

Dear People Whom God Loves,

FREEDOM-EVIL-SALVATION

God is Infinite Freedom, humans possess partial freedom, other worldly creatures possess no freedom.

Freedom is power to choose good. The more loving we become, the more we will choose what is good. Only we humans, of all earthly creatures, have the newest part of the brain that allows us to have sufficient understanding of what good is, to then choose good, because it is good.

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Our freedom is finite. As humans we have within us urges and drives that are good but in various situations can pull us to choose to use them in ways that are bad. We can also choose to use them in ways that are good. This is why we say that our freedom is finite. This is why we can sin. We can choose evil. The reality of being human means that we are not totally drawn to choose good. Our freedom is finite.

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God is Infinite Love. The greater our love is, the more we are drawn to choose good. Since God is Infinite Love, God is Infinite Freedom. Hence God is only drawn to choose what is good.

[A cautionary note: When we use human words like love and freedom to apply to God, we must also remember that God is something like our human words and at the same time is not like our human words and finally is way superior to what our human words are saying. But words still help us have some understanding of God.]

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When we look at our own sins and then see the bad consequences that they have for people, we might lose hope that everything will be okay. When we look at the sins and harmful consequences of all the human sins since humans first walked our earth, we can be tempted to give up hope. When we look at all the mayhem across our world today, wouldn't we be inclined to think that we humans could never fix it. Despair would be quite reasonable.

Our belief as Christians is that God is creator. That means that the Love we name God is holding everyone and everything in existence and that that presence is working in a way that is mysterious and does not interfere with the laws of nature. [The laws of

nature are the patterns that science has been able to ascertain.] As Christians we believe that the power to evolve was a gift from God to our universe.

Since God is Love, we believe (since love doesn't force) that the power of God is the power of love and not the power of force. Hence God respects the type of freedom that is in the universe and the type of freedom that is only in us humans. If God did not allow our freedom, we would not be human and we could not love. We might have a good mechanical working world, but there would be no love.

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With all the pain and suffering that our eons of sin have contributed to causing in our world of today, it is easy to say that our world will never be peaceful and loving. Can we have hope?

Our answer as Christians is yes. We believe that God comes into humanity in Jesus. This is expressed in the words that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Remember that these words are pointing to a wonderful mystery. This mystery is far more than our human words can express. The words are valuable. They can help us believe in the mystery to which they point. At the same time our belief is a gift from God. I believe that we need to have some degree of openness or willingness to receive that gift. I also believe that God will help us find a way to become open.

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What has this to do with salvation? What has this to do with hope? (Please remember that my words are frail and halting.) God chooses to save us and give us hope that full peace and love will eventually be ours. In Jesus, God saves us by Jesus bearing the suffering, pain and hate that humans endure. What did Jesus bear? There was the terrible physical pain of the scourging and the crucifixion, being abandoned by many of his disciples, and the rejection by people that he loved. Our creed says that he descended into hell. Hell symbolizes the state of total darkness, despair, hopelessness, hate, and aloneness. Jesus endured every kind of suffering that a human could have. That is why we call God savior and Jesus savior. God saves us – in Jesus – by going through all of the terrible suffering caused by sin. The resurrection of Jesus is the consequence that follows and is God's sign that all the horror caused by sin will be healed. In other words, we are saved.

We might ask: this happened 2000 years ago and we still are nowhere near full peace, love and happiness. True enough. The salvation story does not end with Jesus' death. Jesus was raised from the dead. (This does not mean that he came back to life.) He

was transformed in his humanness into full peace and love. It is that risen state to which we are all called. God does not force us to enter that state of peace and love that we call the Reign of God. We need to be willing to choose to enter the Reign of God. The power of salvation is God. We are called to co-operate in that power. No wonder that it is not that far along. Heaven is the name of the state that we call the Reign of God. On earth we will never be fully in it.

Jesus tells us that he will send the Spirit to be with us. The Spirit will continue to draw us into that state of peace and love, and after we die to the risen state which is full peace and love. Indeed not only humans will be saved but the whole universe will become the perfection it was meant to be.

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This message of good news is what Jesus brought us. He called that the Reign of God. He wanted the good news to be brought to all nations. This is our mission as Christians – to be willing to accept the gift of gradually being transformed to resemble in a finite way the love, compassion, and mercy that God is.

This gives me a deeper understanding of Jn. 8: 31-32. "Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, 'If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.'"

Smile, God Loves You

Father Clay

P.S. The theologian Hans Kung wrote "There will never be peace on earth until there is peace among religions."

All of us who belong to a religion need to ask ourselves this question: Am I really being a strong believer and practicer of my religion or am I just feeding my ego by showing my power and how right I am? This includes me. I think the latter is more prevalent than we want to face. How much killing and harm has been done in the name of "God"? It is possible to "do" religion and not be entering the Reign of God.