

APE LAKE, BRITISH COLUMBIA, EARTH 25 DECEMBER 2051

Jon Paul Kendall Remillard had philosophical difficulties with the concept of Christmas. That the scraggly little evergreen tree his mother was trimming was a midwinter hope symbol was easy enough to understand from the explanations and mental images his mother Teresa offered. But the notion of God creating a body for himself to wear—and even Creation itself—bothered Jack.

He said: “It seems a very strange and unnecessary thing for God to do. To become human so that we’d love him rather than fear him. If he’s truly a Supreme Being then it follows that he has no need of any other entity to ensure his own happiness. Especially entities that are so imperfect by their very nature that they will inevitably befoul an otherwise orderly creation. I can understand God creating the physical universe for fun. But why create other minds when you know they’re going to mess things up?”

Teresa: “I believe famous human thinkers have debated those points.” I seem to remember that the theologians of early times were quite positive that God had no absolute need to create other thinking persons,” Teresa said. “This is perfectly ridiculous, of course, since the theologians were willing to concede that he had done it and must have had a good reason. Now, unless we’re ready to admit that a Supreme Being can be capricious or wishy-washy, it follows that he needed to do it. He did need us.”

Jack: “But what prompted God’s need of us?”

“Love,” said Teresa.

Jack said: “That’s irrational.”

“Exactly. I don’t believe anyone has ever reasoned out a satisfactory answer to God’s need of us. Those religions outside the Judeo-Christian tradition rarely hit upon the notion of a loving God at all. As for natural philosophy, loving-kindness would not be an attribute that one would logically deduce that a Big-Bang-Creator-God would have.”

“Hardly.”

“But love is the only motive that seems to make any sense. Without it, you have the Creator-God as a game player trying to assuage his cosmic boredom, caring about us only as game pieces. That is to say, not caring very much! Now, if God wanted us to know that he created us out of love, he’d have to tell us, since we couldn’t figure it out for ourselves. He’d have to get directly involved with us, rather than let us tick along obliviously the way the evolving non-sapient universe does.”

“I suppose so ...”

“There are any number of ways he might have done this. But put yourself in God’s position and try to decide the most elegant way to get involved with your thinking creatures. The way that is at once most difficult and unlikely but has the potentiality to succeed in the most magnificent manner imaginable.”

“Not the easiest way?”

“Heavens, no! What would be the satisfaction in that! I can sing ‘Happy Birthday to You’, but I get more satisfaction doing the mad scene from Lucia, even if it tires me out terribly.”

“I understand.”

Pinching and twisting, Teresa affixed one little candle after another, pausing now and then to straighten those that leaned out of true. “God’s most elegant way of involving himself with us would have to be a scandal to the stodgy-minded and a delight to minds that have a sense of humor and of adventure. As his mind does.”

“God can laugh?”

“Of course, dear, and feel sorrowful, too. A Supreme Being without those attributes wouldn’t be supreme. Grim and joyless people try to pretend otherwise, but their arguments are unpersuasive.”

“Explain to me how God became directly involved with us.”

“It has happened differently on different worlds in the Galaxy. On ours, I believe that the primary involvement happened through the Jewish people and the Christians. It’s a long story, and you’ll really have to read it in the Bible. That book is a fascinating account of human moral evolution, with historical and deeply mythic truth all mingled in a wonderful mishmash. It’s a literary treasure as well as the word of God, and some parts of it are profound, and some are fascinating and some are poetic, and some are even a bore, and parts of St. Paul make me want to scream. Different religions interpret the Bible in different ways, but we Catholics believe that when the mentalities of one single key tribe of extremely intelligent people were finally mature enough to grasp the concept of a loving God, God simply spoke to them.” She laughed. “Well—perhaps not simply.”

“And the tribe accepted his messages and passed them on?”

“Some members did. Others kept slipping and sliding back into primitive notions of angry gods that constantly needed to be appeased with blood sacrifices and other rubbish. God had to keep coaxing them and putting them in their place the way a loving mother has to do when her children are naughty.”

“Is love the motivation for all creation, then?”

“I imagine so. Mental lattices within our normal Reality can’t exist without the other five kinds, and vice versa. If God wanted to make minds to love, he had to make the whole cosmos. And it is quite lovely, most of it.”

“But to create for the love of it seems so odd!”

“Of course it does. It really makes no sense—in a rational view of the universe. And yet every artist knows the truth of it. And every healthy adult human knows that people who are in love want the whole world to be as happy as they are. If you are God, loving yourself or even being Love in some mysterious fashion, and there aren’t any other minds to share happiness with—then you make some.”

“So one may conclude that God does need us?”

“Most of our coreligionists today believe it’s true.”

Jack persisted: “And the problem of the created minds being imperfect? And sometimes evil?”

“There’s a principle to the effect that it is much more glorious to make something wonderful out of imperfect parts. The very imperfection of the individual elements—even when there’s actual evil involved, as there often is in human affairs—challenges God to greater creative heights.”

“What a strange idea.”

“There’s an old proverb that says: ‘God writes straight with crooked lines.’ Human history is just full of crooks and twists and twines. One would think anarchy or barbarism or the lowest common denominator would have triumphed ages ago. But it hasn’t. All the messes and atrocities and disasters have somehow been woven into a construct that looks better and better every year—at the same time that some things look even worse! The world you’re going to be born into is a wonderland compared to the world that existed only forty years or so in the past. But even so, there are still persons who are discontented or who are villains, and situations that are evil or tragic. Nevertheless we children of God continue to evolve and improve on every level, almost in spite of ourselves. That also has something to do with nonlinearity and chaos. And God’s love, too.”

Jack said: “That is very mysterious. Contrary to common sense!... Why do I find the concept pleasing? Mama, why do you give gifts at Christmas?”

“It’s a tradition. Wise men gave gifts to the infant Jesus. To Baby God. And he is God’s gift to us.”

Jack said: “That’s the biggest paradox. Even greater than Creation. It was quite unnecessary for God to become human and teach us his love in person. I can see why some Earth religions deny that it happened.”

“Yes, Incarnation is quite absurd. But you must admit it would be an excellent way to catch our attention! And so madly elegant. It’s also much easier for us to pray to and love a God-made-man, who would be more likely to understand our human difficulties, than to try to love an almighty Big-Bang-Creator. Why should he care if my roast is overdone or if I live long enough for you to be safely born?”

Jack said: “I would like him to care.”

“Ah! Now we’re moving into psychology! An incarnate, loving God takes on significant mythic overtones that appeal to the deepest levels of the human psyche. To that almost instinctive part of us called the collective unconscious.”

“I have not yet had any experience of that.”

“You will,” Teresa laughed, “when you really begin to socialize.”

“I—I wish I did not have to. Opening myself up to others can be painful as others are not always nice.”

“You mustn’t fret about it. All people have good and bad in them. I do, and so do you. This is one reason why a loving God is such an amazing consolation. He has no dark about him at all. God must know all there is to know about us—and yet he loves us anyway. He only wishes us well, even when we’re wicked or when we deny him. We would never have guessed that about him in a million years, if he hadn’t told us. It’s mysterious beyond belief”

“Did God become incarnate for aliens?”

“All of them seem to think that he did. And Milieu anthropologists—or whatever they call themselves—tell us that many of the more primitive races in the Galaxy have Incarnation myths very much like ours. Of course, none of this is proof of God’s Incarnation. Even though the evidence strongly points to the Incarnation, ultimately it can’t be proved. But I believe it, and so does Uncle Rogi, and your Papa and brothers and sisters, and billions of other entities. That kind of belief is called faith.”

She gave Jack a giant hug and closed her eyes for a moment. “I have faith in God’s love just as I have faith in your great future, Jack. There are many things that frighten me and other things that make me very unhappy. But if I can just hold on to faith, I won’t give in to despair. I won’t.”

Modified from:

May, Julian (2011-04-27). *Jack the Bodiless* (Galactic Milieu Trilogy) (pp. 268-275). Random House, Inc.. Kindle Edition.