

THE UNKNOWN GOD

LUCINDA RIBEIRO ALVES

Translated from Portuguese
2024 version

NIV-UK Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized,
NIV® Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright © 2023 Lucinda Ribeiro Alves

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 9798857930960

Imprint: Independently published

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Bernard Watts for his great contribution on the English language and above all our heavenly Father who always does wonderful miracles in my life.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I am not an important theologian, nor do I hold a prominent ecclesiastical position in any religious group. I am an ordinary human being who, after great suffering and relentless searching, believes she has been found by the Author of Life. This book is intended to share that quest and encounter with ordinary people who have heard about God since they were born, who may have their own religion or not, but who recognize that God is somehow still unknown. If someone does not acknowledge that God is unknown to them, they cannot know more of the One they do not know. If I think I know everything about something, I am content and at ease, and I do not need to know more.

The Master from Galilee once said: "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick*" (Matthew 9:12). We need to recognize the illness in order to be treated and healed. Only the emptiness can be filled. It is for those who want to know, who want more, who acknowledge that they have nothing and how small and ignorant they are, that the Carpenter of men has come. It is to those people that I also address myself and with whom I share my story.

When I speak of God, I speak of a real person, not of a religion or a philosophy. The fact that we do not fully know something does not invalidate its existence. The lack of knowledge about something does not prove its non-existence. Science will never prove that God does not exist because before

the Big Bang, it finds nothing but the possibility of a Creator, described in whatever way.

In the midst of the burning bush, He spoke of Himself to the man Moses and said: "I AM". It was not a name He shared, but His existence, above all of existence. He is before all being. Many men have had encounters and disagreements with this "I AM". Some were fleeting, others extraordinary. In these pages, I chose to share mine. It is an encounter with not much visible revelation to others, but it is my encounter. It is mine, very much mine and mine alone! And that makes it better than all others throughout all time.

God is a little less unknown to me today. I confess that I still feel I do not know Him, but I know it is not a total ignorance. However, what would become of me if I thought I knew everything about Him? I would be lost for sure, confined in religious dogmas without longing, without yearning, without hunger for more.

I hunger for the unknown that I have not yet discovered, for the surprise of knowing Him more, without ever fully knowing Him. That is why it is difficult at times to relate to those who call themselves believers but are content and complete. I cannot take them by the hand and say to them, "Come seek with me." They fill themselves with various occupations, secular or religious, that do not involve desperately seeking The Unknown. I feel at ease with the insatiable and humble hungry ones.

The Messiah preached to the poor in spirit, those who recognised they had nothing in this world. We arrive in this

world with nothing, and from this world, we depart with nothing, at least materially. We must be aware of this poverty so that we can receive from the richness of the spirit.

It is with humility that I acknowledge that in this book, I share more of my ignorance than my knowledge. Each page is an acknowledgment of my ignorance, of how little I understand about Him, the mysteries of creation, the laws that govern it, and myself. I discovered the scale of my ignorance, but this is the point where I must be finally to learn something. So say the philosophers...

In any case, I do not seek knowledge for its own sake. I seek the truth, and in the truth, I know that knowledge will be present. Simply, in my search, I came across this: He is the Truth! In Him, all wisdom and all science are contained. My lack of knowledge about everything lies in the fact that I do not know Him. In the midst of dense darkness, He extended His hand to my utmost astonishment. In the darkness, He wants to guide me to the Light, and in that direction, I let Him lead me. Even when I do not see light, I hold the Hand that guides me. I hear His whisper, not because He speaks softly, but because of my deafness. I hold the Hand firmly and surrender, because I can trust the only Hand that was extended to me in the midst of darkness, and this Truth guides me to the light.

I would like to have God's formula as in the book that bears that name¹, but unfortunately, such a formula does not exist. The closest to it is called Jesus, or Yeshua, as He was

¹ From José Rodrigues dos Santos

really called. God is not like packaged food, ready to serve. It takes patience and willingness to follow the elaborate recipe to obtain the special dish one desires.

Like Peter and John on their way to the temple, I have neither gold nor silver, but what I have, I give (Acts 3:1-8). In these pages, I offer my greatest treasure, echoing the words of the Preacher: "*Seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you*" (Matthew 7:7).

for as I was passing through
and considering the objects of your worship
I even found an altar with this inscription:
TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.
Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing,
Him I proclaim to you

Acts 17:23 (NKJV)

INDEX

I. Childhood Times	1
II. A Special Dream	9
III. Walking towards the Abyss	15
IV. The First Encounter	23
V. The First Steps	29
VI. Voltaire's Hypotheses	37
VII. The Self-Limitation of God	47
VIII. The Limitation of Love	53
IX. The Limitation of Human Will	61
X. The Limitation of Laws and Principles	77
XI. Origins and the Bible	95
XII. The Plan of Redemption	109
XIII. The New Birth	137
XIV. Final Message	145

I

CHILDHOOD TIMES

I was almost born in a remote area in Alentejo² whose name I can no longer recall, but my mother insisted that I should be born in my maternal grandmother's house, in a village in Beira Baixa³, surrounded by rivers, fields, and mountains. At the top of some stone stairs, there was the unforgettable, green, iron door. It was there, in that little stone house, that I came into this world. When the time came, my family purposefully went there for my birth and then returned to where we lived. I am not much of a country person, but I acknowledge that my village is beautiful.

My earliest memories go back to when I was three years old in a place called Salvaterra do Extremo, so named because it is located in a frontier area. The memories are hazy and varied: eating almond blossom, some tantrums and subsequent scoldings from my father, injuring a toe, having a little friend named David and playing with a small, black, plastic bull with him. Moreover, I attended a funeral with my mother and stayed outside the cemetery under huge cypress trees. I also remember eating a packet of potato chips with an older boy,

² Southern Portugal

³ Northern Portugal

whom I admired, according to what I was told. Was his name Carlos? My sister was born around that time. It seems I was asking for her until I had her, saying I would give all my money in exchange for a sister. She must have been cheap, as she arrived quickly, despite my few coins!

Still, at the age of three, I moved to live in Salvador, another small village hidden away in Beira. Looking back now, I find interesting that the names of the places I lived in during my childhood are Salvaterra (Land that Saves) and Salvador (Savior).

My mother, a practising Catholic to this day, used to take me to Sunday mass ever since I can remember. I recall sitting there, waiting for it to end... Now I understand that it was not that long, but for my young child's mind, it felt endless.

Somewhere in the liturgy, my mother mentioned a moment when we could make a wish; at least, that is what I understood. It was "between the chalice and the host." She explained that if we prayed fervently at that special moment, our wish would be granted. Not that the answer was guaranteed, but the chances significantly increased if the wish was made at that exact moment. Of course, being a credulous child, my desperate waiting was interrupted by a silent wish of seconds. I cannot remember what I wished for, but that was the extent of my knowledge of God during my early years. I cannot say if any of those wishes came true, but if I do not remember, I suppose it means they did not; otherwise, I think it would naturally be etched in my memory.

During my primary school years in this small village, amidst hills that were little known, a priest visited my class to prepare us for our First Communion. It was this man, so modest and not very eloquent, who spoke to me about the Saviour for the first time, there in the village that shared the same name.

The quiet Father Agostinho passed away... He did his best and took all the children to a day of confession. I took it to heart! I searched within myself and confessed even things that could be considered sinful, like speaking indecent words. I was quite brave and sincere. I had to say several "Our Fathers" and "Hail Marys" as penance. Then came the most difficult part: I had to try to avoid sinning for as long as possible... That would be an impossible odyssey! As soon as the wicked girls from my street found out I wanted to stay holy, they sat in front of me and tried everything until they triumphantly exclaimed, "There, you have sinned!" Then they left me alone with my guilt. So much effort, and I lost my holiness... Now, the only way it would return was to confess again! Following that path, my holiness would be short-lived because the priest only saw us on Sundays and did not hear confessions whenever we wanted.

This experience was the pinnacle of my spirituality and the closest I felt to God during childhood. In a way, in this place called "Saviour", I had a pre-encounter with the One who would become my true personal Saviour.

4 - The Unknown God

Life was complicated from an early age. My father was in the military and did not know how to bring up children except with harshness. I was a rebellious spirit, and problems between us began early, practically from the moment I started to speak. When he said no, for me, it meant yes, and when it was yes for him, it was no for me. As I did not hold back expressing myself, it could only end in a bad way. The phrase of his that stayed with me the most was, "You are nothing".

My self-esteem died before it even had a chance to be born, and growth became a painful daily process. To have survived was, in itself, a great miracle, but only I can understand to what extent. The area of feeling is personal to oneself, and suffering cannot be fully shared. However much we describe it to others, they can only guess, based on their own personal experiences. Pain was my companion during my growing up, as well as reflecting on life and human suffering.

Before I turned ten, there was another change of house to a place whose name and legend were associated with "suffering," "blood," and "death." There, my suffering and longing for death reached extreme levels. I had the wish each day of having never been born, blaming my mother for my unhappy existence.

God became the Unknown of my mother's religion. I continued with Catechism for a while and then another sacrament called Profession of Faith. From then on, I cut my ties with religion.

My insistent mother went to mass on Sundays, and I used to promise her that I would attend another service later that day. However, I did everything I could to avoid participating in the ritual that meant nothing to me.

I became more or less a convinced atheist, even I would sadly say convinced of the non-existence of God. I wanted God to exist, but since I did not see or feel anything, I could only deduce that He did not exist. I imagine there are many people like me in the world – wishing for God's existence but thinking He does not exist. Perhaps because those who speak of God describe Him masked by their frustrations and traditions.

From time to time, the evangelists from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, known as Jehovah's Witnesses, would appear on my doorstep. In a small village of mostly illiterate Catholics, the Jehovah's Witnesses faced great hardship for daring to be different and going against the trend. I was a small but troublesome thorn in their side. Every time they came to knock on my door, they were the ones who tired, can you imagine it! I could spend hours asking them questions to which they had no answers, and on the other hand, I had answers for everything. I questioned them about human suffering and evidence of God's existence, and I never tired of it.

My rebellion against my suffering was immense. Since I had no one to retaliate against, God made a good target. If He existed, He should be responsible, but even He did not exist, I still wanted to blame him.

The God I heard about was great but distant and incapable of affecting my insignificant life. He was a huge despot, deaf and mute, insensitive to my torment. If by chance He did exist, that was the image I had of Him.

Day after day, I carried the burden of life... At home there were daily wars, always between me and my father. I was not evil in my thoughts, as I wished well for others, but I did not fit into the world. It was as if this world spat me out every morning... The hatred I felt was not towards others but towards myself. This life did not want me; I did not fit into the giant and strange social puzzle where I appeared without asking.

The traumas of early childhood marked me in such a way that I considered myself a miserable human being. At school, I had good marks, but I felt out of place and could not integrate. Children can be crueller than adults because they have not developed sensitivity to suffering and have no reason to restrain what they think.

At school, I was introverted and could not relate to others. At home, I openly expressed my anger towards life. Many times, I blamed my mother for giving birth to me. They even considered sending me to a boarding school.

What would become of me? I did not know what it was like to have love, acceptance, and security... I wish I had never been born on this terrifying planet! Maybe one day, I would find a way to end it all... I often thought that. Was there any hope amidst such despair? At one point, I even cried out to the heavens, searching for an answer: **"If you exist, make me be**

born again, in another place, with different people"! I cried out, but nothing happened... What prevented me from putting an end to this unhappy existence? I do not know... Humanity is born with a mysterious dose of hope. They say hope is the last thing to die. My hope was so tiny that I barely noticed it. But it was there. Perhaps one day, I would leave that place, and everything would change...

8 - The Unknown God

II

A SPECIAL DREAM

I cannot say exactly how old I was when I had the most extraordinary dream of my life, but I must have been somewhere between twelve and fourteen years old. I did not believe in God, and whenever I had the opportunity to defend His non-existence, I did so with great zeal. It was in this context that the dream occurred.

It was dark around me, but I am not sure if it was nighttime. It seemed like I was in a place beyond the Earth, somewhere in space. It could have been the moon or some other location. I was inside a tall tower, like a massive bell tower whose beginning could not be seen. It was very tall, and I was at the top. I was not alone...

The Son of God was there, dressed in white. I do not know how I knew it was Him. I just knew. He was on my right side, and we were looking outside. I did not dare look at Him directly and contemplate Him. I was overwhelmed by such great awe that I could barely blink.

At that time, the Lord was not my Lord. Apparently, He was already working towards that happening, even though everything was terrible to me, and God was the last thing I was interested in.

I think about this dream so often... How did I know it was the Lord when I did not know anything about Him and claimed not to believe in Him? I felt something strong. It was a presence that I now understand and identify, but how could I feel it while being an unbeliever, a blasphemer, and ungodly? Nevertheless, there He was by my side, treating me as if I were special and unique. I remember keeping my head down and only glancing slightly to the right. That is when I saw that He was dressed in white, and I saw a hand, but I no longer remember what it looked like.

He showed me the Earth from afar. It was like in films, seen from the moon. Everything around was dark, and there was the planet of humans, seen from that distant tower. Then, He began showing me the world, all the people, all the countries, in a way that I cannot explain. I just know that He showed everything at the same time, and I saw everything without the need to mention each person. Perhaps this is how God manages to see everyone at the same time... I do not understand how it was, but I know I saw everyone at once in the blink of an eye.

While showing me all these things, He spoke to me. I do not remember the timbre of His voice, but I will never forget the awe it produced in me. It was a voice that was both love and authority. I was captivated by just listening to Him. I could have stayed there forever and had everything. But it was not His plan...

Looking at all the people He showed on Earth, He said to me: **"I went and died for you. Do you want to go and die for me?"** And that was all He said. How can so few words carry the importance of a lifetime? These were the most significant words I had ever heard!

We kept looking at the Earth, and I had to answer His question. I knew from films and what I heard in Catholicism that Christ came to Earth to die for us and everything else. However, hearing it from His mouth was completely different. It was not a story; it was Him Himself saying what He had done and that He had done it for me. Such profound words: "I went and died for you. Do you want to go and die for me?"

I had to respond... And what could I say to that holy presence, full of love, captivating my soul? I was not accustomed to feeling love... This love was asking me to die, seeming to be a great contradiction. It was not just any love but an affection that fills and gives meaning and purpose to everything. I was just a child transitioning into adolescence, but the language of love can be understood at any age.

Unable to move, I thought for a few seconds about what to say... If I accepted to die for Him, I would need great courage to endure death. But He said He did it for me, so should not I do the same? It made sense, but it was not logic that made me respond; it was that immense love. It was a love so great that it enveloped me, filled me, and paralysed me with awe at the same time. The Lord, whom I did not dare look at, for feeling

unworthy, asked me to leave that place of peace to go to Earth and give my life for Him...

It all happened in seconds, and I could not resist Him. From my mouth came the answer: "Yes, I will go". And with these words, the most wonderful encounter of my life ended. How I wish I had prolonged the moment and asked many questions. How I wish I had looked and spent time there to be restored and find the purpose of my life. How I wish I had known Him, understood Him, and loved Him...

The encounter ended, but it was not the end of the dream. After my words, I found myself on Earth. I was in an empty house with several rooms, but there was no furniture. I thought it would not be necessary because I was there only to die for the Lord, as He had asked. I waited for someone to come and take me, as agreed, so that I could die for Him. Strangely, the days passed, and nothing happened. I had to leave the house, eat and work like other people. The days went by, and my special encounter faded from my mind...

I was still dreaming, but in the dream life, I gradually forgot the reason why I had come to Earth. Time passed, and I became a person like all others, living an ordinary life like everyone else, until my special encounter faded completely from my memory. And then the dream ended.

I woke up, and that day, I thought a little about it. However, just like in the dream, in my reality, the dream also faded away and became hidden in my memory. Because it was just a dream, because I was super rational, very enlightened,

and advanced to believe in a dream, let alone in the God of a dream. I needed real things, real help, real change.

14 - The Unknown God

III

WALKING TOWARDS THE ABYSS

I arrived at the age of fourteen and had to decide on my future area of study. I was involved in the youth wing of a political party opposed to that of a family member. It would not have been an issue if he was not one of the owners of the school I had to attend and also the Mayor. In these circumstances, my parents agreed that I should study in the nearest city. Besides the political situation, the school in question did not offer the field of study I wanted to pursue, although it covered education up to the final year at school.

It was a significant financial sacrifice for my family because, though we were not completely poor, we were always living close to it. Our house was humble, and my parents' car remained the same for twenty years.

Despite the difficulty, everything was arranged for me to go and study in the nearby city: the room was rented, and enrolment in the school was completed. That is how I left home when I had not even turned fifteen yet. During that year, I went home almost every weekend.

However, I did not stop experiencing loneliness. I just exchanged the solitude of my family for a different kind of loneliness. When your soul is as broken as mine was, there is no human solution, let alone an instant one.

I turned fifteen in a city I did not know. I did not have close friends, only acquaintances, but I did not have them back where I came from either. Nevertheless, the change made me dream a little. It made me believe that perhaps everything could change, and one day, I might have a peaceful and somewhat happy life. What would it take? The same as everyone needs: to be loved and valued for who I am, without pretending to be someone different.

That year passed, and unfortunately, it was not much different from the life I had before. I was not with my family at home, but I did not fit in socially there either. I remained the same shy and broken person, wanting to die. The burden of existence remained overwhelmingly heavy...

The school year ended, and the husband of the lady I was staying with became ill and bedridden. They needed the room, so they told me. So, I had to find another place to stay for the following year. A widow, from the village where I was born, had been living there for many years and was renting out rooms. There was a downside for my parents: she was a "Jehovah's Witness." Nevertheless, I ended up staying in the room that had belonged to her son since the others were occupied by other young girls.

It was a time filled with many bad things, but some were not so bad. I had some adventures that I find quite amusing to this day. It was a turning point, and I started going home only once every two weeks.

Mrs. Ilda was a kind lady who tried to reach out to me.

Her religious books were in my room on a shelf. I never felt curious enough to open them. However, she tried to introduce God to me in the best way she knew how. I always rejected her with the responses I was used to, so she said that I was "a crooked stick that would never straighten up". She did not say this with disdain or because she did not care about me; it was just her despair at seeing how hardened my heart was towards God.

I turned sixteen at the beginning of the school year. It was that year when I came to know all the nightclubs in the city. One of the girls staying there, about twenty years old, took me with her. When Mrs. Ilda fell asleep, we would sneak out through the back of the house so she would not hear. Mind you, she was deaf, and once she took off her hearing aid to sleep, she could not hear anything. Besides, she snored so loudly that she was easy to control. When all we could hear was Mrs. Ilda's snoring echoing through the house, it was time for us to leave.

The group I went out with were all older than me, ranging from eighteen upwards. They all smoked, and although I detested it, I started smoking with them just to feel more included. I never came to like it or understand the pleasure in exhaling smoke through my mouth.

From afar, after so many years, I can see that God was protecting me from many things during that time. Every time we came back from a nightclub, I would lie in bed and

meditate on my life. The next day, I would return to school, and everything would continue to be terrible. I felt worse with each passing day...

When I woke up, the first thought that came to my mind was how to end my life. It was like that every day. Day after day, the intense suffering made me wake up with the same thought... I eliminated all possible options until I found the perfect one: taking tranquillisers and falling asleep forever. It would not hurt, I would not be disfigured, and it was within my reach.

When I went home for the weekend, I would always take some tranquillisers from my mother, so she would not notice. I did not have the courage to take them all at once, but I discovered that if I took two or three, I would fall half-asleep and feel less of the pain of being alive. That is how I began taking large doses of tranquillisers whenever I had to be around people in a more open way. I experimented to see how many I could handle, increasing the dose.

Day by day, my small glimmer of hope seemed more distant and invisible. At sixteen, I felt the burden of life to be so heavy that it was unbearable. I vented by writing morbid poems in a notebook I made, with several notebooks joined together, a black velvet paper cover and a pink ribbon as a bookmark. There, I poured out my sadness.

For years, I avoided writing texts in school. In Portuguese tests, I would do everything correctly but leave the composition section undone. I could still manage a pass mark

anyway. I did not write because I thought nobody would understand what I felt or my opinion on things. I refused to write what they wanted me to think.

To this day, I have difficulty writing about a topic assigned to me. Writing, for me, is a flow from my inner self, an extension of it. Writing something that is imposed on me feels almost like betraying my true self. It is as if writing were sacred, as if it were my true face. However, when they asked us to write poetry, I did it with pleasure because poetry is about feelings, and I can be subjective. Somehow, I felt that there was a different kind of respect for poetry, so there was less chance of being judged for who I was.

In secondary school, it was more challenging to avoid compositions, but I always avoided them when possible. I only felt free to write in my confidential notebook. Through its pages, I shared what I felt to the fullest. They were simple rhymes, but they expressed strong feelings of death, despair, and unhappiness.

One day, while in my room with the radio on, I heard something that caught my attention... Someone was quoting the words of Christ saying: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...*"⁴. Those words miraculously pierced my hardened heart, and I burst into tears of desperation. I wanted God to exist! I really did... Was there

⁴ Matthew 11:28

any other way for me, except the existence of God intervening to change everything? On the other hand, if there was something I still valued, it was my capacity for reasoning and understanding. I could not simply surrender myself to an illusion that would serve me no purpose. Besides being unhappy, I would be an ignorant wretch.

At that moment, I picked up a sheet of paper and wrote something in prose. My notebook was meant for poetry, but I needed to organize my ideas logically, to see if what I was thinking made sense. I had never written in prose before, to express my inner thoughts. So, I wrote down three hypotheses: **1st) God does not exist**, which means I truly have no solution; **2nd) God exists and is all-powerful**, just as described in my mother's church, but distant, indifferent, and cruel, able to intervene in my life but choosing not to; **3rd) God exists, but although possessing power, for some reason, cannot intervene** in my life, in which case, God is good, but limited by reasons I do not understand.

I gazed at those three hypotheses with my last glimmer of hope, tears streaming down. Did God exist? Could those words from the radio be real? So, drawing out the letters slowly, burdened by the weight of life I carried, I wrote: "*I wish God existed, but I cannot deceive myself*".

I wish I had kept that sheet... I do not know what I did with it. Surely, in a moment of desperation, I must have destroyed it. I concluded sadly: if God existed, either He could not intervene in my life, or He chose not to; thus, the advantage

of His existence amounted to nothing.

Mrs Ilda's house was half an hour's walk from school. I had five minutes to have lunch and then return to school for the afternoon classes. On the other hand, I was occupying her son's room, which meant he would not have a place to sleep in when he visited his mother. Perhaps it was just Mrs. Ilda who was tired of me, but I had to search for a room again.

Back then, computers were not available for just anyone, and I wanted to buy a typewriter. That summer, when I entered a shop to make the purchase, I noticed an advertisement for a room to rent on the door. I left with the typewriter and more. In my hand, I also had the address and phone number to contact. The person who helped me was the son of the lady who had the room and lived with her.

Everything went well, and it was arranged for me to stay there for the coming school year. There was only one difference: I would have to cook and bring whatever was needed. It was close to the school, so I could even hear the bell ringing for the start of classes, which was much better than being half an hour away.

I had to spend the holidays with my parents. Summer was the worst. I stayed indoors, usually on the terrace, soaking up the sun and pondering my sorrows or watching television. There, I endured the torment of having to interact with my father. The ongoing war persisted whenever we were in the same space.

I provoked him and answered him without restraint. My rebellion against everything prevented me from connecting. We both had volatile and stubborn temperaments. Time passed on, and summer came to an end. I was about to start the final year at school and would soon turn seventeen. Little did I imagine that a significant change was on the horizon...

IV

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

Classes started, and I arrived at my new room. I placed my clothes in the small space they provided me, in the already crowded wardrobe. The place to put my books and personal belongings was tiny, but I had grown accustomed to the restrictions of living in other people's houses.

Mrs. Antónia was my landlady. She used to be very wealthy, and the house still showed that her social standing was high. However, the businesses went bankrupt, and her husband passed away. She had two married sons who were doing well in life, and a third son who was divorced and living with her, with a simple job at the typewriter store where I met him. My room was rented due to the hardships they were facing. Instead of inheriting assets, they inherited debts, and every penny was used for survival. The most valuable furniture had been seized, some even in my presence.

In place of a window, my room had a door leading to a balcony. Below the balcony, a little to the right, was the entrance to a room where religious meetings were held. Due to what was written outside, I could not tell if it was a room rented for any religion or something else. They invited anyone from any belief! I had no idea what it meant. I heard singing on the first day... In the evening, we laughed at those people who

sang so much. Despite my derogatory comments, I was curious.

Mrs. Antónia was a regular churchgoer, and she invited me to go to mass with her on Sunday. However, something would happen, and I would not accompany her anymore...

On Friday afternoon, I went to visit the lady where I stayed two years before. It was nearby, a matter of courtesy. Her husband had passed away, and she had the house filled with students. She made the most of every square metre and charged prices much higher than the conditions offered. She lived with her unmarried daughter. They were people of little education, brusque character, and little affection.

I sat for a while in the living room and told them where I had rented the room, nearby, in the closest square. Everyone knew Mrs. Antónia because she used to be rich and socially recognised. I also mentioned the fact that I was above the "religious singing group." To my surprise, they said they had gone there a few times because it brought them luck. A young man who lived there had also gone there for good luck at school.

They were about to leave for the Friday afternoon meeting, the most crowded after Sunday. I asked if I could accompany them. A strange curiosity invaded me... Could it bring me luck too? If anyone needed luck, it was me. So, I went with them.

The lights were off in the room filled with chairs. There was a murmur... Several people were on their knees with their

faces on their respective chairs, surrounded by the others, which were still empty. I heard what they were saying. Some were thanking for something that happened to them, others were asking for help, others were seeking forgiveness... I had never heard anyone speak to God in that way! They talked as if He were a person who could hear them!

To my great surprise, my companions knelt, imitating the others. I think it was just imitation because I did not see the sincerity and spontaneity in them that I saw in the others. Embarrassed to be the only one sitting, I also knelt and tried to address God, speaking about my distress... Although I could not explain it, there was something different about that place from anything I had experienced before.

Meanwhile, the room filled up, and a man began playing the guitar and singing some simple and somewhat comical songs. I was in the front row because we had sat there, thinking that being closer to the man leading might bring more "luck." While they sang, they clapped and made many gestures! They sang, "the name of the Lord is powerful, no one can defeat Him, sin leaves, sickness goes, the name of the Lord will prevail...". When they said "leaves" and "goes," they waved their hands as if something was truly leaving! It was all very strange! Was God really powerful enough to change my life? Here I was, a desperate little being in the middle of the universe, waiting...

For the first time, God seemed both frighteningly and

wonderfully close! Could He care about me, the least of all human beings? I felt uncomfortable amidst all that spontaneity, but my invisible glimmer of hope began to shine brighter than ever. It was as if God were physically present there, disguised among the participants.

When they finished singing, the man put down the guitar and began to speak. I did not understand anything, and I do not remember any words. Then, he called for those who wanted to accept Christ as their Saviour. I had no idea what it meant, and I certainly was not going to draw attention to myself in front of all those people... So, the lady who brought me pushed me from the front row to the space in front of the man, saying: "go, it will bring you luck!"

Somewhat reluctantly, I went. I felt exposed in my misery before everyone. A few more people appeared next to me. The man said we should repeat what he said...

I hated hypocrisy. I had learned, perhaps from television, that hypocrisy was something bad. With all my idiosyncrasies, I was not a hypocrite... The man said, "Jesus, come into my life, I repent of my sins, be my Lord...". I felt that if I did not say those words with sincere feeling, I would be a tremendous hypocrite. The people seemed genuine, as they could not be so spontaneous if they were not. So, I decided to say the words, not just with my mouth but with the intention to mean them as much as I could.

I did not see any change at that moment. Everything was like entering a film or living in a dream. Nothing seemed real

or logical. Then, someone I did not expect to see appeared: my mathematics teacher from school! She told me she was part of that church! Was that a church? It did not seem like a church according to the concept I had until then. It seemed more like a group of happy lunatics...

They gave me a paper with the date on it, as if it were a ceremony of great importance. I felt a strange euphoria, but apart from that, nothing was different. I only had an inexplicable desire to return and even a subtle joy! Truly unprecedented!

I came home and shared everything with my hosts. I laughed while telling them what was happening next door. I borrowed a Bible from Mrs. Antónia because I wanted to learn more about God. The man who spoke always had the Bible in his hand, saying it was the Word of God. If it had God's words, I needed to know them all. They might say something important to me, and I also wanted to learn more about this unknown God they were talking about.

And so, from being an atheist and despondent, I started a journey in the opposite direction. On a Friday, the 22th of September, 1989, this insignificant teenager was found by the One of whom she had blasphemed, becoming a Father who would adopt her for life.

V

THE FIRST STEPS

On Sunday, two days later, I returned and listened attentively to the sermon. People greeted me with a big smile. On that day, a young woman started screaming loudly, crying convulsively. Then she stopped and seemed relieved. I began to see her regularly at the gatherings, and we ended up becoming friends. We had the same hunger for God and the same need for Him. Often, she would come to my house after work, and we would pray and talk. We were anguished souls, but sensitive. We found comfort and understanding in each other. Our fraternal friendship lasted for years. As I write these pages, more than twenty years later, she continues to be more than a friend, she is like a sister to me.

I never stopped reading the Bible. At night, I would wake up and read until falling asleep again. As soon as I arrived home from school, I would continue reading. I fell asleep and woke up with the Bible in my hands... The man they called the Pastor said it was God's Letter to us. I had to know everything that God's Letter said! I started from the beginning, at Genesis, just like one begins any book, and I only stopped with that fast pace when I reached the end of Revelation, less than three months later.

The strangest thing of all was that I could not stop

singing! I sang everywhere. Of course, Mrs. Antónia, being so refined, thought I was crazy. The worst part was when I went to spend a weekend at home...

My maternal grandmother had a history of mental illness. The last relapse occurred when she went on a pilgrimage to Fátima. She was very calm and modest. However, when she returned from the pilgrimage, she could not stop singing, undressing in the street, and going completely mad. It was complicated to find a treatment that would bring her back to herself.

Now, imagine what my mother thought when I arrived singing non-stop, talking about God, and reading the Bible! My sister later told me that my mother confided in her about the fear that I might be going insane, just like my grandmother. It is very understandable. In her place, I would have thought the same. Fortunately, my madness was different. It was the madness of having discovered the reason for my existence, of having been found by the greatest Father of all. This madness would be permanent, as they could see.

When the Christmas holidays arrived, I had finished reading the entire Bible. One of the things that shocked me was the gap between the Bible and the Christianity practised by my mother. Of course, the basic principles were there, but there was syncretism with pagan customs whose origin took me some time to decipher.

During those holidays, an interesting episode occurred... I was convinced that I had discovered something in the Bible

that Catholics were unaware of, and that is why they had some practices contrary to the Bible.

When we went to my grandparents' village, I decided to talk to a priest, a seminary professor, who spent the Christmas period there since my village was also his home town, and he had relatives there. So, on a weekday, I took my Bible and attended a sparsely attended mass celebrated by him. I stayed at the back, and when it ended, I went to the vestry.

When I become nervous, I feel like laughing. With seventeen years of life and a Bible in hand, laughing like a fool, I entered. The man looked at me astonished. I explained that I needed to have a conversation, and he agreed. I told him how I had encountered God and started reading the Bible after having been an atheist and having blasphemed many times.

I had underlined the Bible verses I considered important, so I could find everything I needed. I began to address the issues that concerned me... Naively, I explained that God forbids us from kneeling before statues, no matter what they represent. I showed him numerous Bible verses where God said He abhorred praying to the dead and using any intermediary other than Christ because He is the only way to the Father. I stated that Mary is an example, not an object of prayer, worship, or veneration. Mary is not the Queen of Heaven, as there are no queens in heaven. That is an idolatry that already existed in antiquity. Even Mary herself, if she were alive, would reprimand all the idolatry they practise. The Bible

teaches that even if an angel were to preach another Gospel, we should not believe it because Satan transforms himself into an angel of light to deceive men. Everything was supported with readings from the Bible.

The embarrassed man tried to defend himself and find some passage to show me, but he could not find any. Then he turned to me and said: *"It is true that we shouldn't kneel before images, I myself try not to do it, but if we were to say that to the people, they would revolt, so we have to go slowly; there is only one thing we should bow to: the Holy Sacrament, as God is present there."*

The man was stunned; he had no words to respond to a girl who had experienced God without any tradition or religious commitments. To his statement, I responded with great conviction: *"But we shouldn't even bow there, because if it's because God is present, it is written that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is present; so we should bow right now because He is here!"* He stared, not knowing what to say...

My experience with God's love was so real that the priest, a seminary professor, could not find the words to respond. Then he said, concluding our conversation: *"I don't understand, but I can see that God has called you in a special way; I can't understand why it wasn't through the Catholic Church, but only God knows!"* I smiled and said goodbye, thanking him for his sincerity.

I told my mother about the conversation, but she did not believe it. Of course, she could not believe that the priest had confessed that the system of praying to saints, especially to

Mary, was wrong. I did my part, and there was nothing more I could do.

At my parents' house, I meditated on everything that had happened to me. Was I living just a dream? Was God really as they taught me and as described in the Bible? With all my soul, I wanted everything to be real. However, some doubts still occasionally overshadowed my new and recent peace. It was in my room, during those holidays days, that after praying, crying, and meditating on everything, I made the final decision to follow this God who reached out to me, with total surrender and love. I remember that day very clearly.

Even when God manifests His presence and His love, He still gives room for man to decide whether to follow Him or not. I remember, a year later, talking to a cousin of mine, about the same age as me, about God. After witnessing and showing him who God really is, the presence of the Holy Spirit was felt there. The young man could feel God and recognize that everything I said was true. In his words, he confirmed that he understood what I was telling him, but he knew that to follow God, he would have to make changes in his life that he was not willing to make. I do not know what he was referring to, but he was doing something in secret that he knew was very wrong and he was not willing to give it up. In his freedom, he made his choice. I chose the opposite: I found a treasure for which I was willing to give up everything gladly. The Gospel of Matthew speaks of something similar:

“⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:45-46)

This freedom with which God has created us is both wonderful and terrible. With it, we can rebel against the Creator or submit to Him. Accepting His salvation is easy. Who would not want to be saved? However, not everyone wants to submit to God.

Salvation implies submission to God's lordship over us. We need not fear, for it is submitting to a loving Father. Everything He imposes on us is for our good. The verse I once heard on the radio at Mrs. Ilda's house is also found in the Gospel of Matthew:

“²⁸Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

This easy and light yoke is His authority over us. It is not an oppressive authority but a gentle one, meant to protect us from evil. Just as a father holds and guides his little child, so God is a loving Father. To enjoy His care and protection, we need to submit to Him, for we will be under His dominion and

be affected by His fatherhood and love.

In God, I found a true Father, with all the love and acceptance I needed to be healed from my inner wounds. It took a long time, but little by little, I was being restored.

Every time I attended a gathering in that church, at the end, they would pray individually for each person's problems. I would often go to ask for prayer for things to change between me and my father. I knew only God could change something so difficult. After some time, something happened within me, as if God Himself had spoken to me. It was a strong impression, deep inside me, telling me that if I wanted things to change between me and my father, **I had to be the first to change!** God was good and loving, but He was also very direct and straightforward.

When I returned for the weekend, I had the opportunity to put into practice what the Father asked of me concerning my earthly father: every time an argument was about to start, I kept silent, and if necessary, I would go to my room. And thus, the infernal arguments ended. I kept silent with great effort. It was very hard at first, but I did it for my new Father, who loved me enough to do anything for that love.

Another interesting episode at that time was an encounter with Mrs. Ilda. After my conversion, I thought of sharing my change with her. She used to say that I was "*a crooked stick that would never straighten up.*" I wanted her to know that God was powerful enough to straighten me up.

One afternoon, I went to visit her, with my Bible in my bag. I headed to her house. When I was almost there, one of those "coincidences" happened! Mrs. Ilda was coming in my direction...

After the greetings, I did not waste time and told her that I was coming to visit her to tell her about my conversion. She did not believe it. She thought maybe I had been brainwashed by some sect, but conversion? Not a chance! When I opened my bag and took out my Bible, she was left speechless.

I quickly told her and explained that I had converted with all my heart, that God was changing my life, and that now I understood that she was right about many things... Despite our differences in biblical interpretation, the truth was that we were both happy because we loved the God who touched our lives and was present in them.

A few months later, I would leave the city to study at university. So much had happened in such a short time! I was no longer that shattered girl who had arrived there... I would leave as a new Lucinda, no longer alone, no longer desperate, no longer desiring to die.

VI

VOLTAIRE'S HYPOTHESES

I am sceptical when it comes to books on religion. As the saying goes: "to each his own judgment." I prefer to spend my time studying the Bible directly rather than reading opinions about it. It was not always like that. In the early years after my conversion, I read many Christian books. However, at some point, I realised that I had to search for myself because in books, I would always find "thorns." This is a figure of speech I heard someone use. They said, "books have thorns." It meant that in human interpretations, there is always something not entirely correct. When reading a book, we should "eat what is good" and remove the "thorns." I look for books with fewer thorns. Time is scarce, and to dedicate as much time as possible to the Bible, I only read carefully selected books that are worthwhile.

I discovered a book that falls into this category. It is titled "The Secrets of Our Father" by psychiatrist Augusto Cury. Perhaps I would not have the courage to express the following chapters publicly if it were not for the motivation it gave me.

Cury talks about the God I know. This man is not religious, but he found God because he sought Him. He is not a role model for me, but he has been an inspiration. He values every human being, admiring the capacity to think and

question even in the most despised in society.

We can only understand God when we look at Him through the eyes of a child. Christ said we must become like children to see the Kingdom (Mark 10:15). God is a Father, and we must reduce ourselves to dependent, humble infants without ambitions in order to know Him. I admired Cury in his book because the psychiatrist humbly places himself in a position of ignorance while arriving at supreme conclusions that many theologians, clergy, and religious figures are distant from.

The most interesting part is that what Cury expresses was not entirely new to me, but a sweet confirmation of many thoughts I cultivated within myself in secret. Realising that there are more people who dare to challenge deeply rooted ideas in Christian tradition gave me the courage to share my own. This is something that Cury achieves: he makes us feel that our thoughts matter, and we should express them because a beggar is valued as much as a king. My God is like that too.

Just like other books, I know my books will also have their "thorns." I try to minimise them, but they result from a vital need to think, question, and, above all, seek knowledge of God. I never want to say, "*I was born in this, and I will die in this.*" I want to be capable of questioning and drawing certain truths from it, as it deepens my convictions.

Soon after reading the entire Bible, two months after my conversion, I started writing and studying it. I had my first computer three years later. Until then, I wrote on sheets of

paper and notebooks. I never imagined I would write books! It is as if my writing ability was hindered by divine providence, as something sacred that would be only for Him. The fact is, as soon as I started reading the Bible, I began to write about it, and I no longer had the writer's block.

My mind questioned everything I heard in sermons and tried to put it into practice. Like a computer, my mind analysed the sermons as I heard them, comparing them with what I knew from the Scriptures. At home, I double-checked everything and saw what could be applied in practical life. I learned that God acted more as I allowed Him to change me and in the same proportion.

Not wanting to change is the biggest impediment to growing and evolving in the knowledge of God. I hope my books can help others open up to the “unknown” God. The simple act of writing is my way of seeking Him. We need to free ourselves from the burdens of tradition we received, or else we will never know the true God.

I was surprised by a portion of Cury's book that I will quote:

"Observing the destruction and suffering caused by the Lisbon earthquake, Voltaire cleverly expressed three simple but significant questions or hypotheses: either God does not exist, or He exists but does not want to execute His own will, or He wants to execute it but

cannot."⁵

I confess I was astounded, not wanting to believe what I was reading! In Mrs. Ilda's room, during my last year of despair, I wrote similar words: "*either God does not exist, or He exists but does not want to execute His own will, or He wants to execute it but cannot.*" It is really strange, yet wonderful. I never knew anyone who formulated the same hypotheses I did during my desperate logic in that last year without God.

I do not know if the philosopher Voltaire ever reached any definite conclusion. As for me, I believe I did. I will share those conclusions in the following chapters. I obtained them through studying the Scriptures and daily living in communion with the Spirit, not through theological commentaries or teachings of religious groups, as much as I respect and appreciate them. In this way, what I present may not align with the traditional doctrine of many Christians, but they are principles and explanations that have satisfied and drawn me closer to God.

First and foremost, I could provide endless reasons to justify the existence of God, but the truth is, **I believe in His existence because I have encountered Him.** The Spirit of God is real and gently insists on lovingly attracting every human being.

⁵ CURY, Augusto, "Os Segredos do Pai Nosso -A solidão de Deus", pág. 133

I surrendered. Perhaps my soul was at such a point of destruction that I could not resist it. I do not know. I only know that, logically, it did not make sense to me, but when I had an encounter with His love, I threw myself into it without a safety net. It was Him, so there was nothing to fear. When facing death every day, one cannot resist the one who comes to save them.

After believing in His existence, I had to understand how God is and how He acts. I so desired to know Him! I read the Bible tirelessly and voraciously, listened to all kinds of preaching, read many books, and, above all, sought Him daily in prayer, worship, and study.

I discovered that many believers in God, both Catholic and Protestant, have a distorted image of Him. They attribute terrible misfortunes in the name of a distorted concept of sovereignty. Not that they are not sincere or true in their faith, but due to the doctrinal inheritance they received. Some are **right in their hearts, but wrong in their minds**. Because God is merciful, He looks at the heart and not the mind.

The concept of God they have belongs to the second hypothesis. They believe God exists and is all-powerful in such a way that nothing happens without His decision. Thus, every death, illness, and terrible thing that occurs is all within His will and purpose. He is a sovereign, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God. All because their theology demands it or because it was transmitted to them in traditional teachings they

blindly follow. According to them, God can only be God if He has all these characteristics and exactly as interpreted by men of the past, whose ideas they follow without question. The problem is, **this conceptual God they speak of is not the real God who came to my aid** when no one else could or would.

After reading the entire Bible repeatedly, I concluded that the God of the Bible is compassionate, forgiving, and capable of repenting from evil⁶, reaching out to the oppressed. The Father, whom Christ revealed, instructed us to turn the other cheek and show mercy to our enemies (Matthew 5:39,43-44). The God of Love hates sin but loves the sinner. His greatest desire is to free humanity from the oppression of evil. He would never choose some for salvation and others for damnation or love some of Adam's children at the expense of others.

The God of the Bible did not forcefully seize power in Jerusalem when the Messiah King came to earth. Christ could have taken power as the King of Israel, but He allowed Himself to be cruelly and unjustly killed. Many were disappointed because, in their concept of God, He should have taken power from the Romans and reigned. However, the true God does not submit to human theological doctrines, whether they are Pharisees, Sadducees, Catholics, Evangelicals, or any other Christian or non-Christian group. **God is indeed sovereign, to**

⁶ Examples of references to God repenting: Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14; 1 Samuel 15:35; II Samuel 24:16; Jeremiah 18:8; Jonah 3:10. Divine repentance is different from human repentance.

the point of surpassing the concept of sovereignty defined by humans.

That leaves us with the third hypothesis: **God wants to intervene in human suffering, but He does not do it for some reason.** The question is, what hinders Him, being the creator and sovereign over all things? One day, we will hear all the answers from Him Himself, but for now, I can only share what I believe. I do not claim to hold all the truth; I am far from it. But there is a tiny knowledge of Him that I have found: the great and supreme God, the creator of heaven and earth, is good and merciful. This is the basic principle of all knowledge of God. Anything that contradicts this does not come from Him but from human speculation. **God is good, and His Word is truth.**

God cannot be known apart from the Scriptures; otherwise, we would be constructing an imaginary God different from the Father that Christ revealed. **If we only believe that God is good outside of His Word revealed in the Bible, we will fall into enormous errors.** We may want to exercise our own mercy in situations that God condemns. On the other hand, if we focus solely on the Word without the basic principle of divine goodness, we may interpret the Bible in ways that have nothing to do with God's plan and purpose for humanity. I firmly believe that this is what happened with some of the main reformers of the church. Today, people blindly follow doctrines that originated from the Reformation without questioning, accepting whatever is written in books.

I refuse to accept human "popes," whether they are Catholic or Protestant. My Lord is Christ, and I honour and respect leaders in general. However, I want to be free to think and question, growing in understanding of God and the Scriptures. **I will always challenge any idea that tarnishes the concept of divine goodness and will always respect that which reveals it to humanity.** Similarly, I will admire those who seek the Truth in the entirety of Scripture, not just in isolated Bible verses or books.

It is dangerous to use only the Old Testament, but it is also dangerous to use only the New Testament, as it will not be properly understood. It is also perilous to limit oneself to the letters of Paul without having the Gospels as a foundation. Taking what Paul said and drawing conclusions that contradict what Christ taught leads to a Christianity that becomes a new religion, speaking of Christ but not obeying His teachings.

Much talk revolves around grace, but there is no grace without goodness. **The calculated grace inherent in absolute sovereignty does not disclose kindness..** I do not believe in a grace that lacks goodness, for both believers and unbelievers. This was the God who came to my rescue; this was the God I found in the Bible; this was the Father that Christ revealed.

We only truly understand the Bible after experiencing the goodness of God, which is manifested through salvation in Christ. The Spirit of God touches us with mercy and grace to then teach us that He is the Lord through the Scriptures. However, **if we forget, even for a moment, that God is**

absolutely good, we will drift away from everything He is and desires for us.

In the Bible lies the Word of God given to humanity, passed down from generation to generation. We must obey it as we would obey God Himself, knowing that His will is best because He is and will always be good. We cannot be children of God without obeying Him, for those who become children long to obey Him. A child trusts and surrenders to the Father.

Based on these two principles, the goodness of God and the truth of His Word, I consider that there are main reasons why God does not act and intervene as we would like. These are some of the reasons I understand based on what I have come to know of Him: the limitation of love, respect for free will, and adherence to laws and principles He established. In the following chapters, I will explore these themes further.

VII

THE SELF-LIMITATION OF GOD

Before anything else, when we speak of self-limitation, it is not a true limitation. We use this term for lack of a better one to express what we intend to describe. We are in no way diminishing God. I believe with all my heart that what might be considered a limitation by some is an increase in the majestic personhood of the Father. We are not making God human either, for much of what we consider human within us is nothing more than a trace of the divine likeness bestowed upon us in creation. He has emotions, loves, desires to communicate and relate. These are not weaknesses and a reduction of His power; quite the opposite. **God is far more than the sum of attributes in a systematic theology book.**

No one can limit God, for He is unique in power, knowledge, and eternity. Man cannot limit God, neither with tradition nor science, theology nor philosophy, acts nor words. **Only God Himself can make decisions that affect Him.** Everything is in His hands, and before all else, He existed in the eternity of all eternities.

In creating, God introduced eternal beings into His life, impacting His own eternity. From that moment on, God limited Himself in His self-sufficiency. The reader might be shocked by this assertion! You may have never heard

something like this before, but remember that by creating humanity, God introduced something extraordinary and distinct into His divine existence.

His divinity, His power, and many of the attributes used to describe Him still remain a part of Him, **but there is a change in His behavior and emotions due to the creation of beings He loves.** Hence, we say later that man can limit God, not that man can do this in and of himself, but because God created beings free to love of His own initiative. Creation had repercussions on His existence.

Note that God has an unchanging plan. Amidst all His love, all the freedom He granted, and all the laws He created, He determined an end to the system we know. There is a time granted to those who reject Him, but at the end of this time, man will know that God is Lord, and everything He determined will come to pass. However, due to this divine determinism, many have interpreted that He determined everything at all times, and that is not so.

He determined general outlines, a beginning and an end. However, He established laws and principles that should govern life in the flesh and the spirit, so that love and freedom can flow. God respects and loves creation. Yet, if we read the book of Revelation, we understand that there is a predetermined end. The Bible says, "*I make known the end from the beginning*" (Isaiah 46:10). This expression does not refer to individual lives and choices of each man, but only to what He determined.

He determined an end from the beginning, but He did not determine how I will live in that interim. Each person must make choices, just as Adam had to choose in the Garden. Only in this way can He be loved as He desires. Only thus can God satisfy His hunger for selfless relationship and His thirst for genuine love. We are not puppets in a grand spectacle. We are free beings to love or not, to obey or reject, to live or die.

The fact that God is not a deterministic despot does not mean He does not have a plan for each person. In the grand project of human existence, with predetermined times, each person is precious and special. Every human being is unique, and God has a purpose for them. His plan is the best, as His perfect will is always the best. However, **God does not impose His plan.** The Spirit seeks to maternally draw man and lead him, first toward the Father, and then to the abundant life that exists for him. God never coerces or imprisons human will.

The divine will is good, perfect, and pleasing. However, as humans are afraid to let go of their own will and surrender, they often choose paths outside the divine plan and suffer the consequences. What man suffers is not the will of God and even less a punishment for not obeying Him, but merely the natural consequence of life without God or life with wrong choices. Sometimes, it is not about choices but simply the fact that we live in a world governed by principles distant from the Creator. We are in this world, and like someone walking on a dusty path, we soil our feet as we journey on the roads of this

system.

God still intervenes in the lives of men. He does, however, according to laws and principles. He would desire to do so more actively and visibly, but it depends more on man than on Him. When man submits and is willing to enter the divine will, then His intervention begins to become visible. God intervenes, but in this time, there are limitations or rules created by God Himself or that result from human will.

One day, the Almighty will manifest openly and judge all things. However, it is His endless compassion that sustains Him until that appointed time. **He desires that all be saved**, as Scripture affirms (1 Timothy 2:4), but He knows mankind and knows that a portion of humanity will reject Him. Not because He predestined a portion of Adam's descendants to eternal condemnation, but because the freedom granted brought about that possibility. Some say He did not predestine for damnation, only for salvation, but one implies the other. Others assert that all men were already condemned, and to save some demonstrates His grace, but the God of the Bible does not show favouritism or discriminate against men made in His image.

His desire is that as many as possible be reached, and He hopes His children will cooperate with the Spirit in expanding the Kingdom here on earth. Not all will accept divine salvation, to the pain of the divine heart, but this is the time and opportunity for each man to acknowledge the existence, but above all, the paternal love of God who wants to open His arms to him.

Christian churches are full of people who recognise the existence and power of divinity but have not experienced His love and do not live in intimate communion with the Father. God is not just someone to obey or suffer consequences from. God is the extended hand when we slip towards a fatal precipice. God is the Father who cradles the newborn, feeds and protects. God is perfect love, compassion, mercy, faithfulness, and tenderness.

We humans take our newborn child and the ground slips from beneath us! Where does this capacity to love and give come from? It comes from our Creator, from whom we received our likeness. And if we would never harm the child that came from our own being, how could God have a lesser capacity to love those Adam begot?

For those who call themselves Christians and have not yet encountered the love of the Father, God remains a great Unknown. Even the Devil knows that God is Lord and Creator, Almighty and the other attributes. Even the enemy knows he must submit to divine laws and will be judged. **Only one thing Satan cannot experience: the Father's love enveloping him in a saving and adopting embrace.**

What do we think of so many believers who have never experienced the confidence of a secure relationship with the one they call Saviour and Lord? When a serious illness strikes them or they lose a loved one, they immediately look to the heavens with great questions like, "*Why, God?*" "*How could You*

allow this?" "Why didn't God act?" Others think they have to do many things, reach many people, have many projects, work tirelessly to serve God and what they call the work of God. However, above all, God wants us to stop and love Him.

If we are secure in the Father's love, we know He is the first to desire our peace, our happiness, and whenever we allow it or the laws governing His intervention allow it, He bursts into our lives to rescue and help us.

Many times, He does not seem present and active because we do not act according to His Word, not creating the conditions for His manifestation. Despite His love, He is still God, and His action is not governed by our will but by principles we should investigate, to know Him better and experience Him more visibly.

God often acts when we think He is inactive. It is written that faith sees the invisible. How much we need to see the invisible! As we come to know the Father, our ability to discern His action increases. That is what we need most in this life: to learn to see the invisible acts of God and hear His inaudible voice.

VIII

THE LIMITATION OF LOVE

The first limitation that God placed upon Himself was the love directed towards another outside of the divinity. Note that, as already mentioned, it is not a limitation. It is only so in the eyes of humans, within the context of human thinking.

Love is an eternal characteristic of God, but when He created a being different from Himself, to extend the immense love He possessed, this relationship had reflections in the way He acted and lived within His own untouchable divinity. There was a change in divine existence: He was no longer the only one to have, be, and share love.

When the Scriptures present God as immutable, it refers to His attributes and not that anything in God's existence can change. The creation of man and angels brought significant changes to the divine existence.

In eternity, God existed... He was alone and was truly all-powerful and all-knowing. The state of God in eternity is close to the concept of Voltaire's second hypothesis. God was alone and unique. He was not the creating God because there was nothing created. It was just Him: perfect, pure, eternal, but alone. We cannot comprehend what it means to be God, but it involves being alone and unique. We cannot understand eternity; therefore, we cannot understand God. I am against

closed descriptions of God's person, stipulating attributes for Him. It is a great risk because we will never fully comprehend what it means, for example, to be omnipotent or omniscient.

When we say He was alone, it does not mean that He felt depressed about it. God is emotionally and psychologically healthy; otherwise, He would not endure His eternity. The need for a relationship is not an illness, but the natural tendency of any healthy being. Despite perfection, divine peace, and self-sufficiency, something triggered the need for others. Perhaps it was just the boundless divine creativity.

Somewhere in eternity, God begot a Son. I will not delve into the Son of God, as it is the subject of much discussion and controversy among various religious groups: co-eternal or generated in eternity, God Himself or the Son beyond God, another divine Person or the same, God equal or lesser than God?

One thing I am sure of is that the Son was not created like the rest of creation, as He was part of the creative process. The Son contains within Himself the divinity of God the Father, but it is difficult to say to what extent. Throughout the Bible, **the Son is worthy of worship, participates in creation as a co-creator**, represents and knows God the Father like no one else. While there have been discussions since the early Councils about the attributes and identity of the Son, He Himself anticipated the insolvability of the question: "*no one knows who the Son is except the Father*" (Luke 10:22). We like to speculate, but we must acknowledge that we will not have definitive

certainties.

In eternity, at a point we cannot reach, the Son was begotten by the Father. This mystery is great, and I will not dwell on it at the moment because, despite the existence of the Son, God was still alone, as the Son received the divine essence, and there was nothing else. I believe that the Father and the Son (together with the Spirit, another mystery), divine and full of love, holiness, and creativity, desired more: more love, more sharing, more to give to, to love, and something new: to be loved by others.

When I converted, I heard something interesting: "every man has a void in the shape of God that only He can fill." One night, before falling asleep, thinking about God, I understood something tremendously unusual: **"God has a void in the shape of a man that only man can fill."** He Himself created this void as the sovereign and all-powerful God. Some may not agree because they think that to be God, He cannot have voids. This kind of human reasoning is what led Christ not to be recognised as the Messiah. They say that God cannot be like that, that God cannot be in another way... God can do whatever He deems possible and will always remain God, and we will not.

In the past eternity, God decided to alter His future eternity. It was in His sovereignty and with knowledge of what would change that He made the decision. When He decided to create beyond His person, He would no longer be alone, but

many implications would arise from loving beyond Himself and His Son. **Love is the greatest conditioner of power.** Love generates the need to be loved by the other, and makes the one who loves an eternal protector of the beloved.

I have a son. During pregnancy, I was surprised that I could not be completely alone. He was within me and went with me everywhere. The surprise was that when he was born, he would be with me forever too. My life changed from the moment I conceived a child. Everything else in my life was affected. I will never make a decision or plan without considering the consequences for my child. All this because I love him in a special and unique way. He will not always make the right choices; he will face difficulties, highs, and lows in life, and I will suffer with him through it all: rejoicing in his joys and crying in his sorrows. **Love brings an incomparable sweet pleasure but also suffering and consequently limits us.**

When God decided to create, He knew there would be implications because God is love and would no longer be emotionally independent. **By deciding to love beyond Himself, He would experience something that God was not supposed to know: suffering.** Yes, God suffers.

Anyone who thinks that God is only happiness without knowing suffering is totally mistaken. This is not making God human. He made us participants in Himself by creating man in His image and likeness. **The capacity to love comes from Him, as well as the capacity to suffer.** How can anyone imagine that the Father did not suffer when His Only Begotten was hanging

on the cross, giving Himself for sinful men? How can anyone imagine that God does not suffer every time a man rejects Him? God suffers for man in such a way that He gave His Son for him.

God became dependent on the love of His beloved. This was the great limitation with which God limited Himself. What kind of God is this who alters His eternity in this way? He decided it that way... I know these statements are considered blasphemy by some believers, but when I read the Scriptures, I see this God with emotions, sensitive, and suffering with those He loves.

When, in giving the Ten Commandments, God demands exclusive worship for Himself and, above all, love with all our heart, soul, and mind, we understand His need for intense love. It is easier to submit and worship God than to love Him. **I know many believers who acknowledge God as the Lord but do not know how to love Him.** Their love is weak and without expression because to love Him, there is an indispensable requirement, which is to know Him, experiencing His incomparable love. God desires to be loved by man because He loves him in a way we cannot comprehend.

It would have been very easy to destroy humanity when it rebelled against Him. However, He did not. The implacable God that some describe would have destroyed men long ago. Instead, He worked to restore them to the point of sacrificing His Only Begotten for this corrupted humanity that continually

rejects and betrays Him. What kind of love is this?

What love attracted me after blaspheming against Him? What love patiently waited year after year until I surrendered because I had no other alternative? I know I did not deserve it, but He was always there, waiting. He still is... Every time I make a mistake, every time I choose pride and my will, He remains silent, waiting for me to seek Him.

The Scriptures say that God is love (I John 4:8,16). **This incomprehensible love collides with His justice and gives birth to compassion, which gives rise to mercy.** God sees the suffering of every man, every sick and hungry child, the pain of the lonely heart, hidden sadness, and unhappiness.

I am not entirely sure who was created first, whether man or angels. However, these angels were undoubtedly created before man rebelled. Before human sin, something happened that is not talked about much among Christians: the sin of angels.

The Bible refers to an angelic rebellion by a group of angels. Among them is the one they call Satan, which means enemy or adversary, but it is not a proper name. Angels have names like Raphael (God heals), Michael (Who is like God), and Gabriel (Strong Man of God). Satan would have had a name like that, but he lost it when he rebelled. Besides this angel, others joined the rebellion and will face judgment in the Final Judgment. The important issue is that angels sinned before human sin and participated in tempting man, following an evil plan to distance humanity from God.

To counter the enemy's plan, God created a new plan to restore man's right to eternity and communion with the Creator. Some say that God does not have two plans, only one, and everything was planned by Him. I see something very different in the Scriptures: God always has a new plan, whatever tortuous path we choose. He has a supernatural creative ability to find a solution for what seems unsolvable.

The plan of redemption was an alternative plan. In this plan, His Son paid for the sin of man alone, not for the sin of the angels. God's love for man is so great that it led to a redemptive act of self-sacrifice.

Although they are wonderful creatures, God did not seek the love of angels. The plan of salvation for man is due to God's great love for humanity and His desire to be loved by them. Despite being extraordinary, there is no plan of redemption for the fallen angels, nor can Christ's sacrifice save them from judgment for their betrayal. Thus, even the holy angels of God cannot understand what salvation is, what it means to be redeemed from sin, and to be a beloved child of God. Only men are reserved for the image and likeness, to be children, to experience being restored from sin, and to experience redeeming mercy in Christ.

If God loves men so much, why does He not put an end to suffering? God desires immensely to do so, and He will.

IX

THE LIMITATION OF HUMAN WILL

When God created man, He did not make an automaton or a puppet to live according to a script He had written. He created an exceptional being in His image and likeness, with the ability to change its destiny, free to have an open future, with the capacity to love or not to love by its own decision. This marvellous being, one day, chose to live in rebellion against its Creator.

Even though God suffered the pain of the fatal consequences for the being He loved, He established a time when He would not definitively judge the situation. For a determined time, God respects and observes, intervening within certain limits that He has set. God continues to be the Lord of the physical and non-physical universe, but He respects humanity in such a way that He does not force them to do what is right. He remains present, gently drawing them, speaking softly like an imperceptible breeze, heard by those who return as prodigal children to the Father's House. Even these, living in this rebellious and contaminated world, are affected by the system and the consequences of the actions of other humans.

When we detach ourselves from this world and decide to seek the Father's will, we experience another realm that "cannot

be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28), and divine intervention becomes real, resulting in experiences considered madness by common mortals.

I have heard at times that even man's sin was in God's plan. How horrible and false! God could never create something so contrary to Himself. Sin was the reason for delivering the Son to death. He would never plan such a thing! So, what was the reason for creating the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? With much fear, because we do not know for certain, nor should we judge divine actions, we can imagine reasons. One possibility is that when God gave freedom to man, there had to be a way to test that freedom. He did not want to coerce His creature into serving and loving Him, for that would not fulfill Him. The tree may have been the test of freedom. This was the enormous price of creating free beings, whom He loved and by whom He wanted to be loved.

Man was God's masterpiece. However, how could God be sure that man would not also rebel against divine parental authority? Let us meditate... **The real problem was not the tree, whether literal or figurative, but the intervention of the "serpent", or Satan.** The sin was triggered not by the existence of the tree or the command God gave not to eat from its fruit, but by the fact that Eve listened to the enemy, who provided false information about God's character.

Satan said: "God does not want you to eat it, so you will not become like God" (Genesis 3:4-5). **The origin of the fall of humanity was the belief that God was not perfectly good and**

that His will for man was not the best. While they trusted that God was good, they remained obedient.

Today, it is still Satan's tactic, being called the Deceiver. He speaks subtly, causing people to believe that God has plans that do not involve complete love and goodness. Theology talks about Goodness and Love, but in practice, in the day-to-day lives, some fail to see it.

We are far from understanding everything about the consequences and reasons for what is called "free will." However, the Bible repeatedly says, "choose good and reject evil," "choose," "accept the consequences of your decisions" (Genesis 4:7; Deuteronomy 30:19).

Then comes a much-debated question throughout history: does God know our decision before it happens? Determinism says yes.

When I studied a little about the Theory of Relativity and the perception that God would have of time, I thought that God could already see "the end from the beginning" in the sense in which it is interpreted, but it is not precisely what the Bible shows us. **God determined an end, and in what He determined, our wills cannot interfere.** However, God did not determine the decisions of our lives, nor whether we will accept and love Him. This choice is exclusively ours. If this is so, how does God see the future? Furthermore, does God really see the future? And if He sees it, how does He see it?

Einstein discovered that time is relative. Based on his

theory, scientists consider that theoretically, we could travel through time if we could only reach the speed of light. We contemplate the starry sky and see the light from stars that existed millions of years ago. The stars we see at this moment are not the ones that really exist but rather those whose light took millions of years to reach here. Light takes time to propagate, despite its approximate speed of 300 million metres per second in a vacuum. Thus, some stars we see no longer exist, and others that are new are not yet visible.

When God contemplates His creation, I have no doubt that He sees the present universe and the past universe. The past of man has already happened. God does not forget and can access His memory as He wishes.

If it is easy to understand the possibility of accessing the past, based on the Theory of Relativity, it is not the same when we think about the future. I remember many films that address the topic of time travel. Whenever someone goes to the past and changes any detail, it has enormous consequences for the future triggered by the past alteration.

Regarding the future, it is even more complicated. Someone travels to a future that has not yet happened and sees something terrible. Upon returning to the present, they completely change their way of acting so that this future does not happen. Thus, that future will be different. But if the first future no longer exists, did it ever exist? Or was it just one possibility among many? **If it is one of many paths, it is not possible to travel to it. Quite simply because the future has**

not yet happened...

In science, it was discovered that Einstein's theory did not explain the entire functioning of the universe, but only part of what is infinitely large. Thus, another scientific theory emerged: Quantum Physics. Quantum Physics explains the infinitely small and is the theory that can help us understand divine access to the future.

What does science have to do with theology? It has everything to do with it. Theology is the interpretation of Scripture in order to attain knowledge of God and extract principles and doctrines to systematise this knowledge. Thus, theology is done through the process of constructing thoughts. The way a society thinks changes over time. Greek thinking still greatly influences how we question and draw conclusions. We think and conclude according to systems of causality and interpretation that have been transmitted to us genetically and socially. **I believe that science and theology are interconnected in the way they evolve because all conclusions are based on the same way of thinking and structured reasoning.**

In science, we move from universal causality, in Einstein's relativity, to quantum uncertainty. In experiments with subatomic particles, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle tells us that if we observe the position of a particle in a closed box with two compartments, we can only locate the particle by shining light on it and using the position and movement of light to obtain information. However, the use of light interferes with

the movement and position of what is being observed, **making it impossible to observe without influencing.**

The Theory of Relativity, while referencing time, cannot explain questions about the future. I believe that it is in Quantum Physics that we can find answers. Making an analogy between the experience of particles and the divine perspective of the future: **the mere fact of initiating an observation of the future influences it.** If God accesses the foreknowledge of our will, He will influence it. But to what extent does God, in His integrity, holiness, and justice, do this? If we ask Him, He can do it and help us make decisions, but how difficult it is for us to allow Him to interfere with our will! And if that happens, it will only be at the appointed time and an intervention in the present. God will never control us, for the reasons we discussed earlier.

There is a fundamental premise in this analysis: the **future has not yet happened.** Even for God, the future has not yet happened. If the future had happened, God would have direct access, for He is not limited by time and could move there to observe. However, God sees the future in those events that He has determined to occur.

According to this reasoning, **if God fully knew the future, He would be completely deterministic.** Then, those who believe in Voltaire's second hypothesis about God would be correct because the deterministic God would have predestined all the evil that afflicts us and eternal perdition for some. I am totally convinced that this is not the God who found

me. My Father did not determine all the terrible things I have experienced, nor the fatal illnesses of defenceless children, nor thefts, nor rapes, nor paedophilia, nor all corruption and misery. My God is good and planned a world full of goodness.

Note, reader, that in defending the immutability of divine goodness, I do not ignore that man may not recognise God's goodness in situations that seem negative to us. God may sometimes lead us into unpleasant, non-sinful situations in order to bring us to His good purpose. Not all suffering in our eyes is bad and devoid of divine purpose.

I am arguing on a philosophical level, based on both theology and science. Do not be scandalised, for I love and adore God with even greater fervour after believing in this way.

Prophecies occur in what has been determined. There are deterministic prophecies such as the coming of the Messiah, the judgment of the world, and eternal life. Other prophecies are conditional. In the account of the prophet Jonah, for example, the prophecy he announced was conditional. **Jonah's prophecy was not fulfilled** because the requirements were not met (Jonah 3:10). The repentance of the city changed the course of history, nullified the prophecy, and it did not come to pass. The prophecies of those who claim to be prophets today are almost entirely conditional. **The prophecies reveal divine will and are conditioned by human response.**

If God were a global determinist, He would see the total

future in the present. He is God and sees everything He wants to see of the future, as it implies determining it. **God is an observer of events to occur every tiny fraction of a second in millions of free and creative beings.** Nevertheless, God observes, but His intervention is limited to what is in accordance with His concept of justice and love.

Then what about divine omniscience? Omniscience lies in the divine ability to know an infinity of possible futures for all His creatures, who possess full freedom to alter the course of events. Although God refrains from determining the future of each individual not to violate their will, He can see the infinite number of possible futures, and if man so desires, He can help them move toward the best future.

Divine omniscience consists of seeing all the possible futures of all men, not a single predetermined future. This is not a diminishment of His power but an incalculable increment.

Even though God has a plan for each man, which is the Father's best, rarely do men manage to remain in the divine plan all their lives. Christ said that He would send the Comforter, the Spirit of God, who would dwell in and guide the man who believes in Him (John 14:16-17,26). The Spirit seeks to lead the man, who serves as His dwelling place, for the best of the Father. Still, human beings often choose independently of God. Some men are more malleable and easier to lead. Others are filled with pride and stubbornness. The latter are the ones who complain the most about the lack of

divine intervention in their lives, but they themselves are the obstacle.

When man lives by choosing against God's will, he ends up deviating from the divine plan, which is the best and where the fullness of abundant life lies. I can clearly see this in my recent past. All my choices led me to what I am now. So many choices were made without God, not deliberately or in rebellion. They simply were not thought through and awaited until I was certain of God's best.

Each decision has consequences and leads us to a destination that we create every day. **We are living the consequences of past decisions.** The good news is that our future can be better if we make better decisions. If we seek the best of God, we will make better decisions that will lead us to a better future.

Everything has been meticulously calculated by the great Architect so that life exists as we know it: the position and existence of the moon, the distance of the earth from the sun, the gases that surround the earth, the chemical composition of the soil, our brain, and all systems of the human body... How clear is the divine intervention in everything we can observe!

Geometric patterns reveal how much mathematics is present in all of nature. Each plant grows in a calculated way, not randomly. Their branches are generated according to mathematical patterns that the Creator implanted. I have chosen two geometric examples to illustrate man's life in his

decisions.



Independent choices



Choices in the will of God

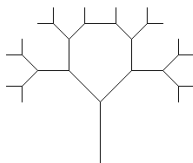
In the first example, we see paths going in various directions, without heading towards a specific goal. They symbolize impulsive decisions, independent of God, according to the spontaneous will of the moment. The best that God planned is lost and unattainable.

The second image, although showing decisions off the central line, is heading towards a specific future. It is impossible always to make the right decision. However, it is not impossible for the most important decisions of our lives to align with the divine plan. If we can discern in the most important decisions and wait for divine guidance, our life will take a direction towards God's best, which is His perfect plan. Without God, we cannot know the definitive consequences of a choice. **Only He sees the futures and knows the consequences of each branch of our choices.** When we choose according to our own desires, sometimes we end up in such confusion in

our lives that it is almost impossible to find the right path towards something good.

It is difficult to remain in the centre of God's will! It requires much waiting, seeking, and loving. However, those who live this way will never say that God does not intervene. Those who know that the Father's will is the best have no problem submitting themselves to it. If someone doubts that God's will is the best, they will never be able to be guided by it. Therefore, I firmly believe that **more important than believing in the power of God is knowing and experiencing His love.**

It is still time for each of us to start seeking the best from God. This is the main and most challenging intervention that God seeks to make at every moment. With each decision, He wants to guide us. We want Him to burst in and perform extraordinary miracles, but we do not let Him perform the miracle of guiding us towards what is best for us. Every day, we have choices to make. They will have repercussions, some enormous, on our future. We cannot see the future, or rather, the futures, but God can see them. Only He knows what "the flutter of a butterfly's wings" can trigger on the other side of the world... Only He can see what the choice to do what I want or say what I desire can cause. Like a geometric pattern, our will branches out, building the future.



What is the reason for divine non-intervention? It is easy! I will answer with another question... Why do I not let God intervene in my life and lead it every day? It is the same reason that prevents God from intervening in a general way. The reason is that He has been excluded from humanity. God only intervenes when He acts in His territory and with human agreement, which is the second self-limitation.

Still, there are some questions... What about believers who ask God to intervene and do not receive a response? Many people have entrusted their lives to God, they are humble and genuinely want God to be the Lord of their lives. They pray daily for His intervention. While some see extraordinary answers and have great testimonies, others cry in despair for not receiving the response they pleaded for. Can we dare to blame God and simply say that it depends solely on His will? Can we be certain that God, for unfathomable purposes, chooses not to intervene in some lives that have cried out for help? Who can assure us that we are not unjustly judging our Creator?

Then, there are those who truly want to follow God's will but do not know the right choice. How can we know God's will at every moment, since it is so crucial to make the right choice? It is true that Christ promised the Comforter, and the Spirit dwells in the man who surrenders his life to Him, but it is not easy to be guided by the Spirit (John 16:7-13). We are largely unaware of how He moves and speaks. These questions lead us to the next point: besides God having included in His eternity

the limitations of human love and will, He also respects His own laws that govern the physical and spiritual universe.

Divine intervention is not automatic like magic, but it follows laws. For God to intervene, man must learn how to open the spiritual world and bring from the spiritual world what God has at His disposal. **Most of what men ask from God is already their lawful right through the sacrifice of Christ, but man does not know how to bring what is rightfully his from the spiritual world into the natural world.**

I was recently meditating on a yet-to-be-proven theory: the Theory of Strings. The Theory of Relativity led us to imagine the universe as a large aquarium where water could be considered the fourth dimension of time. God would be, as creator and observer, outside of time. That is why some theologians think that God accesses the future as He does the past. However, that is not how the universe works, based on my understanding. I draw my understanding from both the Scriptures and the recent evolution of science.

The future has not happened yet. **Travel at the speed of light does not allow us to travel to the future because it does not exist.** The universe is not a large aquarium with God outside of it. I say this in my humble opinion as a thinking being, not claiming it to be the perfect truth.

The Theory of Strings, though unproven, is fascinating. In short, it argues for the existence of a universe composed of strings much smaller than subatomic particles. Each string emits a certain frequency representing a different dimension of

existence. Each string vibrates differently and generates a type of matter or independent dimension.

This theory managed to relate the Theory of Relativity to Quantum Physics. Although means to test it do not yet exist, it may be the embryo of a general theory that will encompass the rest and explain the functioning of the entire universe. Einstein sought this general theory but died before finding it.

Translating it to the spiritual... Instead of having a time dimension and another bigger one that envelops it externally, it places time as one among other of the co-existing dimensions. God is in one of these dimensions, and His ability to move beyond the material allows Him to traverse dimensions without restrictions. God is not outside of our universe but in another dimension among those He created.

Cury writes in his book⁷ that if God were in a distant place from us, when He spoke at Christ's baptism, the speed of sound would take an eternity for His words to reach the Earth. The speed of sound is much slower than that of light... If light takes millions of years to traverse the universe, sound would take much longer.

Thinking of other examples, what about Christ's Ascension forty days after the resurrection, or Elijah's ascension, or angelic manifestations? The spiritual world cannot be outside of time but parallel to it, otherwise, any passage between the natural and spiritual worlds would take

⁷ "Os Segredos do Pai-nosso: A solidão de Deus", Augusto Cury

an eternity to occur. That is how the natural world can access the spiritual.

Take, for example, John's apocalyptic visions (Revelation 4-5): he saw the place where God dwells. Did he leave our physical universe and move to the spiritual world outside of our universe? No! He simply accessed the dimension where God dwells. Even more challenging to understand is the exhortation in the Scriptures boldly to enter the Most Holy Place by the Spirit. How can the Spirit dwell in the believer and simultaneously be where the Father dwells? How can we receive His guidance and hear His voice? I leave this thought-provoking topic for those who study the Scriptures to meditate upon.

I find it wonderful that all knowledge is one. The Scriptures say that Christ is the Truth (John 14:6). The Epistle to the Colossians says that in Him are hidden all the **treasures of wisdom and knowledge** (Colossians 2:2-3). Science is not an enemy of God. Science is a way for God to reveal Himself. Unfortunately, theologians insist on seeing science as the enemy. The religious fear losing faith. So they hold on to tradition, fearing losing control over believers, over religion, and appearing ignorant. **They forget that even the most fervent believer or the greatest sage is still unfamiliar with God.**

Scientific discoveries should make us re-examine our biblical interpretations, but the reverse is also true. We should

also meditate on science in the light of the Scriptures. In the end, there is only one truth, and we will come out richer and less ignorant of God. Without humility, we will remain filled with our past knowledge, proud of how much we know and how much we know of God. That is why the Master said that we must become like children (Mark 10:15).

X

THE LIMITATION OF LAWS AND PRINCIPLES

I believe that throughout all my intense suffering, God has been present and ardently desired to intervene, but could not do so, as He Himself must respect the laws that sustain the spiritual and physical dimensions. He is love and compassion, but He is also holiness and justice.

I believe it is the intense desire of God's heart to put an end to human suffering and to do so now. However, in His incomprehensible ability to see and know all, the eternal losses would be catastrophically greater than the individual suffering of each person. This is not the concept of social good that supersedes individual good. God does not follow this principle. He is willing to leave "ninety-nine sheep" to rescue the lost one (Luke 15:4). The concept of divine social good is the gathering of all individual goods, and each being is of the utmost importance. Nevertheless, God sees what we do not see... He could come to establish His Kingdom definitively. This system would end, evil would be judged, His children would finally see His justice and goodness in its fullness. We forget, in our limited vision, that God desires the salvation of all men and therefore waits patiently. We feel the pain of our present suffering, while He knows the meaning of eternal condemnation for those who do not repent and decide to leave

the realm of darkness.

Observing my childhood, where was God? When I groaned in the darkness of the night, writhing in pain and loneliness, where was He? Today I know He was near... Why did not He intervene? Because I kept Him away, due to ignorance, and also because the conditions for His action in my life were not yet met.

While God remains unknown, He cannot enter. God intervenes according to rules, and we do not know them all. **He acts in the shadows where only those who see the invisible can gaze upon.** With His infinite wisdom and knowledge of men, He knows how to guide events without forcing human will, gently leading and respecting the beings He created and their unchangeable laws.

At the age of fifteen, God placed me in the home of the person with whom I first went to church, two years later. He knew she was involved with witches and healers, so it would be easy to take her to that church, which focused greatly on blessings, healings, and deliverances. The following year, in Mrs. Ilda's house, I heard the Gospel, although not in a completely biblical way. She was sincere, and it was not hard to touch her heart to receive me in her home. The room at Mrs. Antónia's house was reserved for me...

Everything was meticulously prepared, but subtly, without violence, without aggression. I see God intervening in the people and environments where I walked, even when I rejected Him. He acts, knowing factors and consequences that

we are unaware of because He sees the hearts and minds of all men. I do not argue that God does not intervene or plan. He does, but wisely, following rules and safeguarding human freedom.

God could explosively impose His will, manipulating and coercing, but He does not. He uses fallible men, lowering Himself to use human instruments, with all the respect that each being deserves. Each man, even the most rebellious and capable of terrible acts, is seen by God as a raw diamond, like a baby who needs love and protection, like a priceless treasure. What a mystery!

It is impossible to list here all the laws and principles to which the physical and spiritual world are subject, also because I only know some of them, but even those I know would not fit in one book. The Bible is full of principles of how the Kingdom operates: sowing to reap, overcoming evil with good, calling things into being that are not yet, the authority of the child of God over darkness, the power of love, believing in the impossible, the peace of faith, the power of obedience, the power of praise, the filling of the Spirit, the authority of the Scriptures, the priesthood of each child of God, the need for prayer, among others that we can discover.

God acts according to the laws He established for the spiritual world to co-exist with the natural world in an organized way. **These spiritual laws, contrary to what it may seem, do not serve to restrict divine intervention but to**

enable it and protect us from our own rebellion.

Human beings chose to govern themselves without God. Later, we will see that man does not govern himself. There is a third party involved. If there were no spiritual laws, man would be completely governed by Satan, and God would not intervene at all because man abandoned Him. However, in His immense love and wisdom, with the dangerous gift of freedom of thought and action, the Creator established laws. They govern the spiritual world and are a way of acting despite the reign of darkness in the world. The Devil cannot destroy the planet, nor can he manifest himself openly as he pleases, but only according to the pre-established laws. When a man opens himself to the depths of Satan, he gives Satan the freedom to take and possess him. Otherwise, Satan must remain in the shadows, influencing harmfully through the unclean spirits that serve him. He remains invisible and limited, but due to his persistence and cunning, he ends up causing great havoc in humanity.

In the previous chapter, we spoke about dimensions. I believe that Satan and his angels occupy a spiritual dimension. Although they interfere in our physical dimension, their place is in a different dimension, which the Scriptures call Hades, Abaddon, or Hell. In my opinion, hell is not a burning heap of flames, but a dimension where satanic powers dwell. It may seem strange to refer to this powerful angelic being as the ruler of this world for someone who is unfamiliar with this subject. In the chapter on the Plan of Redemption, we will address his

origin and actions, for those who are not familiar with the Scriptures.

God loves humanity and does not intervene if it does not open up according to the principles He has established. These "open the door" to divine action. Those who are rebellious will not obey these divine laws and will not experience the powerful manifestation of the Father's love.

Certainly, there are extremely important laws that I am not aware of. I cannot speak about them, but I can talk about what I already have a small understanding of. Let us take a look at some of the laws contained in the Bible that can help us see a more frequent and visible manifestation of God in our lives. Note that these laws are not instant magic; they only work if practised as a way of life and not sporadically. They are principles that are not detected by the majority. The Bible calls them secrets.

The law of sowing and reaping works both in the natural and spiritual world and is perhaps the most important law. There is always a time of waiting between sowing and reaping. In the case of spiritual things, they are sown in the spiritual world and take time to manifest in the natural world. According to the Parable of the Sower in the Gospel of Mark, this principle is a mystery: *"To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables,"* and also *"Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"* (Mark

4:1-20). The seed is the word: the words written in the Bible are seeds, but so are our words. The soil is the hearts of men, which can be more or less productive. The impediments to the seed bearing fruit, as described in the parable, are: it being stolen by Satan, received with joy but having no root, the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things.

Everything we do, speak, or think serves as a seed in the spiritual realm, but words are the greatest secret and are disregarded in this world. Proverbs 18:21 says: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Many do not eat "its fruit" because they do not love their tongue, that is, they do not value their words. Also, in the Epistle of James, he compares the tongue to a small rudder.

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a [a]perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. (James 3:2-5)

Those who are already believers have difficulty understanding these principles because there are many secular books that advocate them from a humanist perspective, where man achieves success without God. The truth is that these principles are universal, and anyone can practise them and obtain results. Their origin is in God, but even those who reject

God have experienced that they work, and even without God, they can bring about changes in their lives. Just like the law of gravity, spiritual principles work for everyone, even for unbelievers.

We practise this law by being mindful of all the words we speak. We should speak words of life for ourselves and for everyone around us, blessing instead of cursing. Our thoughts are also more important than we may imagine. A restless mind lives in turmoil and ends up speaking and acting unfavourably. It is important to quieten the mind and control our thoughts, not letting them flow freely in hatred, bitterness, anxiety, or worry. Thoughts directly influence emotions, and emotions quickly trigger actions and words.

The law of love works according to the principle of sowing. More than just sowing love, we must live in love: with God, with ourselves, and with others. We are exhorted to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21), to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), to turn the other cheek, as it is more effective than retaliation (Luke 6:29) and to always forgive, lest we contract spiritual or physical illnesses due to lack of forgiveness (Matthew 11:25). Love never fails and endures forever. Without love, everything is in vain before God (I Corinthians 13:1-13).

First and foremost, God asks us to love Him with all our strength, emotion, and mind. Only after that should we love other people as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). The

supernatural love of God is poured into the believer by the Spirit, in those in whom the Spirit dwells (Romans 5:5).

We practise this law when we realise that we must love God as our true Father, above all and everything else. We can only do so when we know Him in His true character. Love is a relationship, an exchange, an experience of giving and receiving, it is also emotion and time spent together. The first and most important of all commandments is to love God with all our strength, heart and mind.

We also practise love when we always forgive and do not seek revenge against our enemies, praying for them and blessing them with words. Love is the bond of perfection and maturity (Colossians 3:14). Only love keeps the soil of our hearts clean and ready to cultivate God's holy seeds. Hatred, unforgiveness, and murmuring are like stones in the heart, making it less fertile (Matthew 13:20-22).

The law of faith works in co-operation with the previous law. A seed can germinate without faith and without love, like any weed does, but for an excellent sowing, love and faith are necessary (Galatians 5:6). Faith is like a powerful fertilizer, causing the seeds to grow and bear fruit. Without faith, we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is believing in the invisible (Hebrews 11:1). Once the seed is sown, it becomes invisible. We must believe and wait until it grows and later bears fruit. A seed, after being sown, needs to be watered. If there is no faith, the seed will be abandoned and may not germinate. These agricultural concepts also work in man's

spiritual life.

Christ always encouraged His disciples to believe in the impossible, to dare in faith, not to fear adverse circumstances, to go beyond the physical universe. The Master exhorted with expressions like: "*Do you still have no faith?*" (Mark 4:40); "*You of little faith*" (Matthew 8:26); "*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes*" (Mark 9:23); "*I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel*" (Matthew 8:10); "*Believe that you have received it*" (Matthew 21:21); "*If you have faith as a mustard seed*" (Matthew 17:20). The Scriptures say:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:1-6)

Faith is not merely believing that God exists. I hear so many people say they have much faith because they believe in God's existence. That is not faith; it's common sense! When we study a bit of science, we can only conclude that God exists. Everything is too perfect, calculated in a way that only an

intelligent being could have originated and planned...

Faith is believing that "*he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*" (Hebrews 11:6). True faith involves seeking. Seeking God means building a relationship. Faith is a life of exchange and knowing God, understanding that He rewards those who seek Him. Faith can only be claimed when one sees something invisible that has not yet manifested in the physical world. Thus, faith involves seeking something and receiving that something. However, the greatest reward for those who know God is God Himself. Knowing and having a relationship with the Father is the greatest reward for those who truly know Him. Moreover, those who know Him understand that with Him, everything else is added.

Faith is discerning the invisible, seeing things that have not yet sprouted from the earth, knowing that if the seed is sown, it will bear fruit, provided it is in good and fertile soil. Yes, faith is believing, but it is more than belief... When you have faith, you already see the invisible. Returning to dimensions, faith involves seeing the spiritual world and seeing what has not yet materialised. It is not a physical vision but a spiritual discernment.

Deciding to sow and believe in things that God does not promise or are contrary to Scripture is a risk. We may be directing our lives toward paths outside His plan, far from the best for us. This is the difference between practising the laws with or without God. Those who sow hatred will reap hatred, those who sow love will reap love. Those who live apart from

God cannot reap all that God has to offer. Here, again, is the power of human freedom: practicing the laws in submission to the Father or independently of Him.

The law of holiness, together with the law of love, keeps the heart clean. Sin is the main hindrance to knowing God. No one can come into contact with God without going through genuine repentance. God is holy! There is no imperfection in Him, nor does He have any contact with evil. As corrupted beings, we could never come into contact with God. That is why we need to go through the experience of redemption and new birth, which we will discuss further.

The Scriptures exhort us to be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 11:45; I Peter 1:15). This is why the Spirit was given to us. Besides guiding us, the Spirit works to sanctify us. Sanctification is closely related to obedience. A proud heart does not obey. It is not about obeying a despot but a loving and wise Father who knows us and desires the best for us. **Humility is one of the characteristics that most helps a person move towards what is best and to know God.**

Comparing it to natural life, imagine a human father with his child. A rebellious and disobedient child always creates problems that harm him. The father educates the child and sets prohibitions only because he knows what is best or worst. The father always thinks about the child and does not create obligations just to make his life difficult. Once, Christ said, *"If you know how to give good things to your children, how much more*

will your heavenly Father give" (Matthew 7:11).

God is good and loves us like no one else! We do not need to make a great effort to be perfect, just let ourselves be gently guided by the Spirit, trusting Him, and with a humble heart recognising that God knows more about us than we do ourselves. If we are in the hands of the Spirit and in the process of sanctification, we are already perfect. The divine concept of perfection is not the same as the Greek concept of perfection that has been culturally transmitted to us. It is not a finished work! One who is in the process of perfection is already perfect. Thus, God sees us as perfect and holy, even though we may fail and sin at times because He sees us as finished, even though we are still being transformed.

Sin also hinders good seeds from germinating and bearing fruit. Sins such as lying, lust, manipulation of others, and covetousness prevent all the seeds we have sown from bearing abundant fruit. It is not a divine punishment for disobedience, but rather the normal functioning of the kingdom. A good seed needs clean soil.

The law of authority is of utmost importance. All physical and spiritual creation is governed by laws and principles of authority. This topic has much to be explored, but we will say only that man lost authority over the earth. Christ came to restore authority to man, but only to those who submit to God. These will again have spiritual authority over the earth and all beings on it.

The spirits that obey Satan no longer have authority over

those who have reconciled with God and received the authority restored by Christ. However, if someone is unaware of this fact, they will not exercise the authority they possess. Authority is not just a hierarchical position; it must be exercised. Even when Christ was physically on earth, He had to exercise it. Demons did not leave just because He was present. Healing did not happen unless He exercised authority, except those triggered by the faith of the individual. He had to rebuke, command, and fight against the powers of darkness. **Having authority is not enough; it must be exercised;** otherwise, it remains merely a concept with no practical results.

Spiritual authority serves to drive away the enemy from our sowing. He comes to "*kill, steal, and destroy*" (John 10:10). He is like those birds that come to destroy the crops or like pests. We need to be vigilant and exercise our authority.

The first step to practising this principle is to know the authority we possess. If the reader is not a born-again believer, genuinely converted to the Creator God, the authority they possess is limited to their person. They have their will, and with it, they can act freely, but they do not have authority over demons. They may exercise authority over their body in case of illness, using the law of sowing and words, but they do not have authority beyond that.

As for a child of God who has the Spirit, they can and should exercise their authority in everything where they discern an attack or interference from the enemy. The Bible

points us to various spiritual weapons to use, and one of the main ones is the name of Jesus, or Yeshua, as He was really called. The Scriptures teach us to use His name to cast out demons and exercise authority over circumstances.

If the reader considers this absurd and meaningless, it will be of no use. If we do not believe, it will be mere theatre. Spiritual authority must be exercised with understanding and discernment of spirits. Exorcisms without knowledge of Scriptures can be dangerous or ineffective.

Spiritual authority can be used in various life situations, not only against spiritual entities. Christ even commanded the wind to be still (Mark 4:39-41). It depends on each one's faith and understanding. However, this authority should not be used to manipulate others' will. This is called witchcraft **or magic: the use of spiritual power to do evil**. Whenever we disrespect someone's will, we are not acting according to God. He does not manipulate wills or disrespect any human being. Therefore, even if we have good intentions, we should never use divine principles to achieve something in another person's life if it is not what they want.

The law of prayer is the most extraordinary principle. The exhortation to prayer is a way of practising all these principles while establishing a relationship with the Father. Prayer that produces results uses the laws of sowing, faith, love, sanctification, and spiritual authority. Prayer activates all the laws of Kingdom. It is a great mystery and also **the greatest lever of the supernatural and divine intervention**.

Through prayer, we present ourselves before God in sanctification and living in His love. Then, we sow according to the best of the Father and exercise authority against evil. Among the various types of prayer, we must live in faith, believing that what we pray is operating in the spiritual world and will materialise while we wait. However, we continue to love, believe, sow, and rebuke any interference from the enemy, who tries to steal the seed and make us give up.

Christ exhorted us to pray always and not give up (Luke 18:1). Through prayer, we commune with God. Prayer can take many forms: thoughts, words, songs. It can be more mental or more emotional. We can pray with Scripture verses or with our own words. Everyone can choose or use all options. Prayer is part of our relationship with God. **We cannot be believers and not pray.** Prayer is not a recital of memorised words repeated like a mantra. Christ said that repetitions are in vain (Matthew 6:7). What matters is the attitude of the one who prays, even if the words are simple.

When prayer uses the previous principles, it becomes one of the greatest powers in the universe. Of course, praying alone without faith and without exercising authority may produce little. A prayer that consists of telling God how terrible our life is and how miserable we are is not a prayer that produces results. God already knows how bad we are. He is not here physically to speak the prophetic word that will calm the "wind" of our problem. We have to be the agents of divine

intervention, putting into practice the principles He left us in His Word.

As mentioned, God operates according to principles and not at our whim. **If He Himself submits to spiritual laws, we must also do so.** Many complain that God does not listen, does not speak, does not act... That is not the God I experience every day! I know it is not easy... Sometimes, I feel more inclined to hate than to love, more inclined to sleep than to pray, more inclined to complain than to exercise my authority over the enemy. It is not easy to sow good words when someone hurts us or when we see no solution to a problem, as our human tendency is to find someone who will listen to us, cry with us and grieve with us.

There is a time to weep, a time to mourn, but we cannot stay in that place. **If we are not willing to live by spiritual principles, we cannot demand that God does what we want.** Even if we do everything, God remains God and not our employee. Sometimes, He will not do what we want because it is not best for us or because some other reason prevents it. However, most of the time, He wants to act in our favour, but we fail to cooperate with Him so He can manifest Himself more powerfully.

When we have done everything we know and our suffering continues, that is when our true self is revealed. Are we still willing to submit to God?

Once, He tested a man named Abraham and asked him something strange and contrary to his nature: to sacrifice his

son (Genesis 22:1-18). Abraham was willing to obey, not because it did not hurt him, but because he believed that the God he served could resurrect the child. Abraham knew the goodness and power of God. Many question the request that God made, accusing Him or not understanding... It was just a test. God would never ask Abraham to do something so evil. Abraham knew that because he knew God! Abraham never thought of rebelling.

How many people like this does God have on earth? I do not believe there are many. But many demand from Him, blaspheme about Him, attribute terrible things to Him, judge Him, blame Him for human misfortunes, and want Him to end suffering, but they are not willing to submit to Him and love Him. Love is the only solution for this world. Rebellion against God leads to more chaos, more suffering. Submission to God and His love would be the only answer, the remedy that this sick world needs.

For those who call themselves believers and are disillusioned with God, I have news: **you were not disillusioned with the true God but with a God that men conceived and transmitted** to you. If you had known the true God, you would never have been disillusioned. The real God is open-armed, willing to speak to you, willing to tell you how much He loves you. He wants to tell you that He has always been attentive and cried with you every time you cried. He extends His hand to guide you if you are only willing to know

Him, not as the God of theology or tradition, not as the God with conceptual attributes of people, but as the Father who has always been seeking you. It is true that there are limitations, but it is also true that if we learn to move according to spiritual principles, we can see God act in a thunderous and powerful way in our lives.

These are not just words; I live this way. Every day is a miracle, even when there is suffering. I have seen extraordinary things, but the best of all is that, both in good and bad times, I am not alone. My soul no longer has a hole to fill **because I have everything, even when I have nothing.**

Yes, God has answers for problems, for illnesses, for human crises. It was because of my misery that I opened myself up to Him. But, there was so much more! He is much more than a solution to a problem. In Him, we find our fullness!

Although we are called to be His ambassadors, we cannot transmit God to others. We can only challenge them. God is not conveyed through words; He can only be experienced. The words in this book will be hollow to one who lies in despair. They will be of no use other than to challenge the reader to seek and surrender. Experiencing, living, touching... Just following religious practices deadens the spirit, but receiving the love of the Father is new life, an abundant and eternal life, already here!

XI

ORIGINS AND THE BIBLE

Even those who have never read the book of Genesis have probably heard the narrative of creation in some form. In the first three chapters of the Bible, it is described that God created the physical universe and everything in it, especially man. I do not believe that science and religion have to be opposed in this field. Nature tells the same story using different "words." Nothing in the original Hebrew text specifies that each day of creation is twenty-four hours. The Hebrew term *YoM*, translated as day, appears in many other contexts as a variable period of time. I myself have listed all the texts where *YoM* exists with various meanings.

Each day of creation may contain millions and millions of years or just a moment. We mentioned earlier that the light from the stars we see was emitted millions of years ago and is only now reaching the Earth. How could the universe be only six thousand years old, as some creationists want to defend? This is just an example of how the Bible and science are not opposed but are companions in the same search for our origins and destiny.

The Bible is not a book of science; it is a book of faith. It reveals the Creator in a simple way, for simple people. Genesis describes that everything originates from God. Science

regresses to an original *Big Bang* that does not collide with the Scriptures. Contrary to what science defended for many centuries until Einstein, there was a beginning of the universe. Science has concluded what the Bible said millennia ago. The question lies in what was before the *Big Bang*... Science finds nothing before the original explosion, and we can summarize the origin, according to science, as follows: before, there was nothing, and then, in an explosion of nothing, everything came into existence progressively.

On the other hand, nothing in the Bible contradicts science in what is truly proven. Darwinism, for example, is just a theory that has become tradition. In my opinion, both Creationism and Darwinism make mistakes. Both are extremist and lack common sense. Often, a scientific theory can become a religion whose god is the theory itself or its author because it cannot be proven and is based on assumptions that cannot be proven either. Evolution within species has been proven, but never evolution between species, that is, between *phyla*. It was assumed in public opinion that the success in proving evolution within a species would apply between species, but the truth is that this has never been proven. All the experiments presented as evidence of evolution referred only to mutations within the species, such as adaptation to the environment or other external stimuli.

In religion, as well as in science, unintentional deviations can also occur. If we read the biblical narrative of creation without the lenses of religiosity and tradition, we can observe

that plant life begins when God commands the earth to produce (Genesis 1:11). The Bible does not say that God created each type of plant one by one, **but that God ordered the earth to produce vegetation**. Then, in the creation of animal life, God also did not command the creation of each individual being, but said: "let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life" (Genesis 1:20). Note that I do not deny that God has the ability to create beings out of nothing. He is God and can do anything, but the Bible does not say that He did it that way; it says that, just as science says, life began in water, and **it was commanded to the water to produce living creatures**. Obviously, these are metaphorical words to place the origin of animal life in the water, but originating from divine will. I consider the Bible fascinating for its richness in creativity, emotivity, poetic sensitivity, prophetic teaching, and divine revelation:

*So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which **the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind**. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' So the evening and the morning were the fifth day. Then God said, '**Let the earth bring forth** the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind'; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Genesis 1:21-25*

The text not only states that the waters produced aquatic creatures but also the flying and crawling ones. I am not very

knowledgeable in science, but the text seems to indicate that the first flying creatures were marine, starting to breathe outside the water and developing wings. The waters also produced crawling creatures. Could they be reptiles that emerged from the water? It is quite possible that this is the meaning of "the living creatures that creep, which the waters brought forth abundantly after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind" (Genesis 1:21). Then, the land is commanded to produce more creatures, surely also originating from the waters. I might be interpreting the text incorrectly, but that is what it seems to suggest.

According to science, life emerged abundantly during the Cambrian period, not progressively as the Darwinists would like. Scientific discoveries do not prove progressive evolution, but rather that life emerged abundantly during this period. The phrase "*let the waters bring forth*" may have many meanings, but the origin of this life produced begins with God. Did God use a primary form of evolution only to create species and then limit the transition between species? We do not know. So why become obsessively fixated on a position that lacks support, both scientifically and biblically?

According to Gerald L. Schroeder⁸, a highly respected Jewish scientist, there is no evidence for evolution beyond the main species, but rather for a kind of evolution within subspecies. In other words, a dog will always be a dog,

⁸ SCHROEDER, Gerald, "Deus e a ciência"

although its breed characteristics may change. From the biblical text, we can understand that **God intervened in the creation of species but then allowed them to evolve freely within each one, following certain physical laws.**

During one of my personal retreats years ago, while reading the first chapters of Genesis, something caught my eye that I had never seen before. It is hard to explain, but I will try to use an ordered scheme with the things created in the first and then in the second chapter:

Genesis 1	Genesis 2
Beginning: heavens and earth - v1	Day when God made the heavens and the earth: there was no plant, nor rain, nor man - v5
Day 1: Light and darkness - v5	
Day 2: Firmament separates waters - v8	A mist rise from the earth - v6
Day 3: Dry land and vegetation - v13	Man is made from the dust of the earth, a living soul; vegetation - v7-9
Day 4: Day and night with light - v16	
Day 5: From the waters: aquatic creatures, flying creatures, and crawling creatures - v23	Animals - v19-20
Day 6: From the land: animals; man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God - v31	Woman, so that man is not alone.
Day 7: Host of heaven, heavens, and earth are finished - v2:3	Serpent, Satan - Gn 3:1

I have analysed each stage of creation in chapter two and matched it with the days from the first chapter. I did not alter the order, as the idea was to keep the same sequence in both chapters and compare them. I was very surprised to realise that the two chapters fit perfectly, except for one detail: the creation

of man.

In the first chapter, man is only mentioned on the sixth day, along with woman and being made in the "image and likeness" of God. However, in the second chapter, man appears with woman after the creation of vegetation and the other animals, but his creation had been earlier. This prior creation, in the second chapter, occurred right after the separation of dry land, and man is called a "living soul," not the "image and likeness." It might not mean anything; the order of description in the second chapter may have been random, or it might mean everything. The truth is that there is a perfect match in the sequence of the two chapters, except for the reference to man, long before being called "image and likeness."

Something curious, which I also cannot explain, is that "image and likeness" always implies the existence of woman alongside the man. I consider the possibility that the "living soul" created could have been a human ancestor, in an early stage of the creative process. This could explain the fossils, considering that each day of creation may contain an incalculable period of time. Of course, I am speculating... However, it is undeniable that man was created before woman and was identified as a living soul at that moment. How long did man exist without woman as we know her? If the YoM were not twenty-four hours, we cannot calculate how much time passed.

The question of the lights being mentioned only on the fourth day also arises. From the perspective of the Earth, they

only became visible at that time, after the separation of the waters and the mist rising from the earth. It does not mean that their creation was so late, but it may refer only to their visibility from Earth. As we said, the Bible is not a book of science but a book of wisdom and faith.

These are just small examples that unreasonably divide scientists and theologians. The Bible is an immeasurable treasure. However, can we trust the Bible as the Word of God, as it is called among most Christians?

The original texts in Hebrew and Greek no longer exist. What we have is a vast collection of copies in scrolls, some of which are quite damaged. Translations were made from these scrolls. Regarding the Old Testament, during the Babylonian captivity, the collection of all the scattered scrolls in Hebrew script, known as square script, was copied. This was the Bible during the time of Christ on Earth.

The current Hebrew text dates back to the beginning of the Christian era and is attributed to Jews called Masoretes. They created a system of vowels so that anyone could read. There is also a Greek version of the Old Testament dating back to the 3rd century BC. It is called the Septuagint, due to the legend that it was written by seventy men who miraculously produced the same translation without having contact with each other. It is a legend, but the Septuagint is an important text as it was translated by Jews from Hebrew texts older than those known today, and certainly older than the Masoretic text.

In 1947, in the caves of Qumran, manuscripts dating back to the 3rd century BC were discovered. Those used in biblical translations were much later, so it was a tremendous find. What amazed scholars the most was the similarity with the texts they already had, revealing that changes over time were minimal. These scrolls allowed for the correction and improvement of the biblical texts we have today. Some are still being translated at present.

The Scriptures of the Old Testament contain fantastic prophecies. They prophesied the coming of the Messiah in detail and are a prophetic and personal message for each man, revealing that there is a God who created us and loves us.

The Bible has numerous translations, and not all of them are correct in every detail. Translators are not God, and if we consider the original texts and their copies as inspired, can a translation also be inspired? Of course not! Translations are not inspired, but they must be compared with the original text. There are differences between translations, influenced by culture, doctrine, the affections, and passions of the translator. However, this does not mean that we can question the credibility of our Bible. If we use a study Bible, for example, it provides explanations whenever there is any doubt in translation. In any case, they all convey the essential message of God to all men.

Another more complex question: are the books chosen to be part of the Bible all inspired by God? Were there more books that were not included or some that were included but should

not have been? All the existing books were analysed in great depth, and in a very demanding way. It seems much more probable that important books were excluded than some selected books did not deserve to be there. We must bear in mind that the choice was human and not divine, although I am sure those pious men must have prayed extensively and sought guidance from the Spirit for such a challenging task.

Even the original texts are the result of man being used as an instrument of communication. In a Lisbon metro station, there is written, in different words, the following: "The Canon of Scripture is not a work of man but is what we can understand of God." The Scriptures are the closest thing we have to divine revelation. If there were no human involvement, it would be incomprehensible. The Scriptures are God's revelation through the words and emotions of men because that is the only way man can understand. Several men were channels so that all men could receive God's message. Therefore, we cannot isolate texts and appropriate small pieces for ourselves. The Bible explains, clarifies, and completes itself. Only as a whole can we receive the Word of God.

It is true that some texts were chosen while others were rejected. It is true that over history, texts were lost, scrolls were damaged... **However, the great miracle is not what was lost but what remained, after several thousand years.**

Without a doubt, in my opinion, **the Bible is the only book that contains the Word of God.** To encounter it, we must

have an encounter with its Author. It is a book that needs a Guide. Like in a foreign country, we need the Spirit to be our guide in the discovery of the wonders to be shown to us. **The book without its Author is just a meaningless puzzle.**

Why do I affirm that the Bible is the only book that can be called the Word of God? Is it not sectarian, disrespectful of other religions that have other sacred texts? I do not say that these books have no value for their believers, but the Bible is not compatible with other books, other gods, other paths.

Those who preach about God and use the Bible alongside another sacred book have never read the Bible with understanding because they would see that this is not possible. Contrary to what prophets of other religions claim, Christ did not present himself as one prophet among many or one path among many. He elevated the Father as the only God and **presented himself as the Only Way**, the Only Truth, the Only Life that leads to the Father (John 14:6). There are many gods and many paths among the religions of men, but they are not compatible with the Bible, nor with its Messiah. Christ presented himself as the Son of God, the Only Begotten, co-creator of all things.

While in the flesh among us, he testified that the existing Scriptures were true and expressed the will of the Father. Christ spoke the truth about the Scripture that existed, or he was the greatest liar in history. **If he is not the Son of God, He is the greatest deceiver who ever lived.** However, I know that he is not because he changed my insignificant life and did not

need to do it. I had nothing to give him, only to receive, and I still do.

The Bible says that there is only one truth and that the gods of other peoples are not the true and creator God. **Christ affirmed himself as the only Way to the Father** (John 14:6). If he is just one of the ways, if any religion leads to God, then Christ did not speak the truth. If he did not speak the truth, then he is not the Truth, and everything written about him is a lie, and we are lost in our sins. I say this as mere reasoning because I know that he is the Truth. I know that he is the Way to the Father, the unique Truth, and the eternal Life!

Regarding the New Testament writings, they are the testimonies of those who lived with the Master and were witnesses of his resurrection. The book of Acts reports the period after the resurrection and of those who saw the Lord after his victory over death. If Christ did not rise, then He was the greatest liar who ever existed, even if He was intelligent and a great philosopher. It is the resurrection that confirms that everything He said was true. He prophesied his death and resurrection and fulfilled the ancient prophecies in detail. He was the Son of God mentioned so many times in the Old Testament, returned to the Father, and intercedes for men. In due time, He will be the King and will reign with those who join Him in his Kingdom, which is already within those who are born again.

We can trust that the Bible is the Word of God, and Christ

is the Son of God. Both are not just objects of knowledge, but primarily of relationship. This detail makes all the difference and distinguishes those who submit to divine love from those who want to appropriate his power for their own gain.

It is possible for someone to know the Bible deeply, even in the original languages and teach about it, but its Author may be an unknown to them. The Scriptures are a means of relationship between God and each of His children. Without this, it is just another sacred book of a religion. Christianity may be just another religion, but it was not a religion that Christ came to establish. He came to reconcile men with the Father and enable a new birth that transforms an impure and imperfect man into a son of God, partaking of the divine nature.

Christianity was created by men, just as Judaism had been. Judaism is not based on the Scriptures, not even the Old Testament, but on endless commentaries on it that generated a complex system of principles, partly opposing the divine ones. Similarly, Christians created a religion based on human interpretations, with rituals, traditions, and a clerical system. Like Judaism, it is divided into multiple groups.

The larger the group, the greater the probability of error. This is what history shows about the church. Parallel to Christianity, **there have always been small groups seeking purity and simplicity of faith rather than the exuberance of religion.** There may be exceptions, but when the group becomes too large and turns into a complex institution, like a

religious company, it becomes difficult for those hungry for continued growth, seeking and those who need to think above the group's rules. It is then, that those hungry for the purity of the faith, group together outside the major institutions and remain a sign that God preserves His truth.

A way to imprison men is to make them think they are rebelling against God when they refuse to submit to the yoke of human authorities for reasons of conscience. If the attitude is to be more faithful, purer in living faith, holier, more merciful, more dedicated to prayer and evangelism, then there is no rebellion against God. If men leading us hinder spiritual growth and do not fulfill their role, it is better to take only the yoke of Christ and do His work, even if in a small group. Note that I emphasise "small group" and not "alone."

I will never encourage isolation or foster individualistic pride, but the institutional church must be a spiritual fertilizer. If it is not, it does not fulfill its role, so let us turn to the "church of people." Christ said that where two or three are gathered in His name, He will be present. No one will ever be without leadership because Christ is the Head of the church, which gathers in His name everywhere.

The human "popes" do not like to lose control of people and try to imprison them with fear, curses of loss of salvation, and interpretations of biblical texts out of context. However, the Spirit of God will continue to bring more hunger, more revelation, more direction, and those who are His will hear.

I do not defend rebellion out of pride and a concept of superiority over the leaders. Once, a very wise brother in the faith gave me some interesting advice when I approached him with the situation I was going through. I felt oppressed in the denomination where I was, but I was still very young to understand that during our Christian life, God takes us to other places to work in us. I did not want to rebel, I did not want to sin against my leadership, but I felt very bad inside because every time someone left that church, they were labelled as rebels. The wise brother told me: "*David always respected Saul, but when his life was in danger, he didn't let himself be killed and fled!*" Those words brought life and liberation to me. I could then hear from God and follow His path for me without feeling guilty.

XII

THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

Up until now, I have avoided quoting many biblical texts to make the reading accessible, even to those who do not study the Scriptures. However, this chapter requires me to do so, lest it be considered a mere philosophical delusion. It is not; everything I affirm is based on the Bible.

The creator God gave man authority over the earth and everything in it:

Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' (Genesis 1:26-28)

Another passage later confirms the same idea: "*The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to the human race.*" (Psalm 115:16). The earth also belongs to the Lord, but He has delegated authority over it to man for a determined time.

We do not know exactly when, but other spiritual beings

were also created, although they are not bearers of the divine "image and likeness." Could they be identified as the "host of heaven" in Genesis 2:1? If so, they were created after man.

There is an opinion that the creating "Elohim" includes angels and that they participated in the creation; however, I cannot find justification for such a claim in the Bible. Angels, or celestial beings, are referred to as "sons of God," and generally, "Elohim" refers to the plural God, which we understand as the Father and the Son (and with the addition of the Spirit, the Ruach). Biblically, the information we have about the creation of spiritual beings is limited. Referring to Christ, it is written:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17)

The expression "firstborn over all creation" can be misinterpreted if one does not understand the biblical meaning of "firstborn." The firstborn son was the one who had the right to inherit from the father. The other sons might or might not receive something, but the firstborn had utmost importance. More than just being associated with the possession of goods, it was a status. The firstborn son was the successor of his father, taking on the honour and position that the father held in society. When the text characterises Christ as the "firstborn of all creation," it does not mean "the first creation of God," but

the heir of creation. He is the Firstborn over all creation. The text itself explains this when it says: "*all things were created through him and for him*". Christ was the co-creator, and all things were created for Him.

Just as "it was not good for Adam to be alone," it was also "not good for the Son to be alone." Humanity was created so that the Son, and consequently the Father, could have a relationship with them. The apostle Paul says that the mystery is that a Bride will be chosen from among humanity for the Son (Ephesians 5:32). It will be a collective Bride but holy, filled with the same Spirit.

Returning to angels and spiritual beings, it is astonishing that God chose humanity to form this Bride when angels appear more excellent to us! There is something in us that we do not understand, but it contains this "image and likeness" and makes us unique.

A friend asked me about the possibility of there being other creations with beings similar to humans in other possible dimensions, with other worlds or universes. It might just be my wish, but something makes me feel special being among dimensions and universe that are real. If God gave His "image and likeness" to other beings and civilisations, we would be just one experiment among many. What I have received from Him and understand is that there is something special about this corrupted humanity. Even if there were more creatures and many dimensions filled with them, we are something

above all that. **What the Son came to do for this Bride is not done multiple times.** There is something incomparable and unique here. I have no proof, but it is what I feel. If it is not like that, I will know one day...

Colossians 1:16 says that "*for in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities*". Everything visible and invisible was created by and for the Son. In other words, we can say that all dimensions that may exist were initially created by and for the Son, even the spiritual beings mentioned here: thrones, dominions, principalities, powers. These names represent hierarchical positions of spiritual beings. Thus, we understand that the Son of God has always been above all angels and any other beings that may exist. This is what the opening verse of the Epistle to the Hebrews means:

*But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'. In speaking of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.'. But about the Son he says, '**Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you***

with the oil of joy.' He also says, 'In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.' To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:2-14)

God the Father shares His divinity with the Son and commands other beings to worship His Son, something that is only allowed to be done to God. In the first of all the Commandments, it is written: *'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve'* (Exodus 20:3-5; Matthew 4:10).

Apparently, everything said so far has nothing to do with the title of the chapter, but the foundation for understanding the Plan of Redemption is the understanding of spiritual authority. God gave authority over the earth to man so that he could rule over it. Everything went as planned for an indefinite time. We do not know how many millennia or millions of years passed with man doing what God had commanded: *'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'* (Genesis 1:28).

Man was created, at some point, as a living being, then on the sixth day, he appeared with the woman. We do not know how long the rest of the sixth day lasted. This is followed by the biblical seventh day when it is said that God finished His creation and then rested, meaning He stopped creation and delighted in admiring it. How long did this rest last until man

sinned? It was long enough for the couple to reproduce and have more people on earth. However, something terrible happened: holy angels, created pure, rebelled against the Creator.

How is it possible for such sublime beings to fall from a supernatural state close to divinity to a corrupted state? If God knew beforehand that it would happen, would He have created them? Did God know? If He knew, they would not be free. He certainly knew at least the possibility. Just as God created man free, He also created angelic beings with that characteristic. We are sure that He considered the possibility of rebellion because freedom implies any possibility of choice. God took a huge risk!

The text in Hebrews explicitly states that angels are ministering spirits sent to those who will inherit salvation, that is, for those who believe and become children of God. If they were initially created for another purpose, it remains mere speculation without a way to be proved. What is clearly stated is that all things, both material and immaterial, physical and spiritual beings, were created in Him. It seems that everything happened in a very sequential manner and not as separate experiences.

The text in Genesis 3 brings us a dramatic event that leads to a turning point in the initial divine plan. The woman has an encounter with a being identified as the Serpent, but who is Satan: an angel who rebelled against God. The text tells us that there was a tree in the Garden, the fruit of which they could not eat. It was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

They could rule over all the earth and all beings in it, but they could not eat the fruit of that tree.

I have some doubts that this event is literal in what it narrates and if it was really a tree and a fruit. The tree was called the 'Knowledge of Good and Evil.' Could it be that what was represented by the tree was access to knowledge about evil that had been forbidden to them? If Satan appeared here to tempt humanity, it is because he had already sinned against God. There could not be a tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil if evil did not exist.

There has been much discussion in philosophy and theology about the origin of evil. Did God create evil? What is evil? Here is what I believe... Evil, in its broadest sense, is the absence of good, just as darkness does not exist but is the absence of light. God is the source of love, goodness, truth, and joy. In His absence, there is also an absence of goodness, love, truth, and joy. His absence is evil. Evil emerged when the first being rebelled against God.

The prophet Ezekiel, in his prophecy about the King of Tyre, speaks of someone who does not seem to be a human king:

*You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created. **You were the anointed cherub who covers;** I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. **You were perfect in your ways***

from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. "By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, and you sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, o covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones. "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you. "You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; therefore I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you, And I turned you to ashes upon the earth In the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; You have become a horror, and shall be no more forever." (Ezekiel 28:13-19)

Other supporting texts, which may be descriptions of the same being, are: Isaiah 14:12-20 and Ezekiel 31:8-18. If this cherub was Satan (the text does not explicitly state it, it is only a hypothesis), then the text says that he was placed in the Garden of Eden and was created perfect. God did not create him predisposed to evil, but absolutely perfect. In his perfection, his interior became filled with violence because of his beauty and wisdom, and thus he was expelled. This makes much sense, as in Genesis 3, he appears in Eden, lying, and tempting Eve.

I have found translations where instead of 'you were the cherub', it is 'you were with the cherub'. In this alternative, the text would be a description of the fall of man, who once had the glory of Eden. He was created good but swelled in his glory and chose to have knowledge like God, rebelling.

Man was created perfect. God, being good and perfect, would not create something bad or predisposed to evil. Man

does not sin for having been created imperfect. Man was created perfect, with the ability to obey God and fulfill the purpose for which he was created.

I have incessantly heard that man is inherently bad. People cite biblical statements like “*there is none righteous, no, not one*” (Romans 3:10) among others. But the texts are taken out of their contexts. What happened was that man became corrupted and then, from that point on, became impure and corrupted. What was good became bad due to the absence of God. That is how these texts describe man, but only in his fallen state. It was not like that in the beginning, and that was not how he was created: “*God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes*”. (Ecclesiastes 7:29).

In his freedom, Satan corrupted himself and was not satisfied but determined to destroy man. Let us see how it happened in the text of Genesis 3:

*Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’? ” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “**You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:1-6)*

The serpent is clearly identified in Revelation: ‘*the great*

dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan' (Revelation 12:9). Thus, we can be assured that this serpent is the Devil, the celestial being that became corrupted. He began by lying to seek Eve's attention, asking if they could not eat from any of the trees in the Garden. Eve responds that they can eat from all the trees except one, and the consequence would be death. Then the serpent, already having Eve's attention, starts lying about God's character and intentions. In paraphrasing the serpent (Genesis 3:4-5), she said: '*God is not concerned about man, nor does He love him; the prohibition is not for man's good but to limit him; God is selfish and only thinks of Himself; God lied because man will not die but will know good and evil; thus, man will be like God.*'

If the tree provided evil knowledge, would God's prohibition not be for man's well-being? Speaking as a human, whenever I forbid my child from accessing information about something bad, I do it solely to protect him. I know that he will come across that information later when he grows up, but as a child, he is not ready to defend himself. There is a time to encounter evil. It will be the time of his maturity. Then he will know how to reject evil, but for now, he needs my protection to keep him away from things he cannot filter and discern.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, in addition to being a test of human freedom, may also have been temporarily withheld knowledge until man could learn to reject evil. In any case, this tree presupposes the existence of evil. If the trees are figurative, as I suppose, this tree was not a

plant but a spiritual entity. **Eve ate from the fruit not when she ingested the fruit, but when she assumed and received the false knowledge about God.** It was not the fruit bitten and digested in her stomach that contaminated her, but the false and evil knowledge transmitted by the serpent. I believe that both the tree and the serpent were one being: Satan.

I think I am not far from the truth to assert that the cherub placed in Eden, when corrupted, became the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were not supposed to eat from this tree. Everything was written in a very poetic and figurative manner, but the principles are clear: **man should not commune with evil, whether it is a tree or a spiritual being, as it leads to his death.** The fact was that both Eve and Adam partook of this knowledge, and terrible consequences were triggered:

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." (Genesis 3:8-12)

The plan of Satan was accomplished. The severest consequences are in the text above. Man began to fear God; he no longer trusted His love and care: fear of His voice, fear of His presence. Nakedness, which previously did not bother him,

became seen as something evil. All of man's innocence was lost, as he became aware of all the wickedness contained in the knowledge of the tree. Therefore, I believe it was not just a tree, but rather evil itself, developed and shared by the Devil. The rest of the text describes further consequences. It is worth noting that these are not punishments, as God had warned of what would happen. The consequence of sin was death, but physical death did not occur immediately, only spiritual death did:

13 And the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

*14 **So the Lord God said to the serpent:** "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.*

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

16 To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

*17 **Then to Adam He said,** "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.*

18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

20 And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

21 Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them. (Genesis 3:13-21)

The cherubim, who had been placed in Eden with a good purpose, led to the fall of man. Notice the difference in language towards the serpent compared to Adam and Eve. The serpent receives a curse: **the offspring of the woman will bruise its head, while it will only bruise the offspring's heel.** Here is the first prophecy of redemption in Scripture, right after the sin. Before giving the consequences of sin to man, God reveals that salvation will come. Someone from the offspring of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

In this episode, tremendously important things happen. Authority belongs to those to whom it is delegated. Man ruled over the earth but was subject to God. When Eve listened to the serpent and embraced its evil, she rebelled against divine authority, placing herself under the serpent's authority. We become slaves of those we obey (Romans 6:16). It is a universal principle.

Imagine what God must have felt at that moment! His immense love for man made Him refuse to accept that situation. God did not conform, even though man had betrayed, disobeyed, and rejected His loving authority. He determined an alternative plan: the authority would be restored to its original plan when a descendant of the woman would defeat the serpent, annihilating its authority.

With a broken heart, God spoke to the woman and announced to her that, in bearing children, she would experience great pain and something deeper: she would be

subject to man. The dominion of man over woman is a consequence of sin. God created man and woman to jointly rule over creation as one. Eve was the instrument of Satan for the fall of humanity, not respecting divine authority. This placed her under a yoke that remained throughout human history.

The patriarchal society, where women are treated merely as reproductive objects and servants, began here. This dominion was not God's original will but a consequence of sin. Once sin is eliminated, women will be liberated from this dominion. The intense pain in childbirth was multiplied, meaning that pain existed but was minimal. The intense pain in childbirth is also a consequence of sin and not something natural and inevitable.

Finally, God spoke to man: '*Cursed is the ground for your sake*' (Genesis 3:17). The ground became cursed! Why did God say this? He had called the serpent 'cursed,' and now He calls the ground 'cursed.' God did not call Eve or Adam cursed, but merely related the consequences to them. However, He called the serpent and the ground 'cursed.' The ground became cursed because someone cursed assumed authority over it. **The serpent would be an authority on the earth, so the earth assumed the curse that the serpent was cursed with.** Unfortunately, since Adam and Eve were part of the earth, along with all their inhabitants and descendants, they would also be influenced by the curse.

Man is called dust. The serpent would eat dust. The earth is dust. The earth would no longer obey man because man

would no longer be the master over creation. The serpent would eat, feed on the suffering of humans, human sin, and humanity's oppression, until *'the head (authority) of the serpent would be bruised'* (Genesis 3:15).

What happened was that Satan took authority over man. The earth remained the land of men, but over man, there would be a diabolical authority that would dominate, oppress, and exploit him. In the Gospel according to Luke, when Christ was tempted by the Devil in the desert, the Devil tried to seduce Him: *'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.'* (Luke 4:6-7). It seems audacious and cunning for Satan to say this to the Son of God Himself! However, it was true that the authority of the kingdoms of the earth had been given to him. But Christ had other plans: to crush Satan's authority and regain God's possession, which man had lost. He declared: *'Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.'*" (John 12:31-32). This would happen when His purpose was fulfilled, but it confirms Satan as the ruler of this world.

Now we have the basis to understand what redemption is. Throughout Scripture, the Hebrew term *'Goel'* is used, translated as redeemer. When someone had to give up land or other possession to pay a debt, a close relative could act as a

redeemer and reclaim the possession from the original owner by paying its price. Another example is when a young woman becomes a widow. In that case, a relative could become her redeemer by marrying the widow. This is the meaning of the term 'Redeemer.'

Psalm 49 speaks of wealthy men who serve as redeemers for material things, but their wealth cannot buy salvation for the soul:

*Hear this, all peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will disclose my dark saying on the harp. Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me? Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a **ransom** for him – for the **redemption** of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever – that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit. For he sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the way of those who are foolish, and of their posterity who approve their sayings. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me.*

Man was lost, dominated by Satan, hopeless, with no way of returning to a state of communion with God and being a ruler of creation instead of being ruled over. How was this

redemption, announced on the day of rebellion in Genesis 3:15, executed? How could a descendant of the woman overcome the serpent by crushing its head? Where was a close relative of man who had the necessary wealth to reclaim possession of creation, possess humanity, in its loneliness and helplessness in the hands of the enemy?

Only a **close relative** could be the redeemer of all that humanity had lost; thus, it had to be a man. On the other hand, he had to be without sin so that he would not also be under satanic authority. Thus, from the lineage of David, a descendant of Abraham, the promised descendant was born in the fullness of time. He was not born of human seed but was conceived by the Spirit of God in the womb of a Hebrew maiden from the lineage of David (Luke 1:32-35). Scientifically, it could be called parthenogenesis: reproduction solely through the female, with no male intervention in the process. It was not entirely so because, in some way we do not comprehend, the man born of Mary was the pre-existing Son of God, and it was through divine intervention that He was conceived in the female womb. This has nothing to do with re-incarnation. He only incarnated as a man once. It is a great mystery! He already existed but had to become fully man without ceasing to be the only begotten Son of God, a co-creator:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and

*coming in the likeness of men. **And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)*

The humiliation of Christ began when He took on the condition of a man. The author of creation, coming from eternity with the Father, found Himself in a frail human body, subject to weaknesses and needs. We cannot even imagine what it meant for the Son to come to earth as a man! As if that were not enough, the plan was something considered foolish even today:

*For **the message of the cross is foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach **Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness**, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (I Corinthians 1:18-25)*

The plan of redemption was consummated when Christ died crucified on a stake, along with wrongdoers, for the sins of

humanity and when on the third day, He rose from the dead, ascending to the Father forty days later, after appearing to many who could later testify. This is the folly of the Gospel! Why did Christ have to die? How did God sacrifice His own Son? Why was there not a less bloody and less unjust solution? Why did God not demand something less cruel to compensate for human sin?

The suffering of God was immeasurable, seeing His Son, unable to intervene. Cury describes it astonishingly and with great sensitivity:

The Son cried without tears, while the Most High God descended from the Heights and bent His face over the earth, desperate. I cannot describe the scene. Every reaction of pain, trembling, and asphyxiation of the Son ran through the bowels of God's being. He was suffocated when Jesus could not open His lungs to breathe. Shouting at the top of His lungs for God to forgive the human beings who mocked Him and killed Him, saying they did not know what they were doing, Jesus, as the most excellent analyst, understood the incomprehensible...⁹

Jesus understood the incomprehensible... The Lamb of God took on the sin of the world, and God experienced what it was to be human. It was a unique moment in both human and divine history! God's love reached its peak, enabling human love to also reach its maximum in response to the first. Who can resist such great love?

In previous chapters, we concluded that there are laws

⁹ Cury, Augusto, Os Segredos do Pai Nosso -A solidão de Deus, pág. 157,158

and principles even God respects. There was no greater pain than what the Father felt when His Son was hanging on the cross, exposed before creation as a wrongdoer, separated from the love and protection of the Father! While many judge and accuse God, He did the only thing that could be done to save humanity. There was no other solution! No man in history had been able to remain outside Satan's authority and have the necessary conditions to pay the price.

Remember that the consequence of Adam and Eve contacting the forbidden knowledge would be death. However, they did not die physically immediately, but the eternal life of the spirit was at stake. There is an interesting detail: right after their sin, God clothed them with skins. What skins were those? Some assert that they were the skins of the first lambs sacrificed for the expiation of sin.

I cannot explain why, but the shedding of blood brought remission of sins, meaning that it prevented the consequences from occurring: *'without the shedding of blood, there is no remission'* (Hebrews 9:22b). Man deserved to die the moment he sinned, but it did not happen. I believe it was the shedding of blood that prevented it when the lambs, whose skins covered Adam and Eve, were slain.

Throughout the Old Testament, animals were sacrificed. For some reason, the shedding of blood served to protect man from the consequence of his own sin. **It was not a redemption that affected the spirit or eternity but only prevented the consequence of sin during life**, protecting them from

premature death, illness, etc. It was a temporary and somewhat ineffective remission, with no eternal repercussions. **After death, even the righteous in life did not enter God's presence but remained in a place called Abraham's Bosom, awaiting the Redeemer,** waiting like the living for a definitive remission.

Meanwhile, before Christ began His ministry, there was a transitional phase with John the Baptist (the baptiser). His baptism (immersion) in water was based on repentance and was no longer just an external act. The Levitical system continued with the shedding of blood in the temple, but this baptism required inward repentance. He came to prepare the way for the definitive redemption, which would be done **once and for all with eternal efficacy:**

*For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies **for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.** (Hebrews 9:13-15)*

The sacrifices of animals could not perfect the inner self. Therefore, they were continuously repeated. Men continued to sin because their inner being remained corrupted, without access to God. The sacrifice of Christ had the power to restore conscience, granting inner strength and a change of nature:

*For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, **can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.** For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me – To do Your will, O God' ". Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified **through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.** And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering **He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.** But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: **I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,**" then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now **where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.** (Hebrews 10:1-18)*

Redemption brought forth a miracle: the perfecting of the spirit of the one who undergoes the "baptism" of repentance. Water baptism is merely a symbol of what occurs within: a cleansing through repentance.

There is a tremendously important aspect: the

redemption accomplished by Christ was the beginning of the process, it has not yet concluded. Christ initiated a new era of restoration and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, but the usurpers have not yet departed; they must be expelled. Everything will culminate on a day determined by God, and **our redemption will only be complete when we receive a new redeemed body:**

Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:23)

When we say that Christ humbled Himself by becoming human, His humiliation is threefold: 1st) He humbled Himself by incarnating as a man, 2nd) He humbled Himself in His death on the cross, 3rd) He humbled Himself by making men His representatives on earth. This last form of humiliation is, in my opinion, the riskiest. I have witnessed so many terrible things done in the name of God! But He sent His Spirit to work together with man and believes that man is capable of representing Him, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom to the rest:

*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were **sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise**, who is the guarantee of our inheritance **until the redemption of the purchased possession**, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)*

*...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself **a ransom for all**, to be testified in due time. (I Timothy 2:4-6)*

Redemption was universal, as the above text says: "*given as a ransom for all*". God desires the salvation of all, but only those who receive it and reconcile with God will be saved. Redemption is available to every man. However, only those who repent and receive the Spirit of God have God's seal and can enjoy it. Redemption takes effect only when a person desires it; it is not imposed but made available.

Each converted individual is called to be an ambassador of Christ, representing Him to other men and offering this redemption. It involves much more than what we can express in this chapter. Many books have been and will be written about it. The text in Colossians 1 summarises everything we have said and describes redemption as **the transfer of the redeemed from one kingdom to another**. On earth, two kingdoms now co-exist: the empire of darkness and the Kingdom of God. As ambassadors of the Kingdom, we are called to **bring reconciliation with God to all who repent**:

*Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. **He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love**, in whom we have **redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created*

through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight – if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:12-23)

As the apostle Paul stated, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are enemies of God, but to those who have received the Spirit, it brings new life, power over sin, and authority over darkness.

As ambassadors of Christ, bearers of the Spirit, we have authority on earth. As we mentioned when discussing the principle of authority: **authority must be exercised, it is not automatic.** The empire of darkness remains on earth, and there is a continuous and fierce war, albeit invisible.

While many waste time blaming God or asking why, the true enemy continues to hide and secretly kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). His greatest weapon is to make people believe that he does not exist, that everything is God's plan. This serves two purposes: it prevents people from attacking him while he acts freely, and it assigns blame to God, distorting the divine image before men.

If God were as some describe Him, then the Devil would be less evil than God. That is why many convert and later drift away from churches, turning against God, as the God preached to them is depicted as a malevolent despot. That is not the God of love revealed by Christ. That is merely a God created by human theology, originating from long-dead men, but whose thinking and teachings still manipulate many.

The Scriptures give us almost unbelievable information about God's plan for those who wholeheartedly convert and receive His redemption. It is of such magnitude that the apostle Paul had to pray incessantly for believers to comprehend it:

*...do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, **the eyes of your understanding being enlightened**; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is **the exceeding greatness of His power** toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, **far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named**, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He **put all things under His feet**, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is **His body, the fullness of Him** who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:16-23)*

The power that raised Christ seated Him at the right hand of the Father, as the Saviour, but also representing redeemed mankind, as the man He became. Christ continues to be the Pre-existent Son and Creator, but now He is also Man. If it was

already a mystery, it became an even greater mystery through His incarnation. It is worth noting that after the resurrection, He did not cease to be fully human, but He acquired a transformed body, which we also await.

Surprisingly, the previous text states that the power of the resurrection was transferred to divine ambassadors, called "His body" and "church." This church mentioned here is not the religious institutions that self-proclaim as churches, but the invisible church, consisting of the redeemed throughout the earth. We can see how little of this power we are exercising! The power that seated Christ above all authority, above all angels, demons, and even Satan himself, has been delegated to us. If any believer is oppressed in any way by satanic powers, it is time to say: enough! We have authority over darkness; we are representatives of Christ, and at His name, every knee should bow (Philippians 2:10). When He was still in the flesh, He said this to His disciples:

*Behold, I give you the authority to **trample on serpents and scorpions**, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the **spirits are subject to you**, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:19-20)*

When the Lord said this, redemption had not yet been fully accomplished, but He never lost His authority, and at that moment, He was delegating it. After the resurrection, He definitively transferred it to His disciples, so that they could continue His work with the co-operation of the Holy Spirit. For

this purpose, He left us spiritual weapons, including His Name, so that we may use it to subject the spirits. This war is real but invisible. It is not a war against people but against the empire of darkness and its oppressive dominion over humanity:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (II Corintios 10:3-5)

Our weapons are not physical weapons, our enemy is no man, but we are in the midst of a spiritual warfare between the empire of darkness and the Kingdom of God.

One day, this war will come to an end. God will take His power as the Creator and Sovereign God and finally execute His will. The last book of the Bible, called Revelation (Apocalypse in some other languages), portrays these events in a figurative yet clear manner. In it, we understand that our destiny is to reign on earth, under divine authority, in peace and happiness in His presence, alongside all those who freely choose to reject the devil's authority and submit to the King and Lord, our beloved Father.

XIII

THE NEW BIRTH

In the previous chapter, we discussed redemption in general, its consequences for the earth, and the eternity of men. But what happens within a person, and what must one do to enter this new spiritual kingdom that God offers?

There was a man named Nicodemus, who held an important position in the clergy of his time, and he sought out Christ when He was alone:

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (John 3:1-7)

The Master carpenter instructed the learned Nicodemus about something that he had not understood throughout his life of study: to enter the Kingdom, one must undergo a spiritual birth. **Redemption involves an inner transformation,**

where someone seeks forgiveness for their sins in genuine repentance and surrenders to God, being willing to be a dwelling place for His Spirit, becoming His child, and His representative on earth:

*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: **who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 1:12-13; 3:16)*

...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

Not all people are children of God. **Only those who are born again by the Spirit within them become children of the Father:** "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Romans 8:9 NKJV).

The one who believes that Christ took their sins and fully surrenders to Him, not driven by emotion but making a **lifelong decision**, will receive the seal of the Spirit. The Spirit will recreate within them a new spirit, free from sin.

In simple terms, we can summarise this initiation into the Kingdom in three steps: 1) confessing sins, 2) repentance, 3) believing in what He did specifically for you. Then, everything begins... Surrender yourself to the Spirit, and He will guide you. He will do everything necessary.

The presence of the Spirit in someone brings about change. It may not be immediate, but one who converts to God and is born again will manifest transformation. In my case, an inexplicable inner joy arose, and I had an immense desire to read the Bible, so I read it in its entirety in less than three months. That was just the beginning... Starting on the path is not difficult, but persevering in it is challenging, which is why it is called the narrow path. Only those who endure until the end will be saved, not those who experience moments of emotion. Following Christ requires total surrender. He said:

*Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily**, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life **for My sake** will save it. (Luke 9:23-24)*

The Gospel is foolishness, but it is the truth. Only through the Spirit can we comprehend it. Those without the Spirit consider us fools.

There is a film that depicts the process of liberation from this world and the new birth like no other I have seen. I am referring to the first film in the Matrix series. The other two films in the trilogy are just films, but the first one always has a great impact every time I watch it. If you do not understand the new birth, watch or watch again this film.

Similar to the film, men are asleep and unaware that they are slaves to a system that keeps them ignorant of their own prison. Not everyone wants to awaken to the truth, as the truth

implies entering a terrible war. Neo, the main character, opens himself to the knowledge of the truth. At first, it is tough, but after discovering the power within his reach, he surrenders to his destiny.

Until the last day arrives, our destiny is one of war, but we fight with our eyes wide open, not relying on our own strength or using natural weapons. Above all, we have something the film character did not know: the love of the Father that surrounds us every day, in indescribable care. Perhaps the character Trinity represented God, who is with us and loves us continually... Nothing else fulfills us after experiencing the presence of God enveloping us in paternal love.

How can we know if we are born again? No one can tell us. The Spirit Himself agrees with the spirit of man about his salvation. It is written:

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." **The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.** (Romans 8:14-16)*

The Spirit is not passive. He guides the men in whom He dwells. But who is this Spirit? Honestly, I am not entirely sure! I only know that Christ claimed Him to be "another Comforter" (John 14:16, 26) who would abide in man after His departure to the Father. The world does not see Him and thus cannot know

Him, but those who are in the world, no longer of the world, can interact with Him.

The majority of Christians believe that the Spirit is part of the Holy Trinity. Although the Bible does not use this term, it speaks of the Son as divine, worthy of worship, and of this Spirit as proceeding from the Father. I have no doubts that the Spirit is Lord. I have seen people address the Spirit as if He were their servant. No! He is Lord! The divine plurality is unquestionable, yet we cannot fully define or comprehend it. Here are some passages about the Spirit:

*the Spirit of truth, whom **the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him**; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:17)*

*But the Helper, **the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name**, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)*

*“But when **the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father**, He will testify of Me. (John 15:26)*

*However, when He, **the Spirit of truth**, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:13)*

*Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our home with him**. (John 14:23)*

We know that it is the Spirit who dwells in the redeemed

man, not Christ or the Father. The Father is on His Throne, and Christ is at His right hand. Somehow, when the Spirit, who is another Comforter, is present, then the Father and Christ are also present. I enjoy this wonderful blessing, even though I do not fully comprehend it. I know that the Spirit is Lord over my life, and I must obey Him as I would the Father. I sense His presence, and thanks to God, I have heard His guidance many times. I would be lost without the Spirit. He is the power of God, the presence of God, the seal of God in me. I do not fully understand who He is, but I know that He is God. I may not know much about Him, but I cannot live without Him.

In the last verses of the Scriptures, at the end of Revelation, there is a promise that Christ will return, but in the meantime, we are not alone... The Spirit generates, sanctifies, and perfects the collective Bride, which is being built as the dwelling place of the same Spirit:

*“And behold, **I am coming quickly**, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”*

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.

*And **the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”** And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. (Revelation 22:12-17)*

Those who are thirsty, come and drink freely from this fountain that flows to eternal life. We are not alone! The reader who has reached this chapter is not alone. God had a purpose in guiding you here. **Even if it may not seem like He is present, God is present.** Even if it appears that nobody cares, God cares. He wants to be your Father and embrace you eternally. Even if you are already a believer, the Father wants to take you to a deeper dimension of relationship with Him.

God speaks, and He is alive! He speaks through His creation, through those who, though imperfect, carry the greatest treasure of the universe: the Spirit and the message of the Saviour. We are on the narrow path, and that is enough to be perfect in His eyes. He is the way, the narrow gate, the only one that leads to life, the only one that leads to the Father. There is no other way to the Father. **No other prophet leads to the Father.** No other man or woman leads us to the Father. He Himself said: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (John 14:6b). Those who think that merely being part of a religion is enough are not on the narrow path. **Only Christ is the sole mediator between God and men.** There are no more intermediaries, no more paths, no more sacrifices. There will be no other redemption, no other plan. It is finished! Those who believe will be saved; those who do not believe will be condemned. He lives! He is risen! The new life is available to us. Whoever is thirsty, come and drink freely from this water that still flows... The end will

come, but today is still the time. Today is the day of salvation, today is the day of change, today is the day of repentance. A decision in a moment changes eternity.

May this be your moment!

XIV

FINAL MESSAGE

One day, when I was about twenty-two years old, I was standing by the window of my room praying, as I did every day, and crying out to God: "*Lord, I don't know you, but I really want to know you!*" With my forehead against the glass, soft and gentle words arose within me: "*You know me, you know that I am good...*". Oh, how I cried! Where did that come from? Was God telling me that I knew something about Him? I could not contain the emotion! I cried, immersed in His love, moved by the sensitivity and compassion of the great and powerful God towards someone as insignificant as myself.

Those words made me think... Why would God say that I knew something about Him? I thought about all the times when someone attributed the misfortunes of men to God, and I would oppose such an idea. If there was one thing I was certain of, it was that He is always Good.

Of all that I have written, I can summarise it in these few words: "**HE IS GOOD.**" In truth, He revealed Himself to Moses as "I AM," but later, when Moses asked to see His Glory, it is written that He showed His "Goodness." It may seem strange, but that is what is recorded in the Scriptures. When God passed by and Moses saw Him from behind, it was the manifestation of His Goodness that was revealed to the

prophet.

In our entire journey on earth, if we only understand how God is Good, we have already gained valuable knowledge that most religious people do not. If we truly understand how good God is, we will not attribute terrible events in our lives and the world to Him. Very bad things happen, but God is not the author of them. Moreover, He is the one most interested in putting an end to suffering.

He suffers with His creation, desiring to put an end to so much evil. If He does not do it, it is because He knows what we do not know, and the time has not yet come. However, He can intervene in our lives. He wants to intervene in our lives! God intervenes when we submit ourselves to His power and authority and are willing to practise His laws and principles as mature sons, not like babies who cry whenever they want the bottle.

We must change kingdoms to experience the new life that Christ gives. Only then are we in a position to receive divine intervention. There are problems, calamities, and terrible situations for which only God has an answer. It is then that we can believe and see God acting. I am living proof of that. My daily existence is proof of that.

The past cannot be changed. We can only build a better future. The possibility of reducing our suffering is now in our hands, starting in our present, in the "now" of each person. **If God is present in my present, it is possible that tomorrow will be better.** I need to be humble and willing to unlearn what

I know and learn again according to the laws of the Kingdom.

God loves each individual uniquely. Everyone is irreplaceable. Over the years, I have heard that no one is irreplaceable, but that is totally false: for God, **each one is special and cannot be replaced**. Each one has gifts and purposes that no one else can fulfill. When a child falls and abandons Him, God's heart weeps, and He is capable of "leaving the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one that no one values" (Mathew 18:12-13). People quickly find someone else to be a replacement, but God does not, He does not replace anyone. That is how the Father found me!

No one valued me at all; I was rejected by everyone as far back as I can remember until He took me, cleansed me, and loved me as if there was no one else in the universe. There is no one like my Father!

God has a void in the shape of each man, which only each man can fill. God has a void in the shape of Lucinda that only this specific Lucinda can fill. God has a void in the shape of John, Manuel, Rita, Maria, Cristina, Judite, Ruth, Paul, Michael, Helena, Rui, Samuel, Anthony, Richard, David, Nuno, Daniela, _____ (your name), that only each one can fill. No one can replace another's void, like the pieces of a giant puzzle.

People, even Christians, have not yet understood what they mean to God. When He created man, He did not create him to be his God, but to be his Father. Then, He had to show

Himself as God because man proved to be stubborn and resistant in loving Him. Among angels and all creatures, He is God only, but among those who are born of His Spirit among men, He can finally be the Father He predestined (planned) to be. Man's nature changes from carnal to spiritual, from human to divine, from living soul to life-giving spirit, and we become "partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4). It does not mean that we become gods above God because there is no above or below in a family. He is the Father, and we are beloved children. Only those who do not know Him as a loving Father worry about such questions of being above or below. He, God, has adopted me, and if I recognise Him as Father, all my behaviour will be of reverence, obedience, affection, and love in return.

In Augusto Cury's book, there is a prayer by a philosopher considered one of the greatest atheists who ever lived, translated from German by Leonardo Boff¹⁰:

"Before I proceed on my way and cast my eyes forward, I once more lift my hands to You alone, from the depths of my heart, with festive altars, so that Your voice could call me at any moment. Upon these altars, it is engraved in fire: 'To the unknown God.' I am Yours, I am Yours, even though up to now I have associated with the sacrilegious. I am Yours, I am Yours, notwithstanding the ties that pull me toward the abyss. Even when I want to flee, I feel forced to serve You. I want to know You, unknown one. You, who penetrate my soul and, like a whirlwind, invade my life. You, the incomprehensible, yet like me, I want to know You, I want to serve only You." (Friedrich Nietzsche)

¹⁰ CURY, Augusto, "Os Segredos do Pai Nosso – A solidão de Deus", pág. 164

A man who fought against religion all his life recognised that he was not fighting against the true God but against the image that religious men made of Him. In the end, he confessed that he could not resist the God who existed independently of his stubborn atheism. Who can resist such love after knowing Him as He truly is?

I pray that whoever reads this pouring out of my soul to the end will open up to know more of the One who loves you as the "apple of His eye." Never be deceived: He is Good. I know that many who fill the Christian churches are far from knowing Him as a loving Father, in daily intimacy. There is no love like His, nor anything that fills the human soul like the revelation of the Father's love: Abba, Father!

I conclude with the lyrics of a little song I wrote in my early years on this journey:

*The God I know is a friend,
Never leaves, never forgets, He speaks to me:
in a song that springs from my heart,
in words, in the embrace of a brother...*

*The God I know is here.
He is saying He loves you through me.
The God I know is love,
His desire is to free from all pain.*

*I know Him because I gave Him my heart.
He calls you, He brought you here, I know!
Come to the embrace that is the beginning
of a life with Someone
who loves you and knows you...
Come to know Him too!*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CURY, Augusto, "Os segredos do Pai Nosso - A Solidão de Deus", Pergaminho, 2008

HAWKING, Stephen, A breve história do tempo, Tradução de Maria Alice gomes da Costa, Edição actualizada e aumentada, Gradiva, 2000 Lisboa

Schroeder, Gerard, Deus e Ciência, Tradução de Paula Oliveira Antunes, Fórum da Ciência, Publicações Europa-América, 1999 Mem Martins

Free ebooks in:
www.luzverdade.pt

