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## **Kellogg Lecture 2: *What if God's primary purpose in creation is life together?*** Marilyn McCord Adams

### **I. Life Together, Risks and Entitlements:**

#### ***Mission and Immigration Analogies:***

How can it be true that God loves us, when God 'sets us up' for horrors? Would it help to reflect that God's primary purpose in creation is life together, to be God-with-us in a material world such as this? To move towards an answer, consider some analogies.

*First Case:* Suppose a couple feels called to go on a mission--whether diplomatic or medical, educational or religious--to a culturally and geographically remote part of the world. Suppose further that this is not a 'wild idea', but a mission that fits their training and expertise, a venture in which they stand a reasonable chance of making a worthwhile contribution, and one towards which their deepest principled commitments lead them. Suppose, however, that the couple has children, whose personalities would be shaped by life abroad in such different circumstances, in predictable and incalculable ways.

There would be significant *costs*. There would be life-threatening diseases to which the children had no immunities and uncertain access to medical care. Social and political instabilities might erupt into violence and war and random killings, all sure to traumatize surviving witnesses. The children might have to attend poorly resourced schools. More deeply, the children would grow up with a divided cultural identity. Countless social influences would rear them up into a culture to which their parents did not belong. Inevitably, the children would learn ways of being in the world practiced by local inhabitants. They would grow up to be, not only interpreters, but also players in their 'language games' and participants in their 'forms of life.' Yet, their parents, their primary caretakers and upbringers, would be coming from a culturally very different place, which the children would be taught to internalize as well.

There would also be unusual *benefits and opportunities*. Learning to live into two very different cultures deeply enough to appreciate their nuances and participate in their richness, should prove expansive. Children who succeeded would develop personal flexibility to move back and forth between cultures, now living and reacting in one mode, now in another as the context requires. Tolerance and perspective could be the fruit of their learned conviction that there is more than one way of organizing human life. The parents would also hope that their children would internalize the sense that there are high purposes more important than the comforts of fitting in and succeeding in conventional terms, that there can be more to life than that.

Nevertheless, these parents, like all others, would be in no position to guarantee that their children would not suffer serious physical or psychological harm or early death by disease or violence. These parents could not ensure that their children would grow up to share their values or be glad to have grown up abroad. No more than other parents could they do anything to make certain that their children will love them or have satisfying lives on the whole.

Suppose that although the couple could leave their children with relatives or send them to boarding schools at home, they choose to keep their children with them, not as a means to the end of the supposed benefits of cross-cultural living, not because the cost-benefit calculation proves that advantages would trump. Rather *they keep their children with them, because they are a family and because for-better-for-worse life together is what being a family is all about*. Normally, unless dangers to life and limb are certain and immanently fatal (as they would be on the front lines of battle or if they inoculated their children with the AIDS virus), we give the parents the benefit of the doubt and judge their decision

to be morally legitimate. Nor do we usually conclude that these parents don't really love their children just because they took them along and exposed them to a more demanding form of life.

*Second Case:* Now suppose that the couple does not yet have children, but--since they are spending their child-bearing and ripe-for-child-rearing years on the mission--they decide to have children, to keep them with them, and to rear them in that country so long as they remain there. In doing so, they join all parents in bringing children into a world full of dangers and into a life that will certainly end in death. In this situation, the couple is birthing their children into a more than normally demanding situation with unusual costs and benefits (as above). Nevertheless, we would still tend to give such parents the benefit of the doubt: their decision to reproduce and rear children in such circumstances would not automatically be judged to be morally illegitimate or unloving towards their future offspring.

*Third Case:* Suppose the mission couple decides to become permanent residents in the country to which they have been sent, to adopt a local orphan and to rear the child in its native culture. Here the parents bear the primary burden of bicultural living. They have grown up in and been formed by one culture and now attempt as adults to learn another. Even if they are highly motivated persons of considerable flexibility, they will be--as adults--too late to master all of the nuances and will always to some extent be strangers to local ways. By contrast, to the extent that the parents 'go native,' the children will have the local culture as very much their dominant culture. The children's life will have a bicultural dimension only to the extent that their parents do not fully belong. So long as the children are never expected to perform in their parents' native culture, this state of affairs can seem to them a pleasant curiosity or a mild embarrassment.

*Fourth Case:* Suppose a couple decides to immigrate from one country to another--whether to escape war or political persecution, or to seek economic advantage, or simply for job-related reasons. Willy nilly, their children as second generation immigrants will learn the ways of the new country, as neighbors, school, and other public institutions reinforce the dominant culture. If the immigrant parents network with others to try to keep ethnic identity alive--to insist that their children learn and speak the old-country language at home and keep important customs and holidays--this may well slow down their children's adjustment. Depending on the cultural gap between old and new countries, the second generation immigrants may do less well in school, get cut out of more advantageous jobs by ethnic profiling, and internalize *modus vivendi* that do not work well in their new home. Once again, so long as old-country ways are not illegal or immoral, so long as the children are not prevented from going to school and learning the shape of responsible citizenship in their adopted country, we tend to think that it is none of the state's business to interfere. Nor do we conclude that the parents are unloving for desiring their children to be somehow like them.

### ***The Presumptive Legitimacy of Life Together:***

Even in modern societies with child protection laws, the mere fact that a child might have more advantages or (within wide limits) receive better treatment otherwise than with their parents, does not trump the parents' desire for life together with the children they have born. The inchoate reason behind this reaction is that *there is a strong moral consideration in favor of letting human beings 'do their thing', and broad-sense family life together is an important part of what it is to be human.* Always or for the most part, human beings are too vulnerable to survive on their own. They require life together in groups. For humans, like many animals, it is natural to move in packs or to 'herd'! Human offspring are born so helpless as to require sustained adult attention, not only to survive but to be drawn into personhood. Most of our meaningful projects are shaped by the society in which we live and the roles we take up in relation to other people. These biological and psycho-social facts about what it is to be human incline us to grant *presumptive legitimacy* to life together. Always or for the most part, life together is integrally related to what it is to be us!

In the merely human case, the presumption is rebuttable. Government social service agencies do 'take children away from their parents' when serious neglect (not feeding, clothing, bathing, attending to) or abuse (physical and/or sexual violence) is proved. Perhaps with more consent, children were also

taken away from their parents, away from London and Brighton into the non-industrial countryside, during the Second War. European missionaries to Australia took aboriginal children away from their parents to protect them from upbringing into aboriginal ways of life by rearing them in European ways and training them in the Christian religion. Experience bears witness to social insecurity about the legitimacy of doing this. The surprisingly large number of children who experience neglect and brutality and death every year, bears witness to the reluctance of social agencies to remove children from parental homes.

Notice that presumptive legitimacy is granted, not only to parents' desire to keep their children with them, but also to bring them up to be competent participants in the parents' culture. Just this year, the prime minister of Australia apologized to the aboriginal peoples for 'the lost generation' of children. One aboriginal woman spoke of the terrible cost to her sisters of not learning their culture from their mother. *Life together in native clan or family, life together that nurtures distinctive ways of being human, is presumed to be a sacred thing.* The Australian experience suggests that the sincere perception that some ways of being human are better than others is no longer seen to trump, morally speaking. Within wide limits, parents are judged to be morally in the clear and not found to be unloving towards their offspring in reproducing and rearing their children up into their own culture. The aboriginal woman did not argue that aboriginal ways are better than European ways, but that aboriginal ways were *their* ways by birthright--which in the case of her sisters had been forcibly taken from them. She also assumed that a mother's teaching her children how to live out her cultural values and perceptions is one form of maternal love.

### ***God and Creation:***

What if God's primary purpose in creation is life together with us in a material world like this? Human beings in a material world like this is what we *are*. God has allowed or nudged material stuff to evolve structures and organisms that give rise to or at least are able to host personality. Those material persons are what we *naturally* are. This material world is not somewhere alien, but our *natural* habitat. Whereas with the couple on mission, it is the foreign land that poses unusual hazards, it is our natural environment, what we naturally are in it, that renders us radically vulnerable to horrors. For God, what corresponds to the couple's decision to take their children with them, or to procreate children into a foreign culture, is the decision to make us in our natural context instead of creating us in supranatural alien circumstances, or instead of creating something else or not creating anything at all. The risk--indeed, the certainty--of horror participation is not supranaturally added, but endemic to who and what we are. Suppose, then, that God creates us because *God wants us to share life with God in our natural setting*, i.e., in a material world such as this. Or, to put it the other way around, suppose that *God creates us in our natural setting because God wants to share life with us in our natural setting*, once again, in a material world such as this. Suppose that God loves material creation, and that Divine desire for life together with us is the focal center of God's intention to share life with the material world.

God is Our Creator, by metaphysical necessity our parental Pantocrator. That is, although God could have existed without creating us or anything else at all, and although God could have created a very different world instead, we could not exist apart from God's choosing to grant us existence. What we are naturally makes us dependent on God for our being and well-being. In that sense, God does not adopt us; we belong to God by nature. By analogy with the mission and immigrant cases, this sets up a presumption of Divine entitlement to life together with us in whatever circumstance God might choose.

Nevertheless, God is radically different in kind from any and every creature. Even if human beings are personal in God's image, Divine personal capacities far outclass human ones. God is very, very big and we are very, very small. Traditional theologians conclude that this 'metaphysical size gap' means that God has no obligations to creatures at all. So far as the above analogies are concerned, the metaphysical size gap makes God-with-us in our world more like the third case of parents adopting children from the country to which they have gone on mission, and choosing not to uproot them but to live with them in their native culture.

Where God and human beings are concerned, life together in our native culture has many dimensions and comes in degrees. *The first degree* pertains to us as creatures: we could not exist apart from God's will to create and preserve us, and we could not function without Divine concurrence, without God's acting together with us to enable us to 'do our thing'. Moreover, personal functioning involves intimate Divine presence as Inner Teacher, always moving over our psycho-spiritual depths below our conscious perception, evoking our capacity to be persons, nudging us in growth directions, and sparking creativity. What we are makes human existence life together with God, willy nilly, so long as we live.

God moves on to *second-degree* life together, when Divine presence breaks through to get our conscious attention, to initiate and cultivate personal relationships, Divine person(s)-to-human person, with us. Bible stories about patriarchs and prophets, legends of saints and heroes are full of such lopsided encounters and attempts to build working partnerships.

*Third-degree* life together is the most daring, when God becomes human, when God takes the vulnerability of life in this world as a material person into Godself in Jesus Christ. This seems to be more like the third and fourth cases where the parents move into a culture that is or will become dominant for their children.

### ***Strenuous Biculturalism:***

Divine-human life together is inherently bicultural. If God creates us in a world like this because God wants material creation to mean something from the inside, then second-degree life together requires *God* to stoop to our level, to speak to us in our cultural language. To reassure Abraham, God cut a covenant by passing through the hacked-in-two animals with an oath: 'let it be to me as it is with these animals if I do not keep my promise!' To seal the deal on Sinai, God handed down a suzerainty covenant like that imposed by emperors on their client territories. Divine desire for second-degree life together must involve God in our everydayness, in our hopes and dreams, our projects and purposes. Patriarchs longed for land, for agricultural productivity and multitudes of descendants, in general, for expanding and prosperous clans. David fought to enter into kingship, to expand borders and to secure his dynasty. Israel wanted to be a great nation, to enjoy wealth and power and security against foreign conquest.

If God creates us in a world like this because God wants to draw material creation into Divine purposes, then second-degree life together will require *us* to stretch and strain beyond our natural inclinations to live into God's plans. God as parent and senior partner hopes that we will subsume merely human goals to Divine purpose, because--given what we are as personal animals in this material world--things can't turn out well (the slaughter bench of history is what we get) if we don't. God issues commands and invents rituals to guide behavior and form beliefs and attitudes, the better to curb our animal instincts. God Incarnate becomes a meaning-maker on the inside, gives third-degree life together a try, to make it possible for insider-meanings to turn out to be positive, despite the worst that we can suffer, be, or do.

Thus, God's desire for life together with us in this material world, forces us--like the children of the couple on mission, like second generation immigrants who speak the old-country language at home--into a doubly demanding situation. On the one hand, being what we naturally are is dangerous because horror-ridden. Matter may evolve structures and organisms that can host personality, but they are inherently temporary and temporarily suitable. Biochemistry distorts, fades, and eventually swallows up personality. Sooner or later, all animals--human beings included--die. Personal animality inherits Darwinian motivation that drives at cross purposes with Divine commandments and undermines our commitment to high purposes. We stretch and strain to do what ultimately exceeds our natural capacities: to personify matter, to give it positive personal meaning from the inside. On the other hand, because God's ways are higher than our ways, human life together with God writes a history of miscommunication, so that--like Balaam beating his donkey, like Gospel Pharisees and Sadducees plotting to kill the Messiah--we reduce ourselves to an absurdity and wind up trying to do the opposite of what God had in mind.

Put otherwise, human beings as *personal* animals both are and are not at home in this material world. As the context that evolves and engenders us, it is our natural home. But it is an inhospitable and abusive home, because horrors swallow up the *prima facie* possibility of positive personal meaning in our lives. *Prima facie*, there is much to be said for our being adopted out of it into another and better culture. Yet, the biculturalism into which the bible's God initiates us makes our situation, if anything, even more demanding. God does not take us out of this world. Rather God with us in the second or third degree enlists us to shoulder Divine projects of which we have a poor understanding, and to do so contrary to external pressures and natural inclinations--like the immigrant parents who insist on teaching their children old-country ways, or like the couple on mission would be if they brought their adopted children up in their native culture but expected them to have perfect high table manners all the same!

## II. Biblical Models of Life Together:

### *Strangers and Pilgrims:*

The bible makes no attempt at cover-up. It uses a variety of images to tell tales of how God's experiments in second- and third-degree life together with material persons in this material world, have and have not worked out. Torah narratives speak in terms of *a journey*: we are fellow wanderers, caravaning with God towards a Divinely directed destination that we never reach in our lifetimes. [1] God's call to Abram *alienates* him from homeland and natural setting: 'Leave home, and go to a land that I will show you!' (Genesis 12:1) God is full of *promises*--of land, of star-*numerous* offspring--promises which are oft-repeated but mostly undelivered when Abraham breathes his last. Abraham's life is not without earthly satisfactions. He becomes rich with flocks and herds fruitful and multiplying. In the course of these experiences, Abraham becomes *a friend of God*. God does come through with a natural heir when the biological clock has long since stopped ticking, and then commands Abraham to sacrifice him. After the trial-by-child-sacrifice episode, they never speak again. (cf. Barbara Brown Taylor)

[2] Jacob wrestles for the blessing--twice cheating Esau, lying to old Isaac, struggling at the river Jabok--even though Jacob has a poor idea of what the blessing really is. God repeatedly promises and keeps His promise to be with Jacob wherever he goes (off to the mother country to marry some wives, back to the father land, down into Egypt). Not only does Jacob become rich, with his twelve sons he launches the clan fruitful and multiplying towards star-*numerousity*. But Jacob's heart is broken by the loss of life-together with his favorite son Joseph, who descends into Egypt to save the lives of many and is reunited only in his father's old age. Meanwhile, full possession of the land of Canaan is postponed 430 years into the future.

[3] Moses reluctantly accepts God's call to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, away from the living conditions to which they had become accustomed for four centuries, to journey back to the promised land of milk and honey. God leads them through the wilderness which is inhospitable to life so that they will learn that God is the source of life, that humans do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. God's idea of 'giving' them the land of Canaan involves their fighting giants to get it, which most of them refuse to do. In consequence, neither Moses nor any of the children of Israel that came out through the Reed Sea (except for Joshua and Caleb) gets to enter the promised land. For all of its frustrations, Moses' role has its rewards: he gets to see God's vulnerable backside and becomes one with whom God speaks as friend to friend. However much Moses resisted Divine attempts to draft him at the beginning, Moses entrusts himself to God on Mt. Pisgah at the end.

Nevertheless, most of the children of Israel prove unable to profit from the journey experience. For them, the living conditions are too harsh, the food and water too scarce and hard to identify, the snakes and scorpions too dangerous, Divine appearances too terrifying and terrorizing (bringing harsh punishment as often as miraculous provision) for them to be able to trust God to be *for* them. The bible does not deny what their experience makes it reasonable for them to believe: that God has led them into the wilderness to destroy them. According to the bible story, the whole exodus generation *does* die there.

Overall, these journey narratives illustrate how God's project of second-degree life together works out well enough for patriarchal heroes who become friends of God, but for the vast majority it brings only misery and disaster.

### ***Cosmic Conflict and End-Time Confrontation:***

Apocalyptic treatises (instanced in the bible by the books of Daniel and Revelation) favor military models. These works are addressed to believers in crisis (usually, some sort of oppression or persecution, past or present, real or anticipated and imagined), and seek to give positive meaning to their predicament by interpreting it in terms of cosmic struggle and end-time war. According to apocalyptic narrative, God has good purposes and God is working Divine purposes out against resistance. Divine power, wisdom, and resourcefulness will decisively surmount these obstacles in God's good time. The terrors believers suffer, which can be expected to get worse before they get better, are merely spatio-temporal manifestations of a cosmic conflict of Good versus Evil, of Creativity versus Chaos, of God versus the enemies of God. The elect are soldiers in YHWH's army, in some versions, called to take up arms in violent struggle against their oppressors. In others, they play no role in the final end-time battle. Either way the role of the elect is to remain loyal to God through terrible and terrifying end-time trials. Apocalyptic treatises presuppose that no matter what the tortures or torments (cf. the Macabbean martyrs), there is enough to the elect as persons to persevere to the end. The forces of evil can kill the body, but the stalwart need not yield and allow them to kill the soul. On the contrary, for the elect, persecution provides a challenge through which spiritual athletes and brave warriors build up strength and increase their loyalty.

Apocalyptic theology acknowledges that it is *'the system'* that needs changing, and that not bringing this 'present evil age' to an end imposes terrible costs on the elect. It meets the piercing cry, 'how long, O Lord, how long?' with several images and hypotheses. The 'exhaustion' image explains that YHWH God of armies is waiting until the enemy has done its worst and run out of ammunition. The rationale is that if it would be impressive for God to prevent the worst from happening, it will redound more to Divine glory if God waits until the worst has already happened--until the powers of darkness have done their damndest--and then turns the situation around to make everything alright. A biological version relies on the fact that plant and animal bodies are not made to last; they wear out. Likewise, bodies politic, empires rise but also fall. Human social systems, no matter how creative and productive they may be for a time, a time, and half a time, always spawn systemic evils which bring them down. This 'present evil age' is 'wearing on towards night'. God is letting it run its course, and then the age will turn! Alternatively, the present crisis is like birth pangs, so severe that the mother thinks she will die, when suddenly they are over and the joy of the child makes her forget how terrible they were.

Decisive Divine victory will bring about 'the turn of the age', a radical change of both natural and social arrangements. The enemies of God will be permanently quarantined and/or annihilated in short order. Corrupt and dysfunctional human societies will be replaced by the utopia that God organizes. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, a wholesome environment to provide healing and everlasting nurture for individuals and nations. The elect will join the alleluia chorus and enjoy life as friends of God in God's Kingdom in the new Jerusalem.

Apocalyptic theology is admirable for its courage to face how bad things are for human beings in this world. We are not contending with flesh and blood (with Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes or Nero, Hitler or Stalin), but principalities and powers! Yet, its rhetorical purpose--to cheer the persecuted on to a superlative spiritual performance--drives it to overestimate our capacity to withstand and maintain core integrity. Valiant soldiers will remain loyal. Failures face the fate of traitors. Realistically, its narratives offer good news only to the few!

### ***Gospel Variations:***

The Gospels feature God's experiments with third-degree life together. All four set the sufferings of Jesus and His followers in a cosmic-conflict frame. In Mark's Gospel, the struggle between God and Satan is unmasked with Peter's half-way confession at Caesarea Philippi, in the Beelzebul controversy, and in Jesus' exorcisms. In Matthew and Luke, it is dramatized in the temptation narrative, where Jesus 'bests' the devil in rabbinic debate. Moreover, in Matthew end-time signs surround the crucifixion (heavenly bodies eclipsing, earth quaking, temple veil rending, dead rising) and resurrection (earthquake-opened tomb, men in dazzling garments). In Luke, the passion occurs when the devil takes his better opportunity, but Jesus reigns, forgives sin, and opens the doors of paradise from the cross. In John's Gospel, the Word becomes flesh and 'comes to His own who receive Him not.' After many polarizing disputations, Satan enters Judas who betrays Jesus. But Jesus declares before Pilate, 'my Kingdom is not of this world'!

The Lord's prayer combines with Jesus' Gethsemane warnings to present the passion as an eschatological 'end-time' trial, in which Jesus (in His human nature) struggles but wins through to victory. Jesus lives up to apocalyptic theology's expectations: there is enough to Him to remain faithful through death on a cross. By contrast, the people of God all show that there is not enough to them--any more than there was to Israel in the wilderness--to remain faithful through end-time trials. Pharisees and Sadducees and Judas are all--in different ways--co-opted by Satan into becoming deeply complicit in the death of the Messiah. The religious establishment are adamantly unwilling to let go of their own views about how God will (or at least should) redeem Israel. Who knows what vulnerability was in play, when the betrayer, having come so close to so great a good, became willing, in losing it, to destroy it. The other disciples desperately want to remain loyal. Yet, Peter denies Jesus, while the others forsake Him and flee. None has what it takes to persevere to the end.

The Exodus story is poignant. The children of Israel, the people who witness the Reed Sea parting, the cloud and earthquake on Sinai, who eat manna in the desert and drink water from the rock, are mostly unable to trust God to be *for* them, to be good to them. The experiment--God-with-us in the second degree--is mostly a failure. The bible's God is not a quitter. God repeats the trials, re-runs the same experiment right through the judges and monarchical periods, with roughly the same negative results. At the end of the first century, the pseudepigraphal author of IV Ezra looks back on Israel's history to complain: God had to know that the vast majority of Israeli's would be unable to keep the covenant. If the punishment for collective failure is horrendous evil (the razing of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple), that makes God's covenant a 'set up', not a blessing but a curse!

The Gospel story is even more poignant. The disciples, the chosen twelve, the inner circle of three (Peter, James, and John), the ones who have shared intimate life together with God-Incarnate, the ones who have enjoyed ring-side seats on the signs and wonders, the ones who have benefited from private tutorials, do not understand (in Mark) and/or do not faith (in Matthew). Despite all, they are not able to bond sufficiently with Jesus' humanity, nor (in all three Synoptics) do they grasp their need to pray their way into familiarity with omnipresent Godhead. When the time of trial comes, their ties of friendship are too flimsy to overpower their Darwinian instincts to fight or flight!

Thus, the passion narrative focuses how third-degree God-with-us is an even worst disaster than second-degree Divine presence because it sets us up for even more blasphemous failures. God come so near and so vulnerable puts the people of God in a position, not only of acting out to degrade and destroy God's other creatures, not only to insult God in God's heaven by misunderstanding or flaunting Divine commands. The Word-made-flesh dwelling among us gives further scope for sacrilege by opening the opportunity to add injury to insult, to perpetrate horrors on God's own person, to degrade, crucify and kill the Son of God!

The Synoptic Jesus paints the picture darker still: His prophetic ministry is meant to expose the thoughts of many hearts, to create a climate in which bad trees bear their bad fruit; He comes positively to provoke religious leaders to betray their deepest loyalties, so that the people of God kill God!

***Concluding Question:***

Where human beings are concerned, life together of parents with their children enjoys presumptive legitimacy. Within certain limits, the couple on mission would be judged to be morally entitled to keep their children with them. Even though they are unable to insure against serious harms, even though they cannot guarantee that their children will enjoy the sojourn while it lasts and/or be retrospectively glad of it, the parents are not automatically found guilty of not loving their children when they place them in such demanding circumstances. Nor are immigrant parents generally faulted for insisting that their children learn old-country ways alongside the dominant culture, even if such straddling holds the children back in the new country to some extent.

I began by asking, what if God's primary purpose in making this world was life together with us in a world like this? Like the mission couple, God could have chosen against first degree life together by deciding not to create or by not deciding to create human beings in this world. Like the mission couples who could have refused the mission, God could have created us in other circumstances: God could have purposed life together in other less demanding circumstances. Unlike the mission couple, God knows the dangers and consequences and has power to obstruct many of them. When God chooses instead to let the material world 'do its thing' so that we are radically vulnerable to and inevitable participants in horrors, isn't that more like mission parents dragging their children onto the front lines of a battle field or innoculating them with the AIDS virus? Or like parents deciding not to immigrate but to live in the cross-fire instead? To be sure, there are the differences: that making us in a world like this is our *natural* and not an alien environment; that being material persons is *essential* to what and who human beings are, whereas being infected with the AIDS virus or living in a war zone is not. But isn't the similarity--of subjecting 'the offspring' to certain personal ruin--overriding? Experience confronts us with the consequences of Divine choice: wrecked and ruined individual agencies, compromised lives, lives of relentless misery, the slaughter bench of history. Moreover, second and third degree life together serve to expose us to occasions for even deeper blasphemy: to curse God to God's face, to perpetrate horrors on God's own person.

Part of what keeps the mission couple from being perverse or irrational, from being cruel in bringing children into such demanding circumstances, is the high purpose that draws them into mission. It is good for them to have it, and it is good for them to bring up their children into the conviction that devotion to a transcendent goal is a substantial part of what makes life worthwhile. God's ways are higher than our ways. God does create us to be partners in Divine purposes. My concluding question is this: if life together with God in this world means immanent danger, sure and certain ruin for us, doesn't that call into question whether God can be loving to us in purposing goods that impose on us horrendous costs? Wouldn't it be better evidence for thinking that God *does not love but hates* what God has made?