To speak God's word:** We can offer encouragement, share scriptures, and point others towards resources that can help them reconnect with God.
- ~ **To have faith in God's power:** Even in seemingly hopeless situations, God can bring renewal. Our role is to hold onto faith and trust in God's work.
- ~ **To embody compassion:** The dry bones represent those in need. We are called to show empathy and understanding, creating a safe space for others to explore their faith.

By understanding the word-by-word message of Ezekiel 37, we can become more effective ministers, breathing life and hope into those desperately seeking to find God.

The Echo of “Where Are You?": God's Relentless Search for Humanity⁴

Deep within the pages of scripture lies a seemingly simple question that reverberates throughout the Bible, carrying profound implications for our understanding of

4 A remark on one of story in 50 Meditations, Kosuke Koyama. New York, Orbis Book, 1975.

God's character. In Genesis 3:9, after humanity's fall from grace, God calls out to Adam and Eve: "Where are you?" This poignant query, according to theologian Kosuke Koyama, serves as a foundational verse, echoing through scripture as a testament to God's unwavering pursuit of his creation.

pen_spark

From Eden to Eternity: A God Who Seeks

The question in Genesis isn't merely about location. It's a heart-wrenching inquiry that exposes the chasm created by sin. God, who walked with humanity in the cool of the garden (Genesis 3:8), now seeks them, yearning for restoration. This relentless search becomes the central theme of the Bible.

A Tapestry of Redemption

From the covenants with Abraham and Moses, to the prophets' passionate pleas for justice, the narrative unfolds as God's persistent pursuit of his people. He sends prophets to warn, judge, and ultimately, offer hope. The Psalms overflow with expressions of both lament and praise, reflecting the complexities of the human condition in light of God's unwavering love.

The Ultimate Act of Love: Jesus, the Embodiment of "Where Are You?"

The pinnacle of God's search arrives in the person of Jesus Christ. John 3:16 declares, "For God so loved the

world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Here, the question “Where are you?” finds its answer. Jesus steps into humanity’s brokenness, becoming the bridge between God and humankind.

The Call to Respond: Finding Our Place in the Story

The echo of “Where are you?” continues to resonate today. It’s a call not just for God to find us, but for us to find ourselves in relation to Him. Each of us stands at a crossroads, facing the consequences of our choices. But just as God sought Adam and Eve, He seeks us too.

Living the Answer

The answer to God’s question lies not in a single definitive location, but in a continuous journey of faith. It involves acknowledging our separation from God, accepting His forgiveness offered through Christ, and actively seeking to live in accordance with His love. It’s about recognizing the “whys” behind our actions, the impact we have on others, and ultimately, choosing to participate in God’s mission of reconciliation and restoration.

Conclusion: A Never-Ending Story

The story of God’s search for humanity is a love story that transcends time. The question “Where are you?” serves as a constant reminder of God’s relentless pursuit, urging us to turn towards Him, embrace His love, and participate in building a world that reflects His character.

If You Want to Find God Almighty, You Ought to Slow Down Your Life

In our hyper-connected, fast-paced world, the very idea of slowing down can feel radical. Yet, renowned theologian Kosuke Koyama offers a compelling challenge: to find God, we need to embrace a “Three Mile an Hour God.” This isn’t about God’s speed, but ours. We, consumed by technology and efficiency, have outpaced the divine.

The Rat Race and the Missed Connection

Our lives are a whirlwind of deadlines, notifications, and an insatiable need to get ahead. We rush through church services, prayers uttered on autopilot, yearning for the next tick on our to-do list. This frenetic pace creates a chasm between ourselves and the God who walks beside us, not at the speed of a bullet train, but at the gentle pace of three miles an hour – the average walking speed.

The Slow Church Movement: A Counter-Narrative

In contrast to the “fast church” model, emphasizing quick sermons and packed schedules, the slow church movement encourages a more deliberate approach. It prioritizes reflection, silence, and fostering genuine connection within the community.

It’s about savoring scripture, not speeding through it. It’s about creating space for stillness, where we can finally hear the whisper of the divine amidst the noise of our lives.

Slow Living: A Pathway to Encounter

The call to slow down extends beyond the church walls. Embracing “slow living” practices like mindful eating, spending time in nature, and engaging in deep conversations allows us to reconnect with ourselves and the world around us. It’s in these moments of quietude that we can truly appreciate the beauty of creation and the presence of the divine in the ordinary.

Finding the Three Mile an Hour God

Ultimately, slowing down isn’t about laziness. It’s about intentionality. It’s about choosing to be present in the present, to savor the journey, and to open our hearts to a deeper connection with God and each other. When we slow down, we create the space to notice the divine whispers in the rustling leaves, the kindness of a stranger, or the quiet comfort of a shared meal.

A Life Transformed

By embracing the “Three Mile an Hour God,” we embark on a transformative journey. We rediscover the joy of simple things, cultivate deeper relationships, and experience a newfound appreciation for the sacred in the everyday. Perhaps then, we can truly understand the profound truth: in slowing down, we find God not somewhere out there, but walking beside us, every step of the way.

Sang Hyang Taya: Echoes of the Unknown God in Ancient Java

The whispers of a Supreme Being resonate across cultures and continents. In the heart of ancient Java, the belief system known as Kapitayan held a core concept – Sang Hyang Taya, the “Unknown One,” the “Unreachable,” the “Undescribable.” This article delves into the possibility that Sang Hyang Taya wasn’t merely an aspect of animism, but a reflection of an ancient monotheistic understanding of the divine, echoing the “Agnostos Theos” (Unknown God) encountered by Paul in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 17:23).

Kapitayan: Beyond Animism

Traditionally, Kapitayan has been categorized as animism, attributing spiritual significance to the natural world. However, a closer look reveals a deeper layer.

Sang Hyang Taya transcends the physical realm, existing as the ultimate source and creator. While rituals involving animal offerings might seem animistic, they could also be interpreted as acts of reverence towards the divine, a distant yet powerful entity.

Degrading Rituals: A Loss of Understanding?

The diminishing significance of animal sacrifices in Javanese traditions could be a sign of a fading connection to the original meaning. As societies evolve, practices can lose their symbolic weight. Perhaps the act of offering was once a way to acknowledge dependence on a supreme creator, a tradition that weakened over time.

Agnostos Theos: A Parallel from the West

The encounter of the Apostle Paul with the Athenians in Acts 17:23 offers a fascinating parallel. Paul, noticing an altar dedicated to “An Unknown God” (Agnostos Theos), uses it as a springboard to preach about the one true God. This concept of a supreme being, even if unknown and unnamed, aligns with the characteristics of *Sang Hyang Taya*.

Reinterpreting *Sang Hyang Taya*

Could *Sang Hyang Taya* represent an echo of an ancient monotheistic belief held by Javanese people? Perhaps the emphasis on the “unknown” and “unreachable” reflects the limitations of human understanding in the face of the divine. This interpretation doesn’t negate the animistic

aspects of Kapitayan, but suggests a more nuanced belief system, acknowledging both the spiritual essence in nature and a transcendent creator.

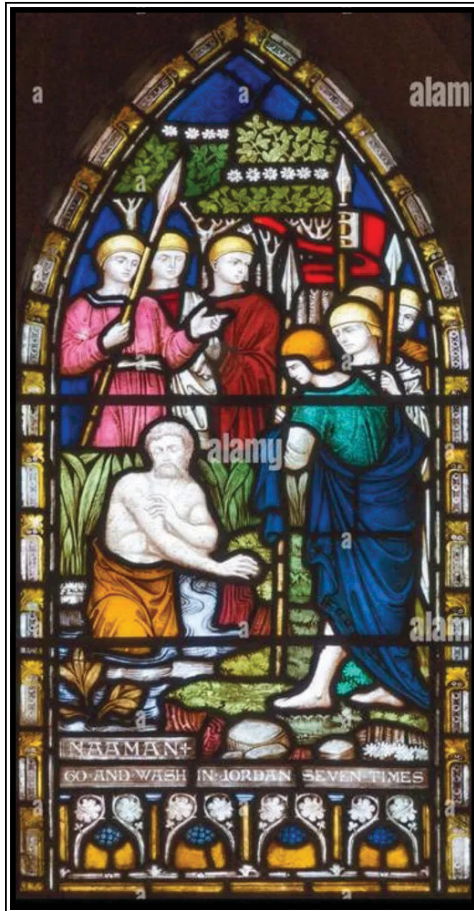
This potential connection between Sang Hyang Taya and the Agnostos Theos compels further exploration. Examining historical texts, analyzing the evolution of rituals, and drawing comparisons with other ancient belief systems could shed light on this intriguing possibility.

Conclusion: Unveiling the Tapestry of Faith

The concept of a Supreme Being, veiled in mystery yet ever-present, seems to weave its way through various cultures. By delving into the depths of Kapitayan and recognizing potential parallels with other traditions, we gain a richer tapestry of human experience in the quest for the divine. Whether Sang Hyang Taya is definitively linked to the Agnostos Theos remains to be seen, but the exploration itself opens doors to a deeper understanding of humanity's enduring search for the ultimate reality.

Section 2

Stories of 7 Men and Women of Faith in the Bible



Stories of 7 Men and Women of Faith in the Bible

Preface to Men and Women series: A Tapestry of Humanity

Welcome, reader, to a journey that explores the dynamic between men and women throughout history. This book, the culmination of the “Men and Women” series, weaves together narratives from various fields, aiming to create a richer tapestry of human experience.

Within these pages, we will delve into the profound faith of men and women in the Bible. Their stories of devotion, struggle, and leadership offer timeless lessons and a deeper understanding of humanity’s relationship with the divine.

Moving from the sacred to the secular, we then encounter the world of philosophy. Here, we’ll meet brilliant

minds like Hildegard von Bingen, whose groundbreaking work challenged the boundaries of knowledge in her time. Both men and women philosophers have tirelessly grappled with fundamental questions about existence, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to shape our understanding of the world.

Science, the constant process of unraveling nature's secrets, has also witnessed the vital contributions of both genders. This book will highlight the achievements of men and women in various scientific fields, showcasing their relentless pursuit of discovery and innovation.

Finally, we turn our gaze inwards, exploring the realm of spirituality. From ancient traditions to modern practices, men and women have sought meaning and connection beyond the material world.

Their experiences offer valuable insights into the human quest for wholeness and transcendence.

This collection is not meant to be a competition between the genders. Instead, it celebrates the unique contributions of men and women, highlighting how their combined efforts have shaped our world in profound ways. By studying their stories, we gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, the complexities of human relationships, and the richness of human experience.

As you embark on this journey, keep an open mind and a curious spirit. Prepare to be surprised, inspired, and challenged by the diverse voices that fill these pages. May

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Maranatha

Mid April 2024

Victor Christianto & Florentin Smarandache

A Hero's Affliction: The Healing of Naaman the Aramean

The annals of history often celebrate the triumphs of war heroes, their victories etched in stone and sung in ballads. Yet, the story of Naaman, the mighty commander of the Aramean army, transcends the battlefield. It's a tale of resilience, faith, and the unexpected power of humility in the face of a debilitating illness.

Naaman was a formidable figure. His battlefield prowess secured victories for Aram, a nation frequently at odds with Israel. However, beneath the gleaming armor and the aura of invincibility resided a crippling secret – leprosy. This dreaded disease, incurable at the time, ravaged Naaman's body, a stark contrast to the strength he projected.

News of Naaman's affliction traveled through the Aramean palace, eventually reaching the ears of a young Israelite captive serving in Naaman's household. This young

woman, with a glimmer of hope, shared a life-altering truth – the prophet Elisha in Israel possessed the power to heal Naaman.

Fueled by desperation, Naaman, accompanied by a grand entourage of chariots, horses, and lavish gifts, embarked on a journey to Israel. He arrived at the doorstep of Elisha, expecting a grand display of power, perhaps a dramatic ritual to cleanse him. Instead, Elisha, through a servant, sent a simple message: bathe seven times in the Jordan River.

Naaman's pride took a blow. Here he was, a revered warrior, instructed to perform such a seemingly mundane task in a foreign river. Disappointment and anger coursed through him. However, his faithful servants, recognizing the desperate situation, intervened. They reminded him that even a seemingly insignificant act could bring healing.

Humbled by their words, Naaman relented. He dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, a gesture of faith in an unfamiliar god. And then, a miracle unfolded. As Naaman emerged from the water, his skin became clear, the leprosy vanished. He was healed.

Naaman's transformation went beyond his physical wellbeing. He returned to Elisha, no longer the proud warrior, but a man brimming with gratitude. He declared, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). This statement, uttered by a former enemy commander, underscored the power of faith and the healing touch of the divine.

Beyond the Battlefield: Lessons from Naaman

Naaman's story transcends the boundaries of religious text. It offers valuable lessons that resonate across cultures and time:

- **Humility in the Face of Adversity:** Naaman, a man accustomed to wielding power, had to surrender his pride to find healing. It reminds us that even the strongest amongst us face vulnerabilities, and true strength lies in acknowledging them.
- **Faith Beyond Borders:** Though Naaman belonged to a rival nation, he was willing to embrace a foreign god in his hour of need. This teaches us that the quest for healing and connection with the divine can transcend political and national divides.
- **The Power of Simple Acts:** Elisha's seemingly simple instruction – bathing in the Jordan – proved to hold immense healing power. This underscores the importance of trusting in seemingly insignificant acts of faith or self-care, for they can lead to profound change.
- **The Ripple Effect of Transformation:** Naaman's journey wasn't solely about his own healing. His transformation sparked a potential bridge between Israel and Aram. This highlights how personal transformations can have far-reaching positive consequences.

A Legacy of Hope

The story of Naaman is a testament to the human spirit's ability to overcome adversity and the unifying power of faith.

It reminds us that healing often comes in unexpected ways, demanding humility and a willingness to venture outside our comfort zones. Naaman's legacy lives on, a beacon of hope for those struggling with physical and spiritual ailments, urging them to hold onto faith, trust in the transformative power of even the simplest acts, and embrace the possibility of healing, even from unlikely sources.

Further Exploration

This article provides a brief glimpse into the story of Naaman. For further exploration, consider delving deeper into:

- The biblical text of 2 Kings 5, which offers a more detailed account of Naaman's journey.
- Scholarly works on the historical context of the story and its significance within the larger narrative of the Hebrew Bible.
- Artistic interpretations of Naaman's story, such as paintings or sculptures, which offer a visual perspective on this powerful narrative.

Abraham: The Patriarch of Faith in the Old Testament

The Old Testament lays the foundation for Judaism and Christianity, and within its pages, one name stands out as a pivotal figure – Abraham. Often referred to as the “father of faith,” Abraham’s story is not simply a historical account; it’s a paradigm for a life guided by unwavering trust in God.

A Call to the Unknown: Leaving Familiar Grounds

Abraham’s journey begins in the book of Genesis. Initially known as Abram, he resides in Ur, a prosperous Mesopotamian city. Yet, God disrupts Abram’s comfortable life with a radical call – to leave his homeland, his family, and everything familiar to journey to an unknown land (Genesis 12:1). This act of obedience, the first of many, establishes Abraham as a man of unwavering faith. He trusts in God’s promise of a new beginning, even though the destination and the path remain unclear.

Covenant and Commitment: A Bond Forged

As Abraham embarks on his nomadic life, God establishes a covenant with him – a binding agreement. God promises to make Abraham “a great nation” and bless him with numerous descendants (Genesis 12:2). This covenant signifies a special relationship between God and Abraham, a testament to God’s faithfulness and a responsibility placed upon Abraham and his future generations.

Trials and Tribulations: Testing Faith

Abraham’s faith, however, is not without its tests. Famines force him to migrate to Egypt, where he deceives Pharaoh about his wife, Sarah (Genesis 12:10-20). Later, facing childlessness, he fathers Ishmael with Hagar, Sarah’s handmaid (Genesis 16). These episodes highlight Abraham’s humanity – his moments of doubt and fear. Yet, God remains steadfast in his promises.

The Ultimate Test: Sacrifice and Renewal

The ultimate test of Abraham’s faith arrives when God commands him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, born to Sarah through a miracle (Genesis 22). This demand seems incomprehensible, a stark contrast to God’s promise of blessings through Isaac. Yet, Abraham prepares to obey, demonstrating his unwavering trust in God’s ultimate plan. Just as Abraham raises the knife, God intervenes, providing a substitute sacrifice and reaffirming his covenant.

Legacy of Faith: A Beacon for Generations

Abraham's life serves as a model for future generations. His unwavering faith inspires others to trust in God's promises, even in the face of uncertainty. He embodies the importance of obedience, even when the path seems illogical.

Beyond the Narrative: The Significance of Abraham

Abraham's story extends far beyond the pages of the Old Testament. He holds immense significance in:

- **Judaism:** Abraham is considered the founding father of the Jewish people, the Israelites, his descendants through Isaac. His covenant with God is seen as the foundation of the special relationship between God and the Jewish people.
- **Christianity:** Christians view Abraham as a spiritual ancestor, a model of faith for all believers. His willingness to trust God, even when faced with seemingly impossible demands, resonates with the Christian concept of salvation through faith.
- **Islam:** Muslims revere Abraham as a prophet who submitted to God's will. His willingness to sacrifice Ishmael, though ultimately replaced, is seen as a powerful symbol of obedience.

A Legacy that Endures

Abraham's story is not just about the past; it's a timeless narrative with enduring relevance. It offers profound lessons for navigating life's uncertainties:

- **Faith in the Face of Doubt:** Abraham's journey reminds us that faith doesn't negate doubt; it allows us to move forward despite it.
- **Obedience and Trust:** His story underscores the importance of trusting God's plan, even when it seems unclear.
- **The Power of Covenants:** Abraham's covenant with God reminds us of the importance of commitments and the strength found in faithful relationships.

Further Exploration:

The story of Abraham is rich with theological and historical complexities. To delve deeper, consider exploring:

- **Biblical commentaries** that offer in-depth analysis of the Hebrew text and its historical context.
- **Scholarly works** that examine the theological significance of Abraham's story within the broader narrative of the Old Testament.
- **Artistic representations** of Abraham, through paintings, sculptures, or literature, that offer diverse perspectives on his life.

The Woman at the Well: A Samaritan's Encounter with Grace

The Gospel of John recounts a poignant encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. This seemingly ordinary interaction transcends its simplicity, offering a profound message about faith, societal barriers, and the transformative power of grace.

Breaking Boundaries: A Samaritan Woman at the Well

The social and religious landscape of first-century Judea was complex. Jews and Samaritans held deep-seated prejudices against each other. In this context, Jesus, a Jew, initiates a conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well – a place traditionally associated with women's daily routines (John 4:6-7). This act, in itself, was revolutionary. Jesus shattered social norms by acknowledging and engaging with a woman from a marginalized group.

The Weight of Circumstances: A Life on the Margins

The Samaritan woman's identity is further defined by her marital history. She has had five husbands, and the man she is with currently is not her husband (John 4:18). This detail hints at a life marked by societal judgment and limited options. Jesus, however, does not condemn her. Instead, he initiates a conversation, focusing on her spiritual thirst rather than her past.

Beyond Stereotypes: A Wellspring of Living Water

The crux of the conversation revolves around water. Jesus speaks of offering “living water” that will quench her thirst forever (John 4:10-14). The woman initially interprets this metaphor literally, reflecting her practical concerns about drawing water from the well. Yet, Jesus uses this exchange to introduce a deeper truth – the promise of spiritual fulfillment that transcends physical needs.

A Shattering Revelation: Recognizing the Messiah

As the conversation unfolds, the woman's curiosity piques. Jesus reveals his messianic identity, a statement that would have been astonishing to a Samaritan (John 4:25-26). The woman, recognizing the significance of this encounter, leaves her water jar behind and rushes to share the news with her village (John 4:28-29).

A Legacy of Grace: Embracing the Outcast

The story of the woman at the well offers several profound takeaways:

- **Breaking Barriers:** Jesus' willingness to engage with a Samaritan woman challenged societal norms and prejudices. It highlights the universality of God's love and the importance of reaching out beyond our comfort zones.
- **Seeing Beyond Circumstances:** Jesus doesn't judge the woman for her past. He focuses on her spiritual needs, demonstrating God's compassion for those on the margins.
- **The Power of Grace:** The encounter transforms the woman's life. She becomes an evangelist, sharing the news of Jesus with her community. This exemplifies the transformative power of grace, which uplifts and empowers those who receive it.

A Story for All Times

The story of the woman at the well resonates across cultures and time. It reminds us that:

- **God's Love is Universal:** Regardless of social standing, ethnicity, or past mistakes, God's love extends to all.
- **Faith Can Blossom in Unexpected Places:** The woman's encounter with Jesus ignites her faith, demonstrating that spiritual awakening can occur in the most ordinary moments.
- **We Are All Called to Share the Message of Grace:** Inspired by Jesus' message, the woman becomes a conduit of grace for her community. This

calls upon us to share the message of God's love with those around us.

Further Exploration

The story of the woman at the well is a rich tapestry with layers of meaning. To delve deeper, consider exploring:

- **Biblical commentaries** that analyze the text's cultural context and theological significance.
- **Feminist interpretations** that examine the story from the perspective of a woman living in a patriarchal society.
- **Artistic representations** such as paintings, sculptures, or music that offer diverse interpretations of this encounter.

Maria and Martha: The Sisters of Bethany, When Faith Becomes Action

In the tapestry of Jesus' life, countless encounters stand out, each offering a glimpse into his teachings and ministry. Yet, the story of Mary and Martha, sisters residing in Bethany with their brother Lazarus, holds a unique place. They are not simply passive recipients of Jesus' teachings; their unwavering faith inspires action, ultimately leading to one of Jesus' most powerful miracles – the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

A Welcoming Haven: A Home Away from Home for Jesus

The Gospel narratives paint a picture of a warm and inviting home in Bethany. Unlike other encounters with fleeting crowds, Jesus finds a sense of belonging and friendship with the siblings.

He enjoys their hospitality, sharing meals, conversations, and laughter (Luke 10:38). This close relationship becomes crucial when tragedy strikes.

A Time of Loss: The Illness and Death of Lazarus

The idyllic haven of Bethany is shattered by news of Lazarus' illness. Mary and Martha, filled with worry and grief, send word to Jesus, hoping for a miracle (John 11:1-3). Their faith in Jesus' healing power shines through. Despite the distance, they believe Jesus can intervene.

The Agony of Waiting: Where Was Jesus?

Days turn into weeks, and Lazarus succumbs to his illness. The sisters grieve, and a sense of doubt might have crept in. Why hadn't Jesus come? Yet, Mary and Martha's faith endures. They hold onto the hope that Jesus, even in his absence, possesses the power to heal, even after death.

Beyond Words: A Faith that Speaks Volumes

When Jesus finally arrives in Bethany, Martha rushes to greet him. Her words reveal both grief and a flicker of doubt, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). However, it is Mary's response that truly demonstrates the depth of their faith. Overwhelmed with emotion, she falls at Jesus' feet, her silence speaking volumes. Here, action speaks louder than words. Her grief, her trust, and her unwavering belief in Jesus' power are laid bare.

A Call to Faith: “I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

Jesus, deeply moved by their grief, utters words that resonate across the ages: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26). Mary’s response, a simple “Yes, Lord, I believe,” encapsulates the essence of faith. It’s a leap of trust, a belief that transcends logic and embraces the possibility of the miraculous.

A Miracle Witnessed: Lazarus is Raised

Jesus, with a voice of command, calls for Lazarus to come out. The story reaches its climax as Lazarus walks out of the tomb, bound in grave clothes (John 11:43-44). This act, witnessed by many, solidified Jesus’ status as the Messiah, the one with the power over life and death.

Beyond the Miracle: A Legacy of Faith and Action

The story of Mary and Martha extends beyond the dramatic raising of Lazarus. It’s a testament to the power of unwavering faith that translates into action. Their belief prompts them to reach out to Jesus, even in his absence. Their grief, while profound, doesn’t extinguish their hope. Their story serves as a beacon, urging us to:

- **Embrace Faith as Action:** Just as Mary and Martha’s faith compelled them to seek Jesus, our faith should inspire positive actions in the world.

- **Hope in the Face of Loss:** Grief is inevitable, but Mary and Martha remind us that even in the darkest moments, hope can persevere.
- **The Power of Community:** The sisters' bond with Jesus and their reliance on each other highlight the importance of supportive communities in times of need.

A Story for All Times

The story of Mary and Martha continues to inspire believers across generations. It offers comfort in times of loss, reminding us of the power of faith and the possibility of miracles. It compels us to move beyond passive belief and take action, to share our faith with the world, and to build strong communities that offer support and hope.

Joseph of Arimathea: A Discreet Disciple

The Gospels offer glimpses into the lives of various individuals who played pivotal roles in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Among them, Joseph of Arimathea stands out as a somewhat enigmatic figure. While the biblical accounts don't delve deeply into his background, his actions during Jesus' crucifixion hold immense significance. Here, we explore the known aspects of Joseph's story, addressing the possibility of a familial connection to Jesus and the legacy of his courageous act.

A Leader in the Shadows: A Member of the Sanhedrin

All four Gospels mention Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-42). They describe him as a wealthy and respected member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. This position indicates his social standing and influence within Jewish society.

A Secret Disciple: Fear and Faith

Intriguingly, the Gospels also portray Joseph as a follower of Jesus, albeit a secret one. Mark and Luke highlight that he “was waiting for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51) and did not consent to the condemnation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:51). This suggests a personal belief in Jesus’ teachings, yet a cautiousness about openly endorsing him, perhaps due to fear of repercussions.

A Bold Act: Claiming Jesus’ Body

Despite his prior discretion, a pivotal moment arrives after Jesus’ crucifixion. The Gospels recount how Joseph, with courage and a sense of urgency, approaches Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, and requests Jesus’ body for a proper burial (Matthew 27:57-58; Mark 15:43-45; Luke 23:52-53; John 19:38). This act signifies a remarkable shift. Joseph steps out of the shadows, risking his reputation and potentially facing disapproval from the Sanhedrin, to ensure Jesus receives a dignified burial.

The Kinship Claim: A Historical and Theological Debate

The notion of Joseph being Jesus’ uncle, specifically Mary’s brother, stems from non-canonical texts, such as the writings attributed to Hippolytus of Rome in the 3rd century AD. The canonical Gospels provide no evidence to support this claim. It remains a topic of debate among theologians and historians.

The Significance of Joseph's Action

Regardless of his familial connection to Jesus, Joseph's act holds immense significance for several reasons:

- **Defying Expectations:** A respected member of the Sanhedrin publicly associating himself with the condemned Jesus was a bold move, showcasing his unwavering faith.
- **Respectful Burial:** In Jewish tradition, proper burial rites were crucial. Joseph's action ensured Jesus received a dignified treatment after his execution.
- **Preparation for the Resurrection:** By laying Jesus in a tomb, Joseph unwittingly prepared the stage for the empty tomb, a key element in the Christian narrative of the resurrection.

Beyond the Biblical Account: Joseph in Later Traditions

Joseph of Arimathea has captured the imagination of artists, theologians, and writers throughout history. He is often depicted as a courageous and compassionate figure, a silent witness to the events surrounding Jesus. Some legends associate him with the Holy Grail, the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper.

A Legacy of Faith and Courage

Joseph of Arimathea, though a discreet figure in the Gospels, offers valuable lessons:

- **The Power of Faith:** Despite his initial fear, Joseph ultimately acts on his convictions, demonstrating the transformative power of faith.
- **The Importance of Action:** Joseph's act of claiming Jesus' body highlights the importance of translating faith into concrete actions.
- **Courage in the Face of Adversity:** Joseph's willingness to defy societal expectations showcases the importance of standing up for what we believe in, even when it's difficult.

Further Exploration

While the Gospels provide a limited glimpse into Joseph of Arimathea's life, his story continues to intrigue scholars and believers alike. For further exploration, consider delving into:

- **Scholarly works** that analyze the historical context of the Sanhedrin and the significance of Joseph's social standing.
- **Apocryphal texts** such as the writings of Hippolytus, keeping in mind their non-canonical nature and the debates surrounding their historical accuracy.
- **Artistic representations** of Joseph of Arimathea, which offer diverse interpretations of this enigmatic figure.

Saint Thomas: Beyond Confusion Toward Infinite Faith to Jesus

St. Thomas, also known as Doubting Thomas, occupies a unique space within the Christian tradition. The Gospel of John portrays him as the disciple who initially struggles to believe in the resurrected Jesus, demanding physical proof (John 20:24-29). However, his story goes beyond this singular moment of doubt, revealing a journey towards profound faith. Let's delve into the multifaceted portrait of St. Thomas, exploring his encounter with the risen Christ, the enigmatic Gospel of Thomas, and his legendary missionary journeys.

Doubting Thomas and the Touch of Faith

The Gospel of John presents St. Thomas' skepticism as a pivotal moment. When the other disciples share news of the resurrected Jesus, Thomas declares, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger in

the mark of the nails, and place my hand beside his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). This statement has earned him the moniker “Doubting Thomas.”

However, a deeper understanding emerges when we consider the cultural context. In Jewish tradition, physical evidence held immense importance. Thomas’ request can be seen as a yearning for confirmation, a desire to fully comprehend the miraculous event.

When Jesus appears again, he offers Thomas the very proof he desires. Thomas, overwhelmed by the encounter, utters the powerful words, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). This exclamation signifies a transformation – a leap from doubt to unwavering faith. Thomas’ story, then, becomes a testament to the power of seeking answers and the ultimate triumph of faith, even in the face of uncertainty.

The Gospel of Thomas: Unveiling the Mystery

Adding another layer of intrigue is the Gospel of Thomas, a non-canonical text discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. Unlike the canonical Gospels, it focuses on Jesus’ teachings in the form of sayings and parables. The authenticity of this text is debated, but it offers a glimpse into a different understanding of Jesus’ message.

Scholars suggest that the Gospel of Thomas reflects an early Christian movement with a more Gnostic perspective, emphasizing self-knowledge and inner wisdom. The sayings attributed to Jesus are often cryptic and metaphorical, requiring deeper reflection. While not a substitute for the

canonical Gospels, understanding the Gospel of Thomas can enrich our understanding of Jesus' diverse teachings.

Beyond the Biblical Narrative: St. Thomas, the Missionary

Tradition holds that after Jesus' ascension, St. Thomas embarked on extensive missionary journeys, spreading the gospel message to the East. Legends portray him traveling to India, China, and even beyond. Although the historical accuracy of these accounts remains uncertain, they highlight the enduring legacy of St. Thomas' faith and his zeal for sharing it.

A Legacy of Transformation

St. Thomas' story transcends the labels of "doubter" or "missionary." It offers valuable insights for our own spiritual journeys:

- **The Importance of Inquiry:** Thomas' questioning nature reminds us that faith can coexist with curiosity. Doubts and questions can be stepping stones towards a deeper understanding.
- **The Power of Personal Experience:** Like Thomas, we may seek experiences that solidify our faith. However, the path to faith may involve a blend of reason, emotion, and personal connection with the divine.
- **The Infinite Mystery of Christ:** Both the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Thomas, in their own ways, highlight the multifaceted nature of Jesus and the ongoing quest to comprehend his teachings.

Concluding remark

St. Thomas, with his initial skepticism and subsequent profound faith, embodies the human struggle to grapple with the divine. His story reminds us that faith is a journey, not a destination, and that true understanding often lies beyond the confines of easy answers. It compels us to continue seeking, questioning, and ultimately, embracing the infinite mystery that is Jesus Christ.

Section 3

Stories of 7 Men and Women in Philosophy – ancient to modern



V. Christianto & Florentin Smarandache

Stories of 7 Men and Women in Philosophy – Ancient to Modern

Preface to Men and Women series: A Tapestry of Humanity

Welcome, reader, to a journey that explores the dynamic between men and women throughout history. This book, the culmination of the “Men and Women” series, weaves together narratives from various fields, aiming to create a richer tapestry of human experience.

Within these pages, we will delve into the profound faith of men and women in the Bible. Their stories of devotion, struggle, and leadership offer timeless lessons and a deeper understanding of humanity’s relationship with the divine.

Moving from the sacred to the secular, we then encounter the world of philosophy. Here, we’ll meet brilliant

minds like Hildegard von Bingen, whose groundbreaking work challenged the boundaries of knowledge in her time. Both men and women philosophers have tirelessly grappled with fundamental questions about existence, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to shape our understanding of the world.

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Finally, we turn our gaze inwards, exploring the realm of spirituality. From ancient traditions to modern practices, men and women have sought meaning and connection beyond the material world.

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As you embark on this journey, keep an open mind and a curious spirit. Prepare to be surprised, inspired, and challenged by the diverse voices that fill these pages. May

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Maranatha

Mid April 2024

Victor Christiano & Florentin Smarandache

Thales of Miletus: The Fountainhead of Philosophy

Standing at the very cusp of Western philosophy lies Thales of Miletus, a 6th-century BC Greek thinker often hailed as the “first philosopher.” Unlike his predecessors who relied on mythical explanations for natural phenomena, Thales sought rational and scientific understanding. His groundbreaking proposition – that water is the arche, the fundamental principle from which all things arise – marked a pivotal shift in human thought.

From Myth to Cosmos: The Dawn of Inquiry

Prior to Thales, Greek explanations for the universe relied heavily on gods and mythical narratives. Natural occurrences, like storms or earthquakes, were attributed to the whims of deities. Thales, however, dared to question these established beliefs. He sought a single, underlying

principle that could explain the nature of all things – the first material cause from which everything originates.

Water, the Essence of All:

Thales arrived at his famous conclusion – that water is the arche – after observing the world around him. He likely drew inspiration from several sources:

- ~ **The Primordial Ocean:** Ancient Greek myths often depicted the world as emerging from a vast, primordial ocean. Thales might have seen this as the foundation for all things.
- ~ **The Life-Sustaining Power of Water:** Water's vital role in sustaining life would have been undeniable to Thales. He may have reasoned that since all living things need water, it must be the source from which life itself originates.
- ~ **The Ever-Changing Nature of Water:** Water's ability to exist in solid, liquid, and vaporous states might have resonated with Thales. It could represent the potential for all forms of matter to come into existence from this single source.

While Thales' specific reasoning remains a topic of scholarly debate, his proposition represented a radical departure from myth. He paved the way for a more rational approach to understanding the world, laying the foundation for the scientific and philosophical endeavors that would flourish in ancient Greece.

Echoes in the Divine Iliad: A Question of Authorship

The existence of an unknown writer's book titled "The Divine Iliad" that supposedly mirrors Thales' water theory is intriguing, but its authenticity is questionable. Here's why:

- ~ **Limited Historical Evidence:** There is no mention of such a book or author in any reliable ancient Greek sources.
- ~ **The Nature of the Iliad:** The Iliad, a well-known Greek epic poem, focuses on the Trojan War and the exploits of Achilles. It wouldn't be a natural fit for a philosophical treatise on the fundamental elements of the universe.

It's possible that this book is a later invention, perhaps mistakenly attributed to an unknown writer.

Beyond Water: The Legacy of Thales

Thales' contributions extend beyond his theory of water as the arche. He made significant advancements in mathematics, geometry, and astronomy. He is credited with predicting a solar eclipse, a feat that solidified his reputation as a wise and learned man.

More importantly, Thales established a school of thought in Miletus, inspiring future philosophers like Anaximander and Anaximenes. He ignited the flame of philosophical inquiry, encouraging a shift from mythical explanations to rational thinking. This intellectual torch, passed down through generations, illuminated the path for the development of Western philosophical thought.

A Wellspring of Inspiration:

Thales' legacy continues to inspire us in several ways:

- ~ **The Importance of Questioning:** He challenged established beliefs and dared to seek answers through observation and reason. His spirit of inquiry is a cornerstone of scientific progress.
- ~ **The Search for Underlying Principles:** Thales' search for the arche echoes our quest for the fundamental laws that govern the universe. His story reminds us that the journey towards knowledge is an ongoing process.
- ~ **The Interconnectedness of the World:** His water theory, while not entirely accurate, highlights the desire to understand how various elements are linked and form a cohesive whole.

Thales of Miletus stands as a towering figure at the dawn of Western philosophy. His proposition about water, though debatable, ignited the fire of scientific inquiry. He challenged the status quo and initiated a tradition of seeking rational explanations for the world around us. His legacy continues to inspire us to question, explore, and strive for a deeper understanding of the cosmos.

Further Exploration

To delve deeper into the world of Thales and early Greek philosophy, consider exploring:

- ~ **The writings of early Greek historians** like Herodotus and Aristotle, who mention Thales and his ideas.

- ~ **Works by modern scholars** on the history of philosophy, which offer detailed analysis of Thales' theories and their impact.
- ~ **Resources on the development** of scientific thought, which trace the lineage of inquiry initiated by Thales.

Epimenides: Cretan Prophet and Paradoxical Philosopher

Epimenides, a name echoing from the mists of ancient Greece, occupies a unique space at the intersection of philosophy, religion, and paradox. Hailing from Crete, he was revered as both a wise philosopher and a divinely inspired prophet. His legacy is further cemented by his unexpected appearance in the New Testament, specifically in the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus. Let's explore the intriguing life and ideas of Epimenides, navigating the historical gaps and unraveling the threads of his enduring influence.

Shrouded in Mystery: A Life Reconstructed

Unfortunately, very little concrete information about Epimenides' life survives. Historians estimate he lived sometime in the 6th century BC on the island of Crete.

Ancient sources, such as Plato and Plutarch, mention him with admiration, yet details remain sketchy. Legends portray him as a gifted poet and a man of exceptional wisdom, credited with purifying Athens from a plague.

The Cretan Prophet: Between Myth and Reality

Epimenides was believed to possess a unique connection to the divine. He was credited with prophetic abilities and even considered one of the “Seven Sages” of ancient Greece, a group of revered philosophers. Some accounts suggest he experienced a period of divinely induced sleep that lasted for decades, upon awakening, possessing profound knowledge.

The Paradoxical Statement: A Challenge to Logic

Epimenides’ most enduring legacy lies in his association with a now-famous paradox. According to ancient sources, he once declared, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (quoted in Titus 1:12). The paradox arises because Epimenides himself was a Cretan. If all Cretans are liars, then Epimenides’ statement must be a lie. But if it’s a lie, then Epimenides, a Cretan, is telling the truth, which contradicts his initial statement. This paradox has captivated logicians and philosophers for centuries, highlighting the complexities of language and self-reference.

A Biblical Connection: Epimenides in the New Testament

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Titus, a leader of the early Christian church in Crete, makes a surprising reference to Epimenides. He quotes a line similar to the famous paradox, calling the Cretans “liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12). However, Paul doesn’t mention Epimenides by name but refers to him as “one of their own prophets” (Titus 1:12). This brief yet significant mention suggests that Epimenides’ reputation as a prophet and his critical view of Cretan society were well-known in the region.

Interpreting the Biblical Citation:

Paul’s use of Epimenides’ quote can be interpreted in several ways:

- ~ **Supporting Criticism:** Paul might be using the quote to bolster his own criticism of the Cretans, aligning himself with a respected Cretan figure.
- ~ **Highlighting Hypocrisy:** By citing a Cretan prophet, Paul might be challenging the Cretans to live up to their own moral standards as articulated by their own prophet.
- ~ **Irony and Contrast:** The use of a pagan prophet’s words in a Christian letter might be a subtle way to showcase the superiority of Christian teachings.

The exact intention remains open to debate, but it undeniably links Epimenides to the nascent Christian world.

A Legacy of Paradox and Influence

Epimenides' legacy stretches far beyond his enigmatic life. He represents:

- ~ **The Intersection of Philosophy and Religion:** His dual role as a philosopher and prophet blurs the lines between these realms, reflecting the interconnectedness of wisdom and faith in the ancient world.
- ~ **The Power of Paradox:** His most famous statement continues to challenge logicians and philosophers, demonstrating the complexities of language and self-reference.
- ~ **A Bridge Between Cultures:** His mention in the New Testament connects the Greco-Roman world with the emerging Christian tradition.

A Figure of Mystery and Enduring Fascination

Epimenides, shrouded in the mists of time, remains a fascinating figure. His life and ideas offer a glimpse into the intellectual and religious landscape of ancient Greece. The paradoxical statement attributed to him continues to spark debate and intrigue. His presence in the New Testament underscores the interconnectedness of cultures and belief systems in the ancient world. Epimenides stands as a testament to the enduring power of wisdom, prophecy, and the enduring allure of the paradoxical.

Hildegard von Bingen

(see in this book cover)

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was a remarkable woman who defied the limitations imposed on women in the Middle Ages. A Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, and visionary mystic, she left an indelible mark on religious history, medicine, and the natural world. Her life and work offer a captivating glimpse into the intellectual and spiritual landscape of the 12th century.

A Cloistered Life, Blossoming Intellect

Born into a noble family in Germany, Hildegard was offered to the Church at a young age. She entered the Benedictine monastery of Disibodenberg at the tender age of eight, where she received a basic education in religious studies. However, Hildegard's true education came from her visions.

From a young age, she experienced vivid and complex visions that she described as flowing from God into her

soul. Initially hesitant to share these experiences, she eventually felt compelled to record them, convinced of their divine origin.

Breaking the Mold: A Voice of Authority

Hildegard's visions, filled with rich symbolism and theological insights, challenged the prevailing view of women in the Church. Despite facing resistance from some male authorities, she persevered, finding support from powerful figures like Pope Eugenius III. She received papal approval to record her visions, a remarkable feat for a woman in that era. Her writings, including "Scivias" (Know the Ways) and "Liber Divinorum Operum" (Book of Divine Works), showcased her profound theological understanding and her unique perspective on the cosmos.

Beyond Visions: A Multifaceted Genius

Hildegard's talents extended far beyond the realm of visions. She was a prolific writer, composing not just theological treatises but also letters, poems, and even a morality play. She possessed a keen interest in the natural world, developing a unique system of herbal medicine and recording detailed observations about plants and animals. Her most innovative work, however, was her music. She composed liturgical chants characterized by a distinctive style and emotional depth, further enriching her spiritual legacy.

A Bridge Between Science and Spirituality

Hildegard's approach to the world was holistic, integrating spirituality with scientific curiosity. Her writings on medicine, while rooted in religious beliefs, also demonstrate a keen observation of the human body and the natural world. She challenged the prevailing medical practices of the time, advocating for a more holistic approach that considered both physical and spiritual well-being.

A Legacy of Inspiration

Hildegard's life and work resonate across centuries for several reasons:

- ~ **Defying Expectations:** She challenged the limitations placed on women in the Middle Ages, asserting her voice and leaving a lasting impact on theology, music, and medicine.
- ~ **The Power of Visions:** Her visionary experiences, while controversial in her time, offer a unique window into medieval religious thought and the importance of divine inspiration.
- ~ **Holistic Approach:** Her work bridges the gap between science and spirituality, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things.

A Figure for Our Times

In today's world, Hildegard's legacy offers valuable insights:

- ~ **The Importance of Listening to Inner Voices:** Her life encourages us to pay attention to our intuition and inspiration, even when they challenge the status quo.
- ~ **The Interconnectedness of Creation:** Her holistic approach to the world serves as a reminder of the delicate balance between human well-being and the natural world.
- ~ **Breaking Barriers:** Her story inspires us to break down limitations and pursue our passions, regardless of societal constraints.

Further Exploration

To delve deeper into the fascinating world of Hildegard of Bingen, consider exploring:

- ~ **Translations of her writings**, such as “Scivias” and “Liber Divinorum Operum”, to gain firsthand access to her unique perspective.
- ~ **Biographical works that explore** the historical context of her life and the challenges she faced.
- ~ **Recordings of her music** to experience the beauty and emotional depth of her compositions.

John Lennox: Bridging the Divide Between Faith and Science

In the ongoing conversation between science and religion, Professor John Lennox stands as a prominent figure. An eminent mathematician at the University of Oxford, Lennox is also a committed Christian apologist, using his scientific background to defend the rationality of faith. His life and work bridge the gap between seemingly disparate worlds, offering a compelling perspective on the harmony between scientific inquiry and religious belief.

A Life in Numbers and Faith

Born in Northern Ireland in 1943, John Lennox's life has been shaped by both intellectual rigor and a deep Christian faith. He excelled in mathematics, earning his MA, MMath, and PhD from the University of Cambridge. His academic career flourished, leading him to a prestigious position as

Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford. While excelling in the realm of numbers, Lennox also nurtured his faith, finding a way to reconcile his scientific pursuits with his religious convictions.

Apologetic Advocate: Defending Faith with Reason

Lennox emerged as a prominent voice in Christian apologetics, the discipline of defending the Christian faith. He uses his scientific expertise to address common arguments against Christianity, particularly those rooted in scientific materialism – the belief that matter is the only reality. Lennox argues that science itself points to the existence of a Creator, highlighting the fine-tuning of the universe and the complexity of life as evidence of intelligent design.

Engaging the Critics: Debates and Dialogues

Lennox has actively engaged with prominent atheists and agnostics, participating in public debates with figures like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. These debates, often heated and widely publicized, brought the issue of science and religion to the forefront of public discourse.

Lennox, known for his respectful yet firm approach, aims to present a reasoned defense of Christian belief while acknowledging the complexities of scientific inquiry.

Beyond Debate: Books and Broader Reach

Lennox's impact extends beyond televised debates. He is a prolific author, penning books on topics such as the relationship between science and God, the historical reliability of the Bible, and the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. His books, accessible to a wide audience, provide a deeper exploration of the arguments he presents in public forums.

A Call for Openness and Respect

Lennox advocates for a space where science and religion can coexist and even complement each other. He encourages scientific curiosity while challenging the notion that science has all the answers. He emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and open-mindedness in navigating the complex questions of faith and existence.

The Legacy of John Lennox

John Lennox's contributions are significant for several reasons:

- ~ **Bridging the Divide:** He provides a crucial bridge between the realms of science and faith, demonstrating that they need not be in conflict.
- ~ **Engaging with Skepticism:** By engaging with prominent atheist thinkers, he addresses critical questions and encourages thoughtful dialogue.
- ~ **Inspiring Curiosity:** He encourages believers and non-believers alike to approach questions of faith

with intellectual honesty and a willingness to explore possibilities.

A Figure of Inspiration

John Lennox's life and work offer valuable lessons:

- ~ **Faith and Reason Can Coexist:** Scientific inquiry and religious belief can co-exist, even enrich each other.
- ~ **The Importance of Open Dialogue:** Honest and respectful conversation is crucial in navigating complex issues like faith and science.
- ~ **The Pursuit of Truth:** A relentless pursuit of truth, with an openness to evidence from various disciplines, is essential.

Further Exploration

To delve deeper into the world of John Lennox and the relationship between science and religion, consider exploring:

- ~ **Reading his books**, such as “Has Science Buried God?” or “Can Science Explain Everything?”, to delve into his arguments and reasoning.
- ~ **Watching videos of his debates** with prominent atheists to witness his approach firsthand.
- ~ **Researching the field of science** and religion, exploring the works of other scholars who grapple with the intersection of these two domains.

John Lennox, the mathematician who believes, stands as a testament to the possibility of intellectual rigor and a vibrant faith coexisting within one individual. His work continues to inspire believers and non-believers alike to engage in open and thoughtful dialogue on the most fundamental questions of existence.

Alister McGrath

A Bridge Between Science and Religion

Alister McGrath, a prominent figure in contemporary theology and philosophy, occupies a unique space at the crossroads of science and religion. Formerly an atheist turned Christian apologist, his journey reflects a deep engagement with both intellectual traditions. His work, encompassing theology, philosophy, and the natural sciences, bridges the gap between seemingly disparate worlds, offering a nuanced perspective on faith and reason.

From Atheist to Apologist: A Transformation of Thought

Born in 1953, McGrath embarked on a fascinating intellectual journey. Initially drawn to scientific inquiry, he earned a first-class honors degree in chemistry at Oxford University. His atheism, however, was challenged by the complexity of life and the seemingly inexplicable fine-tuning

of the universe. A thorough investigation of the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus led him to convert to Christianity. This transformative experience ignited a passion within him to explore the intersection of faith and reason.

A Scholarly Voice: Examining Faith Through Various Lenses

McGrath's academic credentials are impressive. He holds a DPhil in molecular biophysics and a doctorate in theology. This unique combination allows him to approach theological questions from both scientific and philosophical perspectives. He has authored numerous books that delve into various areas, including:

- ~ **Christian apologetics:** Defending the rationality of the Christian faith, addressing arguments from atheism and skepticism.
- ~ **Historical theology:** Examining the development of Christian thought throughout history.
- ~ **Science and religion:** Exploring the relationship between these two seemingly disparate domains.

Beyond Academia: Public Engagement and Dialogue

McGrath isn't confined to academic circles. He actively engages with the public through lectures, debates, and media appearances. His ability to communicate complex theological ideas in a clear and accessible manner resonates with a broad audience. He encourages

constructive dialogue between believers and non-believers, advocating for a respectful exchange of ideas.

A Legacy of Exploration and Understanding

Alister McGrath's contributions are significant in several ways:

- ~ **Bridging the Divide:** He fosters understanding between science and religion, demonstrating that they can be complementary rather than conflicting disciplines.
- ~ **Intellectual Honesty:** He encourages a rigorous approach to faith, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and a willingness to engage with challenging questions.
- ~ **Accessible Scholarship:** He makes complex theological concepts understandable to a wider audience, sparking curiosity and promoting informed dialogue.

A Figure of Inspiration

McGrath's life and work offer valuable lessons:

- ~ **Faith and Reason Can Coexist:** Scientific exploration and religious belief can co-exist and enrich each other, leading to a deeper understanding of the world.
- ~ **The Importance of Open Inquiry:** A relentless pursuit of knowledge, with a willingness to question assumptions, is essential in both scientific and theological endeavors.

- ~ **Communication is Key:** Clear and accessible communication allows complex ideas to reach a wider audience, fostering understanding and productive dialogue.

Further Exploration

To delve deeper into the world of Alister McGrath and the ongoing conversation between science and religion, consider exploring:

- ~ **Reading his books**, such as “Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction” or “Dawkins’ God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life” to gain insights into his perspectives.
- ~ **Listening to his lectures and podcasts** to experience his engaging and accessible approach to complex topics.
- ~ **Researching the field of science and religion**, exploring the works of other scholars who are grappling with the relationship between these two realms.

Alister McGrath’s journey from atheism to Christian apologist, combined with his exceptional academic background, positions him as a leading voice in contemporary theology. His work continues to inspire people of faith and non-believers alike to approach questions of existence with intellectual curiosity and a willingness to engage in thoughtful dialogue.

Kosuke Koyama: A Theologian with an Asian Voice

Kosuke Koyama (1915-1999) stands out as a prominent figure in Asian theology. A Japanese Christian theologian, he challenged traditional Western theological formulations and offered a unique perspective rooted in the realities of Asia. His work emphasizes the importance of contextualization, urging theology to address the specific needs and experiences of Asian societies.

From Rural Japan to Global Stage: A Life Dedicated to Faith Born in a rural Japanese village in 1915, Koyama's early life was steeped in Buddhist traditions.

However, a transformative experience led him to convert to Christianity. He pursued theological studies in Japan and the United States, earning a doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Returning to Japan, Koyama served as a pastor and professor, eventually becoming a leading voice in Asian theology.

Challenging the Western Narrative: A Contextual Approach

Koyama identified a disconnect between traditional Western theology, often rooted in European history and culture, and the realities of Asia. He argued that theology needed to be “contextualized,” meaning it should be reinterpreted and re-expressed in ways that resonate with the specific social, cultural, and political realities of Asian societies.

Key Themes in Koyama’s Theology

Koyama’s theological contributions encompass various themes:

- ~ **The Theology of Water Buffalo:** This influential concept uses the image of the water buffalo, a powerful yet domesticated animal, to represent the Asian experience. It challenges Western models of power and emphasizes the importance of communal well-being.
- ~ **The Theology of Han (Shame):** Koyama explores the concept of “han,” a deep sense of shame rooted in social relationships, and its implications for Christian understanding of sin and forgiveness.
- ~ **Minjung Theology:** He associated himself with Minjung Theology, a movement that champions the voices of the

marginalized and oppressed in Asia. Beyond Theology: Social Justice and Interfaith Dialogue

Koyama's work transcended the realm of purely academic theology. He was a vocal advocate for social justice, speaking out against oppression and advocating for the rights of the marginalized. He also championed interfaith dialogue, promoting understanding and cooperation between Christianity and other Asian religions.

A Legacy of Liberation and Contextualization

Kosuke Koyama's contributions hold lasting significance:

- ~ **A Voice for Asia:** He provided a much-needed Asian perspective in Christian theology, challenging Western dominance and offering a framework for a more contextualized faith.
- ~ **Theology for Liberation:** His emphasis on social justice and the plight of the marginalized continues to inspire theologians and activists working for a more just world.
- ~ **Interfaith Bridge Builder:** Koyama's work on interfaith dialogue paves the way for greater understanding and cooperation between religions in Asia and beyond.

A Figure of Inspiration

Koyama's life and work offer valuable lessons:

- ~ **The Importance of Context:** Theological ideas need to be re-examined and re-expressed in ways that resonate with specific cultural and social contexts.

- ~ **Faith and Social Justice:** Christian faith compels us to work for social justice and speak out against oppression.
- ~ **Interfaith Dialogue:** Understanding and cooperation between different religions is crucial for building a more peaceful and harmonious world.

Further Exploration

To delve deeper into the world of Kosuke Koyama and Asian theology, consider exploring:

- ~ **Reading his books**, such as “Waterbuffalo Theology” or “Three Mile an Hour God,” to gain firsthand access to his ideas.
- ~ **Researching Asian theology**, exploring the works of other Asian theologians who are building upon Koyama’s legacy.
- ~ **Engaging with interfaith dialogue** initiatives in your community to promote understanding and cooperation between different religious traditions.

Kosuke Koyama stands as a beacon of Asian theological thought. His work continues to inspire theologians, activists, and believers of all backgrounds to approach faith with a critical lens, to advocate for the marginalized, and to build bridges of understanding across religious divides.

Miroslav Volf: Navigating Faith in a Divided World

Miroslav Volf, a contemporary philosopher-theologian, stands out for his profound explorations of faith and its role in a world fraught with division. Born in former Yugoslavia in 1951, his life experience amidst political and religious tensions has deeply shaped his work. Volf's intellectual contributions bridge the gap between philosophy, theology, and political theory, offering a compelling vision for fostering understanding and reconciliation across seemingly unbridgeable divides.

A World Shaped by Division: From Yugoslavia to Global Stage

Volf's early life in Yugoslavia exposed him to the devastating consequences of ethnic and religious conflict. This firsthand experience with division fueled his lifelong pursuit of understanding the nature of conflict and the possibility of reconciliation. He pursued his academic

career in the United States, earning a doctorate in theology from Yale University. As a professor of theology at Fuller Seminary and Yale Divinity School, Volf has become a leading voice in contemporary theological discourse.

The Centrality of Storytelling: Narrative Theology in Action

Volf's approach to theology is unique. He emphasizes the power of storytelling, arguing that narratives can illuminate complex theological concepts and bridge divides in ways that abstract theory often cannot. He encourages using personal stories, historical accounts, and even fictional narratives to explore theological themes and foster empathy across religious and cultural boundaries.

Wrestling with Difficult Questions: Exclusion and Embrace

One of Volf's most significant contributions is his exploration of the delicate balance between exclusion and embrace. He argues that healthy communities rely on establishing boundaries and excluding certain behaviors, but they must also be open to embracing difference and forging connections across those boundaries. His book, "Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation," tackles these complex themes with remarkable depth and nuance.

Beyond Religious Walls: Public Theology and Flourishing

Volf's theological vision extends beyond the walls of religious institutions. He advocates for "public theology," a practice of engaging with social, political, and economic issues from a faith-based perspective. His book, "Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World," argues that religion plays a vital role in promoting human flourishing and building a more just and peaceful world.

A Legacy of Reconciliation and Hope

Miroslav Volf's contributions are significant in several ways:

- ~ **Bridging Divides:** His work offers a framework for fostering understanding and reconciliation in a divided world.
- ~ **The Power of Storytelling:** He highlights the importance of narratives in theological discourse and interfaith dialogue.
- ~ **Public Theology in Action:** He encourages active engagement with social issues informed by a faith-based perspective.

A Figure of Inspiration

Volf's life and work offer valuable lessons:

- ~ **Faith and Reconciliation:** Religious faith can be a powerful tool for promoting reconciliation and understanding in a world of conflict.

- ~ **Empathy Through Narrative:** Sharing stories can be a powerful way to connect with others and build bridges across divides.
- ~ **Faith in the Public Sphere:** Religion can contribute positively to public discourse and the pursuit of a more just society.

Further Exploration

To delve deeper into the world of Miroslav Volf and his thought-provoking ideas, consider exploring:

- ~ **Reading his books,** particularly “Exclusion and Embrace” and “Flourishing,” to gain a deeper understanding of his central arguments.
- ~ **Engaging with online resources** from institutions like Yale Divinity School, where Volf has taught, to access lectures and articles.
- ~ **Exploring the field of public theology** by researching the works of other scholars who advocate for a faith-based approach to social and political issues.

Miroslav Volf’s intellectual contributions stand as a beacon of hope in an often-divided world. By emphasizing storytelling, reconciliation, and the power of public theology, he inspires us to embrace our differences, engage with social issues, and work towards a more flourishing future for all.



Hildegard von Bingen

Epilogue

How Design Thinking Meet Ikigai Principles – A Case of Appropriate Technologies



How Design Thinking Methodology Meets Ikigai Principles: A Few Examples

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Introduction: Finding Your Ikigai Through Design Thinking

Design thinking has become a powerful tool for creative problem-solving across industries. But what if we could combine its structured approach with the profound wisdom of the Japanese concept of Ikigai? Ikigai, roughly translating to “reason for being,” centers on finding the intersection of your passion, mission, vocation, and profession. This

article explores how design thinking methodology can be enhanced by Ikigai principles to create a more fulfilling and impactful design process.

The Design Thinking Framework

Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation. It follows a series of iterative stages:

1. **Empathize:** Understanding the needs and challenges of the target audience.
2. **Define:** Clearly framing the problem statement based on user research.
3. **Ideate:** Brainstorming a multitude of potential solutions.
4. **Prototype:** Creating low-fidelity models to test and refine ideas.
5. **Test:** Gathering user feedback on prototypes to validate or iterate on solutions.

Ikigai: Aligning passion with purpose

Ikigai goes beyond just identifying a career path. It's about discovering the sweet spot where your:

- ~ **Passion:** What you love to do.
- ~ **Mission:** What the world needs.
- ~ **Vocation:** What you're good at.
- ~ **Profession:** What you can be paid for.

How Design Thinking meets Ikigai

Here's how Ikigai principles can enrich the design thinking process:

- ~ **Empathize with passion:** During the empathy stage, consider not just user needs but also their passions and aspirations. How can your design solution tap into their inherent desires?
- ~ **Define with purpose:** As you define the problem statement, ensure it aligns with a greater purpose. Is your design addressing a challenge that truly matters?
- ~ **Ideate with Ikigai in mind:** Brainstorm solutions that consider the user's passions and your own skills and interests. Look for opportunities to create something that sparks joy in both the user and yourself.
- ~ **Prototype for impact:** Develop prototypes that not only address user needs but also have the potential to create a positive impact on the world.
- ~ **Test with Ikigai as a lens:** Gather user feedback with Ikigai in mind. Does your design resonate with their passions and aspirations? Does it create a sense of purpose and fulfillment?

By incorporating Ikigai principles, design thinking becomes a more holistic and meaningful process. It allows you to not only create innovative solutions but also solutions that resonate with your own sense of purpose and the passions of your users.

This approach can lead to:

- ~ **More impactful designs:** Solutions that address not just functional needs but also emotional and aspirational ones.
- ~ **Increased designer satisfaction:** A design process that aligns with your own values and passions can be more fulfilling.
- ~ **Stronger user connection:** Designs that resonate with user passions can foster deeper connections and brand loyalty.

Outline of possible examples in real world:

(a) Improving nutrition for school children in developing countries

Malnutrition in developing countries remains a persistent challenge, especially for school children. While global solutions are crucial, the key to success might lie in adapting local resources and traditions. This article explores how a historical intervention in Japan, combined with a “think globally, act locally” approach, can offer valuable lessons for improving child nutrition programs in developing countries like Indonesia.

The Nori Intervention: A Model for Local Action

In the 1950s, Japan faced a serious childhood malnutrition problem. A key solution involved incorporating Nori, a readily available and affordable source of vitamins and minerals – seaweed – into school lunches. This simple,

culturally relevant intervention significantly improved children's health.

Think Globally, Act Locally: Applying the Nori Lesson

The Nori story offers a powerful message for developing countries:

- ~ **Identify Local Staples:** Focus on fortifying or incorporating nutrient-rich, locally available foods into school meals. These could be indigenous fruits, vegetables, or underutilized grains.
- ~ **Culturally Relevant Solutions:** Programs should resonate with local traditions and preferences. This fosters acceptance and long-term sustainability.
- ~ **Community Involvement:** Engage local farmers and communities in producing and supplying these nutritious ingredients for school meals. This strengthens local economies and fosters ownership.

Indonesia: A Case for Local Action

Indonesia, with its diverse agricultural landscape, presents a perfect example for applying the “think globally, act locally” approach. Here's how:

- ~ **Nutrient-Rich Local Staples:** Indonesia boasts a wealth of nutrient-rich options like sweet potatoes (vitamin A), Moringa leaves (iron and calcium), and tempeh (protein). These can be incorporated into school meals.

- ~ **Culturally-Sensitive Menus:** Indonesian cuisine often features rice and vegetables. School meals can build on this foundation by adding these locally sourced, fortified options.
- ~ **Community Partnerships:** Partnering with local farmers to supply these ingredients can create a sustainable food system for school meals.

Beyond Nori: A Call to Action

The Nori intervention serves as a powerful reminder that solutions to complex problems often lie in leveraging local resources and traditions. By adopting a “think globally, act locally” approach, developing countries like Indonesia can design effective and culturally relevant nutrition programs for their school children. This approach, combined with investment in education and sanitation, has the potential to break the cycle of malnutrition and create a healthier future for generations to come.

(b) Potential solution to global increase of temperature with improving condition of deep sea fishes

Rethinking Deep-Sea Fisheries with Design Thinking and Ikigai

The relentless rise in global temperatures and looming threat of climate change demand drastic solutions. While human activity plays a major role, a surprising factor might contribute to this crisis: the decline of deep-sea fish populations. This article explores how a design thinking approach, guided by the principles

of Ikigai, can pave the way for a solution that benefits both the environment and the fishing industry.

The Deep-Sea Fish Connection: A Hypothesis

Recent research suggests a link between specific deep-sea fish populations and ocean temperature regulation. These specialized fish, through their biological processes and ecological roles, might play a part in maintaining a natural oceanic balance.

Uncontrolled deep-sea fishing in recent decades could have inadvertently disrupted this delicate equilibrium, contributing to rising global temperatures.

Design Thinking with Ikigai: Finding Harmony

Design thinking, with its emphasis on human-centered solutions and iterative problem-solving, offers a framework to address this challenge. Here's how Ikigai principles can be integrated:

- ~ **Empathize with the Ocean:** Understanding the ocean ecosystem, including the role of deep-sea fish, becomes paramount. Scientific research and data analysis are crucial at this stage.
- ~ **Define with Purpose:** The problem statement needs to consider not just temperature reduction but also protecting biodiversity and ensuring a sustainable future for the oceans. Ikigai's focus on purpose can guide this definition.
- ~ **Ideate with Innovation:** Brainstorm a range of solutions that go beyond simply banning deep-sea fishing.

This could involve:

- o Identifying specific fish species critical for temperature regulation.
 - o Implementing quotas and regulations for sustainable deep-sea fishing.
 - o Exploring alternative fishing practices with minimal ecological impact.
- ~ **Prototype with Responsibility:** Pilot programs can be implemented to test the effectiveness of proposed solutions. This phase can involve collaboration with fishing communities to find workable solutions.
- ~ **Test with Impact:** Continuously monitor the impact of implemented solutions on deep-sea ecosystems and global temperature. Ikigai's emphasis on finding solutions that create a positive impact becomes crucial here.

Finding the Ikigai of the Ocean

This approach goes beyond just tackling climate change. It seeks to identify solutions that align with the “Ikigai” of the ocean – a state of balance where the ecosystem thrives, fishing communities flourish, and the needs of future generations are considered.

The hypothesis of deep-sea fish influencing global temperature needs further scientific exploration. However, the design thinking framework with Ikigai principles provides a valuable starting point for tackling this multifaceted challenge. Collaborative efforts involving scientists, policymakers, and the fishing industry are needed to ensure

a sustainable future for our oceans and our planet. By focusing on solutions that benefit both humans and nature, we can move towards a world in harmony.

Concluding remarks

So, the next time you embark on a design thinking project, consider incorporating the wisdom of Ikigai. It might just help you discover your own design Ikigai – a process that is both personally fulfilling and leads to impactful solutions for the world.

By incorporating Ikigai principles, design thinking becomes a more holistic and meaningful process. It allows you to not only create innovative solutions but also solutions that resonate with your own sense of purpose and the passions of your users.

Moreover, our proposed approach goes on taking a deeper look at deep sea ecosystem goes beyond just tackling climate change. It seeks to identify solutions that align with the “Ikigai” of the ocean – a state of balance where the ecosystem thrives, fishing communities flourish, and the needs of future generations are considered.

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