TRADITIONAL REASONS FOR GOD'S CREATING US

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Issues can be relatively simple in themselves; and so the question seems about God's reason for creating us. Issues get complicated when we try to distinguish our own understanding from other ones and when we have to give reasons against such alternatives, especially if they overlap our own.[1] As in our positive presentation so also in evaluating other positions, interpersonalism serves as the criterion for what is foreign and contradictory to what scripture says about the nature and purpose of God and man.

Prioritized Self-Glorification

Since the reformation, the most common explanation for creating us is that we exist to glorify God. Scripture often commands us to glorify him, and divine glory is the effect of all right living and worship. In giving reasons God made us, we have qualified that traditional answer by seeing it in an interpersonal framework. We have adjusted divine glory away from being the ultimate, primary, central purpose to being a secondary result[2] so that divine glory does not logically come first. We have been conceiving of it from an objective viewpoint and made it an indirect result.

The difference between the two ideas about divine glory corresponds to whether we consider Ephesians **1**:4 a statement of originating purpose or of natural result. Grammatically, *unto* (*eis*) could mean either (1) God's electing people in Christ before the foundation of the world could be for the purpose of his own glory or with what results result in his glory. We have chosen result because it harmonizes better with the interpersonal framework in which we believe this matter stands,[3] and because we are "*eis*" the praise of the glory of his grace. If it is for the glory of God's grace, then grace is prior to the glory. Divine election is conditioned on foreseen human responses are conditions for divine election, which means it is not deterministic.[4]

Since the sovereign God that loves also knows everything, he *"sees the end from the beginning"* (Isaiah **46**:9-10; cp. **41**:21-26; **44**:7; **45**:21). He foresaw that people would glorify him for his goodness. Parents "know" that their children will appreciate them for what they are doing for them, but that is not their motive for "gracing" them or for having them in the first place. Interpersonal sovereignty expresses itself in a way that fits with fellowship; it takes into consideration other people's ability to choose. Interpersonalism

in God adjusts his omnipotence, sovereignty, and individuality to what fits with the existence of the other persons he decided to create.

Unnatural to interpersonal relationship

Our first objection to prioritizing divine glory is that **(1)** self-glorification is unnatural to interpersonal relationships. It does sound right to say that our purpose is to glorify God, but such an idea emanates from our perspective. In the context of God's purpose for making us, it becomes questionable: God made us to glorify himself.[5] That sounds like a self-centered God, who uses other persons for himself.

Our reason for making divine glory an indirect result is that it seems more biblical as well as more natural to interpersonalism as the biblical worldview. Scripture does not seem to mean that God does things directly for his own glory. It says instead that he does all his pleasure (Isaiah **46**:10). We want to avoid the specter of self-centered deity, so we exalt God's goodness without detracting from his greatness. Putting self-glorification in first place seems unnatural to holiness and love (goodness). With God as well as us, *"It is more blessed* [fulfilling?] *to give than to get"* (Acts **20**:35). The Proverbial writer says, *"Let another praise you and not your own lips"* (**27**:2; cp. **25**:27?). Healthy personalities are outward directed instead of *"Look at me."* We suppose that God has a "healthy personality" and that his sense of delight and fulfillment come in social activities—from self-giving (transactionalism) aside from the response of the blessed.

Self-centered holiness and self-centered love are contradictions of terms. That stricture can be lessened by saying that (1) God is justified in self-centeredness because he actually is the greatest; so there is no impropriety in his creating persons to acknowledge his greatness. Furthermore, (2) in creating other persons to glorify himself, God did not make them in such a way as to have that glory at their expense. Particularly, (3) since God created us with freedom of the will, the self-glorification purpose would be realized through human free-will response. God would not contradict the interpersonal model since he does not force us to love him back. He does not manipulate persons in impersonal ways. In fact, (4) creating for his own glory has the secondary effect of creating for people's fulfillment by giving them opportunity to acknowledge God's greatness, to relate to him in that greatness, and to experience his purposes being fulfilled through them. It gives them the experience of meaningfulness and beauty. There is admittedly a difference between self-centered reasons and self-benefiting reasons.

Even with these clarifications, self-glorification strains interpersonalism. Self-glorification implies a self-centered attitude even if it does not force or manipulate other

persons to give the glory. "Using" people means more than by-passing their capacity to choose and make commitment; it degrades the other in the mind of the self. It "prostitutes" them much as intercourse without marriage does even with a willing partner. By its very nature, interpersonalism precludes seeking personal satisfaction by using persons as non-persons; the "inter" is thereby lost. So, we have emphasized that in God's giving is his receiving (transactionalism).[6]

As human persons are not an end in themselves, so also God is not an end in himself. People are responsible for what is beyond themselves. The same holds true for a personal God. By freely choosing to enter a relationship, God is not an absolute end that eliminates mutuality. He is a "God for others" in that he is a "God of love."

The most extreme form of self-glorification glorifying by depersonalizing mankind is the belief that God made—in effect most—people for the very purpose of destroying them! The idea comes from misreading Romans **9**:22, *"What if God, wanting to show his wrath and make his power known, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fit for destruction?"* The interpretation comes out as meaning that before times eternal God "fitted" most vessels for destruction because he wanted to show his anger at sin and his power to overcome it. But nobody makes vessels for the very purpose of destroying them—much less have children for that reason! If he did make them for destruction, why make them as vessels? Why give them any design? Why not make them ornaments or toys? Making them vessels implies making them for the purpose that vessels serve. It would be pointless, if not inconsistent and at cross purposes, to make something designed for a purpose while intending to destroy it. Creating persons to destroy them would be inconsistent because God would be giving them personal capacities and then treating them as if they did not have those capacities.

Moreover, destroying people to demonstrate power does not demonstrate much power. There is more power and skill demonstrated in constructing something than in destroying it. If it is for anger against sin, God could simply wait till people chose to sin and chose to refuse redemption from sin, and then destroy them for it.[7]

Instead of making people's fellowship with God unconditional, we need to see it as conditional because it is interpersonal. The way God's glory comes must fit with the way God's sovereignty operates. Making his sovereignty unconditional makes his glory impersonal because it removes the creatures' capacity to choose for or against the conditions God lays down. Sovereignty—and therefore glory—in an unconditional system means that God must make the vessels for the express purpose of destroying them because they have no choice to misuse those gifts andqualify themselves for destruction

by God. For sovereignty, fellowship, and glory to be conditional and personal, we must retain free will in our understanding of our nature.

Incompatible with righteous deity

Making us to destroy most of us creates divine inconsistency in an even more serious manner: **(2)** it makes him the author of our sins. Destroyed vessels correspond to destroyed people. People are destroyed for sin. If God made us to destroy us, he would have made us with a nature that would make us sin so he could destroy us. It is obvious that guilt applies at the point of decision. If we have no ability to choose other than sin, it is questionable whether we can even speak of our sinning. We do not say animals sin when they harm one another. The only choosing would be God's choosing to make us who would necessarily do evil. God, not Satan, would become the father of sin.

Foreign to foreseen sin

Especially **(3)** if self-glorification is central to why God created us, the fact of sin works against the purpose of God. Most of us will be lost,[8] and all of us fall short of God's glory (Romans **3**:23); yet we cannot thwart God's purpose. Evidently, we must re-define God's purpose so that it is not absolute relative to his glory. We need to re-define God's purpose so it does not absolutize any one thing on either side of the relationship. In personal relationships, there are more than one person and more than one motive out of which each of those persons operates. In regard to one Person's creating another, our understanding of the reason(s) for it should not collapse it into one side or their other—unconditional divine sovereignty or absolute human freedom—and we should not reduce it to one motive—self-glorification. That is why we have combined personal delight, goodness toward the other, and divine glory as reasons for creating mankind. That is why we qualified glory by making it secondary as a foreseen conditional result rather than primary as a decreed unconditional purpose. Lessening the degree of any one motive does not destroy it or undo the combination. Our sin does not destroy God's glory because self-glorification is not the primary reason for making us.

Lessened divine glory

Finally, **(4)** centralizing divine glory detracts from it. It does so by detracting from human dignity, which we shy away from doing, not because of human pride, but because

of divine praise. In unnecessarily reducing human dignity, we reduce God's glory in whose image he made us. God is great enough that we do not have to lower ourselves so he can stand above us. We are more satisfied, more fulfilled, and more glorified if we are loved, obeyed, and served by others who choose to do so than by something that cannot do otherwise. As long as we do not go beyond what is written about mankind, dignifying others exalts and glorifies their creator all the more.

We prefer to think that God is great enough that he does not need to create others to praise his greatness. It seems more appropriate to say that God desires to be appreciated. He has enough "ego strength" not to need praise for what he does. Supposing that God created us to praise himself amounts to creating God in our fallen image, because that is the kind of self-centered thing we do in our fallenness. To turn this matter in the opposite direction, we wonder with the psalmist how God could even be glorified by people's paltry praise (Psalm **8**:1-4), much less claim that he created us mainly for that reason.

Centralizing God's glory comes from misformulating divine sovereignty. Whenever people conceive of sovereignty as status, power, and authority aside from the qualifying effects of the social setting (love), they reduce God from person to power (force) or from person to principle (holiness). They think about his functioning as if he were not a person; they picture his operation as if it he worked like a force, idea, or law. They treat interpersonal operation as if it were the same as chemical, logical, or legal operation. As a universal principle, it is true enough that God acts as he does because he delights in doing so, and that is the only consideration with things (nature, force, chemistry). But as soon as he brings other persons into the picture, he delights himself in accordance with the nature of the persons he brings in. His sovereignty takes a different form, though it is sovereignty still. His holiness becomes more complex, though it is holiness still. It is adjusted by the nature of the interpersonal case he created.

We should make one important concession to putting "glorify God" (glory) ahead of "enjoy him forever" (a result of his goodness) as the Westminster Shorter Catechism does, for example.[9] That arrangement is appropriate from our perspective, and perhaps that was why the Catechism was written that way. The statement deals with divine glory more from the standpoint of what we want to do than what God wants us to do. Such an attitude looks at our role from inside our experience with God. It looks at it from our psychological point of view (existential) rather than from the objective viewpoint (analytical) used in chapter one.

Both persons in a healthy relationship rise above their individual viewpoints. Both project consciousness over behind the eyes of the other and look at the relationship from

there. Down inside the situation we, who are to act like God, need to begin with others and function in an outwardly directed manner. That means that in our self-giving service—as in God's self-giving grace—there is love demonstrated and satisfaction experienced prior to any reward received on the return side of the association, all the more so on our part because all of us experience the goodness of God's common grace before we respond to it. We respond to what already is rather than create from sheer nothing. In responding to what we receive, we "add" the increase we have individually made to the "talents" first given us (quantity) as well as the gratitude and praise we freely give (quality). Putting "glorify God" ahead of "enjoy him forever" also acknowledges the priority and superiority of God over us. We are both personal, but we are not equal.

As a final comment on centralizing self-glorification, we note that terminology can be a problem. People may be thinking broadly when they say that God made us to "glorify" him. They may be presupposing the four qualifying factors noted earlier, and may be including, even prioritizing, in the word *glorify* what we have meant by "delight." If so, it relieves much of our concern, and we can summarize the proper picture under this usage of *glorify* as follows. The reason for God's general creation is his own glory in the sense of delight. His impersonal creation is directly for his delight both transactionally and reciprocally. In regard to personal creation, the manner of glorification shifts to conform to the character of interpersonal operation. Delight-glory from self-expression continues and reciprocate-glory from voluntary response is added. Reciprocate-glory is not the originating motive but the foreseen result. There is still a distinction between purpose and result despite omniscience.

In summary, because God is interpersonal, his goodness encompasses his glory, not the other way around. God's love and holiness are more basic than his glory. Goodness precedes gain. God avoided inappropriate self-glorification by going ahead with creating us though he knew we would sin, by first giving us more than he later gets from us, by offering us redemption, by making glory voluntary, and by knowing that it would come from only a remnant. Glory is preserved, however, because people are misusing God's gifts when they choose to sin (so our sin is not a reflection on him), because the disobedient majority use the very skills God gave them when they disobey him, and they sin in the face of a redemption option. In the end, God preserves holiness toward the wicked, love for the righteous, and appropriate glorification of himself by exerting omnipotence in the final overthrow of unrepentant evil. The glory of God is not the absolute or ultimate reason for creating us because (1) it would imply a self-centered God, (2) it would make God the author of sin, (3) it would not fit with foreseen sin, and

(4) it would take away from his glory. Viewed from our perspective, however, God's glory is our ultimate purpose.

A cluster of foreign reasons for creating us originate from a concept called *"the great chain of being."* Those reasons come from writers ancient to modern, Jewish, Christian, and pagan. The idea is that all reality forms an ascending sequence from lowest matter to highest deity. This "chain" was sometimes as a static arrangement of the way reality is. One adaptation of the scheme makes it ideal rather than real; not everything is there from the first, but comes into being over time. Another adaptation considered the chain dynamic rather than static; beings can move up and down the levels in the ladder.[10] The chain of being with its various modifications stands aside from anything taught in scripture itself and has in fact a pagan origin.[11] The next four reasons for creating mankind were usually offered on the background of this notion about the chain of being.

Necessary Goodness

The first misconstruction centered on the glory-of-God reason for his creating us. A second one centers on a misformulation of the goodness-of-God reason. Athanasius argued that since good cannot be selfish, God created us as an object to give to.[12] The difficulty here does not lie in God's creating us as someone give to, but in his having to do so to maintain his own goodness. There is a difference between doing something a person wants to do and doing something he has to do. In this case God would not be acting freely or sovereignly. His goodness would not have been perfect if he had not created what he could create and had not created all that he could create, because a God who creates is better than one who can but does not create.

In effect such reasoning prioritizes impersonal over interpersonal. **(a)** It makes God subject to a determinism based in abstract form. The traditional view of trinity makes it unnecessary for God to create other persons in order to have someone to show his goodness. This goodness, however, would have been particularly in the sense of love more than benefit, depending on certain assumptions we make about individual persons in the godhead.[13]

Replacements for Fallen Angels

Another idea derived from the chain-of-being notion is that we were created **(b)** to replace the fallen angels. According to tradition, at the rebellion Satan led in heaven, fully one-third of the angels were cast out with him.[14] The "perfect number" was made

imperfect and needed to be made complete again; so God created Adam to replace Satan and Adam's progeny would replace the rest of them. Another form of this idea has been that the God originally created an "imperfect number" of angels, and then made people to fill out the rest of the "perfect number." The difference between the two variations corresponds with a difference in writers' beliefs about when the angels fell. The first view assumed angels were made first, some of them fell, and then God created people to replace the fallen ones. The other view argued that people and angels were created simultaneously; angels were not created as a full number, and we were intended to fill out that number as well as to replenish the ones God knew would fall later.[15]

(1) Scripture does not say that we become angels when we die. In response to the Sadducees' question about the resurrection, Jesus does compare resurrected people and angels. He says that we become <u>like</u> angels, not that we <u>become</u> angels (Matthew **22**:30 = Mark **2**:25 = Luke **20**:36). His concerns are with <u>sexuality</u> and marriage. Elsewhere scripture implies that <u>corporeality</u> will be set aside although that depends on how we use the term. We do not know what the resurrected body is like or how it is connects with the present body; that is a "mystery" (1 Corinthians **15**:51-54). In 1 Corinthians **15** Paul speaks of a "body" for the raised (35-54), a "spiritual" (44-46), "heavenly" body (47-49) that is incorruptible and immortal (50-54). At least "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (50), and even those who are alive at Christ's return will be changed (51-52; cp. Matthew **17**:1-8, *etc*.?). In 2 Corinthians **5**:1-6 Paul speaks of "clothes" and "a dwelling" that will replace what is destroyed and mortal so we will not be naked and unclothed. At least eventually we will apparently be more than what is left when the mortal "part" dies, whether we can stretch the word "corporeal" to cover that added component or not.

According to Hebrews **1**:14 (< Psalm **104**:4), angels are ministering spirits, which means they do not have "flesh and bones" (Luke **24**:39), although being spirits might allow for having a "spiritual body" of some kind. Even if we resurrect to pure spirit, that will not make us angels any more than it will make them deity because *"God is [a] spirit"* (John **4**:24). Some variety evidently exists in the spirit realm because angels and deity are different if only in rank, authority, or power. That variety may be as great in the spiritual realm as it is in the physical. From revelation, then, we cannot tell what the nature of spirit is or what the spiritual body is for resurrected people. Consequently, neither from biblical statements nor from the nature of spirit do we have a basis for concluding that human beings become angels.[16]

(2) We wonder where the idea comes from that a "perfect number" of anything must exist?[17] That puts abstract number above the real divine Person or it

misunderstands sovereignty, especially if by omnipotence God can get his work done with the number of angels he originally made or had left after some of them fell. The arrangement of abstract pattern above real Person sounds like the ancient concept of the Fates, to which even the gods were subject. The fact that God originally made a given, hence "full," number of angels does not mean his sovereignty would be forfeit if he did not re-establish that full number. Out of the full number of people, there is only a remnant restored even through redemption. We do not argue for universalism because the full number of people God made must be restored to preserve his sovereignty. In the first place, God sovereignly chose that people could choose for or against fellowship with him, and he sovereignly chose what destinies there would be for each choice. The same point applies to the full number of angels.

(3) It would have been simpler for God to make more angels than to make people to become angels, especially since our corporeal frame makes us meantime more subject to falling than we were.

(4) There is same question about the relative rank of people and angels. Interpreters sometimes argue that we will be above angels in the end. In his strictures on litigation between Christians, Paul asks in passing, *"Don't you know that we will judge angels?"* (1 Corinthians **6**:3). Since angels serve people, some infer that they rank below people, although admittedly their service to mankind no more implies their inferiority to us than it implies Christ's inferiority to us. In **2**:14 the Hebrew writer says of them, *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to serve them who will inherit salvation* [that is, *people*; cp. **2**:1-4, 16]*?"*[18]

On the other side of the argument, in that same context the author quotes Psalm **8**:5 as saying, *"You made [mankind] a little lower than the angels . . . "* (**2**:7), although another translation could be, *"You made [mankind] a little-while lower than the angels."*[19] The latter rendering implies the opposite sequence for the rank of us and angels. The ambiguity, however, between our being "a little lower" than the angels and our being "a little while lower" may come into the reading of this text because of Jesus' temporary identification with us. He who is above the angels moves below them by incarnation and returns to where he was by resurrection and ascension. That is different from our being above the angels; it confuses us with Christ. We suspect that Psalm **8** is speaking of people in general and that any inclination to read time into the Hebrew writer's argument comes from facts about Christ's temporary incarnation to become our representative. Furthermore, if we will judge angels and become higher than angels, we would not become angels but something above angels. Psalm **8** might show that beings

can move up the chain of being, but it does not prove that they move up the chain to replace fallen angels.

The higher rank of angels over us, at least for now, could also be argued, not only from the first translation for Hebrews **2**:7 ("a little lower"), but also from 2 Peter **2**:11. After speaking of human false prophets and teachers, the text describes angels as "greater in strength and power." Whether that changes in the afterlife is moot. As a result, though angels appear to rank above us, that position has been questioned; but even if they do, that fact would not further the idea that God made us to move up the chain of being and fill out their number after they fell.

The Corporeal-Incorporeal Link

A third idea coming from "the great chain of being" is that we were created **(c)** to link the corporeal and incorporeal realms. We have both a physical and spiritual component; so we might say that we link those realms together, but that is different from saying that we were made for the purpose of linking them together. On the background of the "chain of being" concept, however, the observation about the way we were made becomes something of a reason for making us that way. If the goal was first to have the full range (plenitude) of possible kinds, then without us there would have been a missing link; so our purpose was to fill the gap in the previously determined motif in the created realm.

If it were observed against plenitude that there are many "kinds" that have become extinct and that many others do not exist that even we can imagine, the answer would come back that these "missing links" might still exist where people have not yet explored or on other planets, or that imaginable possibilities would come into being later. All these speculations to defend a proposition that originated in imagination! Plenitude pushed to its extreme would imply infinite variety, which might not even be possible within the limits of space and time.

Deification

Besides changing chain of being from actual to potential so that new kinds could become later, some authors changed it from static to dynamic. Rather than a static arrangement of created kinds ordered from lowest to highest, the chain is put "into motion." Beings move up (and down) the chain. When dynamic progress comes into the picture, several things can follow. The most extreme of these is that God made us **(d)** to

partake of the divine nature. Usually, when writers from Christian backgrounds have developed this concept, they have not meant "deification" in nature ("substance"/"hypostasis") or status (relationship), but becoming like God in holiness and virtue (action) as 2 Peter **1**:4 says, *" . . . through [these promises] you may become partakers of the divine nature"* (cp. Galatians **4**:19; Ephesians **2**:10; **4**:13b; Hebrews **12**:10; 1 John **3**:2).[20] That is the same idea as being restored to the ethical image of God (2 Corinthians **3**:18; Colossians **3**:9-10; cp. Romans **8**:29; Ephesians **4**:23-24). It is a behavioral likeness rather than an ontological one, and it differs from the eastern notion of union with the Ultimate One.

Other Christian writers have meant deification in the sense of becoming immortal, since God alone has immortality (1 Timothy **6**:16). God made us so we could move up the ladder of being and obtain immortality (cp. 1 Corinthians **15**:53, 49; Philippians **3**:21; 1 John **3**:2).[21] It is plausible that God had more in mind for us than permanent existence on the earth. Had people not sinned and no one had ever died, it would only have been a matter of time till indeed the earth would have been "filled." Not dying does not mean remaining permanently on earth or in a physical state. Both Enoch and Elijah left this world by translation instead of death (Genesis **5**:24; Hebrews **11**:5; 2 Kings **2**:1-18), which sounds like the same transformation that will take place in the living at the time of Christ's return (1 Corinthians **15**:50-54) and perhaps the transfiguration of Jesus himself (Matthew **17**:1-7 = Mark **9**:2-8; Luke **9**:28-36). What possibilities there are for human existence elsewhere in the universe we have no way of knowing; so the issue remains moot, one we cannot make claims for but also one we cannot deny.

Mormonism, however, in its doctrine of eternal generation, goes beyond obtaining immortality and holiness. It is a modern example of blurring the god-man distinction. Supposedly, during the next life we become gods who then populate other worlds like Jehovah Elohim populated the earth. He was originally a flesh-and-blood being identified with Adam himself, who came into the garden with one of his wives.

> *When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. . . . He is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.*[22]

Each human baby, born of human parents, first exists as a "spirit baby," born of Yahveh Elohim and one of his wives. There is, so to speak, a moving down and then up the ladder of being. *"As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be."*[23] God is a glorified man. As many as attain the Celestial Kingdom themselves become gods over other realms. Consequently, Mormonism teaches a polygamous polytheism reminiscent

of the ancient pagan deities of the Near East except that the former has a higher ethical content to it.[24]

The idea that we become angels in the next life is another example of moving up the ladder of being. In a related way, fallen spirits have been regarded as the souls that receive physical bodies, and the combination makes a human being.[25] Spirits live as human beings in physical bodies regarded as habitations of punishment so they can move back up the ladder again to their former estate. The idea of evolution follows this dynamic model in that the lower, simpler forms of being eventually produce the higher, more complex ones. Different forms of re-incarnation likewise illustrate moving up and down "the chain of being."

As a general comment on moving up and down a chain of being, we suggest that scripture pictures the continuity of kind and the perseverance of identity. Animals do not become people, and people do not become animals or angels or God; angels do not become people or God. There may be adjustments within kinds, but we have no indication of the confusion of kinds and identities as in evolution, reincarnation, and deification. In creation, living things were to reproduce after their kind (Genesis **1**:11-12, 21, 24-25). Under Mosaic law bestiality was punishable by death (Exodus **22**:19; Leviticus **18**:23; **20**:15-16; Deuteronomy **27**:21).[26] On the other hand, the Son of God did incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth and angels appeared in human form on special occasions, but these cases are not instances of leaving what they were so they could become a different order of being permanently.

Fulfilling Divine Need

Besides (a) the interpersonal context that we have been stressing, (b) God's ultimate position is another factor that sets a boundary on reasons for his creating us. Paul enunciates the principle on Mars Hill: God is not *"served by people as if he needed something, since he is the one who gives everyone life, breath, and all things"* (Acts **17**:25). The apostle reasons that the source of everything is not dependent on anything. As a result, beyond misformulated self-glorification and the scale-of-being ideas, a third misformulation of God's reason for creating us is any proposal that implicitly makes God dependent being. For example, ancient pagans sometimes offered their sacrifices to feed the gods. One reason those gods would bring calamities on people was for their failure to provide sacrificial food. God did not institute animal sacrifice among the Israelites because of some desire for what was offered. The function of the offerings was not to feed him: *"If I were hungry, I would not tell you, because the world is mine and the*

fullness of it. Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?' (Psalm **50**:12-13). Through Jeremiah God says to Israel, *"I did not speak to your fathers . . . out of a concern for sacrifices"* (**7**:22).[27] Mosaic sacrifices were not for God's benefit, but for the sinner's benefit, because the death of the animal was viewed either as a substitute for the death of the one who offered it or as an expression of love to the God who gave life and breath and all things, including the offering itself.

The idea that God created us because he was lonely likewise implies that he "needs" something and assumes he is one individual person rather than an interpersonal unity.

> *And God stepped out on space,*
> *And he looked around and said,*
> *'I'm lonely–*
> *I'll make me a world.'"*[28]

Even under poetic license such a concept is misleading, so say the least.

Summary

Passages that bear on God's reasons for making us include Genesis **1**:26-28; **2**:5, 15; Psalm **8**:3-8; Ecclesiastes **12**:13; Acts **17**:24-28; 1 Corinthians **6**:13, 19-20; Ephesians **1**:3-14; and 1 Peter **2**:9. In an interpersonal framework, we have organized those reasons in the order of delight, goodness, and glory. Delight means that God sensed fulfillment in the very process of creating all things, including us. Goodness means that God created us as that on which he could more fully bestow himself. Glory means that in response to God's previous grace, our gratitude, praise, and obedience to mission bring God the glory he foresaw would come. Our mission is twofold: we are stewards of creation and caretakers of brothers; we exercise dominion over the earth and proclaim reconciliation to all who have alienated themselves from their creator. Delight and goodness account for our reasons for existing in and of ourselves; glory accounts for our purpose beyond ourselves. The purpose of people is fellowship with God and fulfillment of mission for him. The purpose of God in creating people was to fulfill himself, have objects of fellowship, and accomplish results through them. Our purpose is to serve as an object of fellowship and fulfill mission in dominion and proclamation. Delight and goodness are intentional reasons for creating us; glory is a foreseen result. Any of those three terms could be expanded to include what the others mean if appropriate adjustments are made.

Other positions on the reasons for God's creating us include making (1) self-glorification central, which seems unnatural in an interpersonal setting. Especially on the

background of "the great chain of being," four reasons for our existence originated: (2) as a necessary expression of goodness, which puts abstract principle above personal character; (3) as replacements for fallen angels, an unrevealed notion; (4) as a link between the corporeal and incorporeal realms, and (5) deification, which normally means becoming godly or immortal but sometimes means more. Finally, we were supposedly made (6) as a means of fulfilling God's need, which does not harmonize with God's creatorship, omnipotence, aseity, and sovereignty.

Endnotes

[1]See Addendum A for a listing of some references in Plato, Philo, and church fathers up through Augustine that deal with the reasons God made us.

[2]J. S. Lidgett in *The Fatherhood of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1987) prioritizes God's fatherhood over his sovereignty. The fatherhood image adjusts sovereignty in the direction of interpersonalism. Fatherhood is helpful because in combines interpersonal principles *per se* with God's superiority and authority in relating to us. Lidgett comments on traditional approaches by saying,

> *"The Calvinistic principle made the glory of God supreme, but believed glory consisted in God* [sic] *predestinating His creatures and sacrificing them to secure its ends. On the other hand, the Arminian principle—God's end is, above all, the well-being of His creatures—if it magnified the benevolence of God it did so in a way that went far to treat God as a means to His creature's end"* (p. 163).

[3]*Unto* in Ephesians **1**:4-6 could be taken in a purpose sense if within the purpose concept there is a distinction between intentional purpose and conditional purpose as explained in chapter 1in connection with foreseen sin.

[4]Our understanding of foreknowledge, predestination, and conditionality is worked out in *What the Bible Says About the Nature of Man*, pp. 157-215. Since conditionality presupposes a person's ability to fulfill conditions, in this present volume on natural *vs*. psychological depravity conditionality also applies significantly to the doctrine of election. See as well the references under "depravity" in the "Topical Index" of *What the Bible Says About the Nature of Man*, p. 585.

[5]In *Reflections on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis has a helpful essay that grows out of this point: "A Word About Praise" (*The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis*. NY: Inspirational Press, l987 [l955], pp. 177-81).

[6]In the Prayer by St. Francis of Assisi, this sentiment is familiarly expressed:

> *"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek*
> *To be consoled as to console,*
> *To be understood as to understand,*
> *To be loved as to love;*
> *For <u>it is in giving that we receive</u> . . . ."*

[7]Romans **9** offers a complex discussion; **9**:22 itself has several features that need to be evaluated in light of Paul's general argument. To avoid repeating our own approach to these matters, we refer to *What the Bible Says About the Nature of Man*, pp. 133-40,

152-53; as well as *The Implication of Divine Self-Consistency for the Doctrine of Natural Depravity: A Biblical-Systematic Approach* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1977), pp. 200-51. By way of summary, **(a)** the phrase κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπώλειαν [*katērtismena eis apōleian*] is best translated *"fit for destruction"* (stative), rather than *"fitted* [by God] *for destruction"* (passive voice) or "*having-fitted-themselves for destruction"* (middle voice) because the first translation does not push the author's point beyond what he is necessarily saying.

A factor not noted in those previous materials is **(b)** the force of the participle θέλων (*thelōn*), translated "willing," "desiring," or "wanting." Greek participles simply connect nouns and verbal ideas without indicating the sense in which they connect. Participles may cover for noun-verbal relationships that are linked by time, means, manner, cause, condition, concession, purpose, result, attendant circumstance, coordinated circumstance, apposition; but a participle in itself does not specify any one of these. The actual relationship between the referent of the substantive and referent of the participle must come from context and the nature of the case. Some interpreters who think **9**:22 means that God makes "vessels" for the purpose of destroying them appear to take the participle in a causal sense:

> *"What if God, because he wanted to show wrath and to make known his power, endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction in order that he might make known the richness of his glory on the vessels of mercy?"* (cp. TEV).

In a temporal sense, it would read, *"What if God, while wanting . . . ?"* (Weymouth). The concessive translation makes especially good sense because it contrasts what might be called God's "impulse" against sin and what he restrains himself from doing for the benefit of the righteous: *"What if God, though wanting . . . ?"* (Moffatt, Conybeare, NASV). The most accurate translation, however, leaves the connection unspecified, *"What if God, wanting . . . ?"* (KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, Douay, Berkeley, *etc.*; the NIV virtually mistranslates the participle as "choosing"). The causal interpretation seems not only foreign but unnatural; a person does not put up with the objects of his wrath because he wants to show his wrath. If anything, he does not put up with them.

Two other matters in **9**:22 do not particularly affect our concerns here**: (c)** a manuscript variant on whether *and* should begin verse 23, and **(d)** whether **9**:22 is a statement or question.

[8]The Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647 has as its first entry, *"Question. 1. What is the chief end of man? Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."* See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* (NY: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, l877), Vol. III, p. 676.

[9]For a thorough presentation on the "chain of being" and its influence on western philosophy, literature, and the church, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, l964 [1936]).

[10]The idea originated with Plato (428-348 B.C.) and came into the church especially through the influence of Plotinus (A.D. 205-270), the Neo-Platonist whose thought greatly affected early Christian writers, especially Augustine (354-430), and thus the theology of the whole western church. It is also reminiscent of the Gnostic pleroma, a series of levels graded from the realm of matter plus spirit (our present condition) through realms with decreasing proportions of matter to spirit all the way up to pure spirit.

Through knowledge (*gnosis*), a person can learn the way to pass upward to the next higher realm on the way to pure spirit, spirit being good and matter being evil.

[11]Athanasius (296-373) argues this way in *Against the Heathen* **3**:35. See in *NPNF*, 2nd series (1904 [1893]), ed. by Philip Schaff, Vol. IV, p. 26. Other writers before and after him spoke of God's creating as an expression of goodness with or without necessity attached to the idea.

[12]This common verdict is based on observations like the following: in the patriarchal age the flood took all but a few (Genesis **6-9**; 1 Peter **3**:20); among Israelites there is the remnant doctrine (1 Kings **19**; Isaiah **9**:22-23; Romans **9**:27; **11**:5); in general, *"many are called, but few are chosen"* (Matthew **22**:14), and there are few that find the narrow gate that leads to life (Matthew **7**:13-14; Luke **13**:23-24).

[13]We are going beyond scripture in supposing one way or another that each member of the godhead possessed all divine characteristics in the absolute degree. As is frequently pointed out about omniscience, at least during his incarnation Jesus apparently did not know the time of his return (Matthew **24**:36—because the Father had not decided yet?). A fair number of manuscripts and ancient versions, however, omit the phrase *"nor the Son,"* including the Latin Vulgate and the Byzantine text type. It is omitted from Roman Catholic translation, based on the former, and from the KJV and NKJV, based on the Received Text that descended from the latter as well as from *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, edited in terms of this same textual tradition by Hodges and Farstad (Thomas Nelson, l982). Other edited Greek texts retain it, reflecting a different system of prioritizing ancient manuscripts and assuming intentional scribal omission: WH, Nestle, UBS, *etc.*, as in ASV, NASV, RSV, NEB, NIV, TEV, and other English translations.

[14]Note Revelation **12**:4; **6**:12-14; **8**:12; Daniel **8**:10.

[15]Most writers on this idea assumed that angels fell before people was made, but Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) argued that angels and people were created at the same time because the apocryphal writing Ecclesiasticus **18**:1 says, *"He that lives forever created all things together."* Scripture itself does not speak about the time of their fall, only to the fact of it (2 Peter **2**:4; Jude 6; Genesis **6**:1-4 + 1 Enoch **6-16**). In a passage about laying the foundations of the earth, Job **38**:7 does say, *"The morning stars sang together, and all <u>the sons of God</u> shouted for joy"* (cp. **1**:6; **2**:1).

[16]It is tempting to argue for a greater difference between angels and resurrected people by saying that angels are pure spirits while resurrected people are spirits plus spiritual bodies. <u>Angels</u> are not said to have bodies, and demons—presumably fallen angels–yearn for bodily habitation of some sort as implied by their drive to possess humans (Matthew **12**:43-45 = Luke **11**:24-26) or even animals (Matthew **8**:28-34 = Mark **5**:1-17 = **8**:26-37). They do so presumably to interact more naturally with this different kind of realm to which they were cast down. <u>People</u> are said to have spiritual bodies, which means they are not simply resuscitated corpses or disembodied spirits, We speak of "spiritual body" because Paul speaks this way (1 Corinthians **15**:44), but we have little content in mind when we repeat his words, because we have no independent knowledge of the nature of the spiritual realm so as to link up his meaning with something we know through experience. The transformation of the living at the general resurrection may parallel the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain with Elijah and Moses (Matthew **17**:1-8 = Mark **9**:2-8). It is not clear to what extent Christ's post- resurrection

appearances go beyond being a proof of his resurrection to becoming a pre-figure of our resurrected bodies and consequently an indication of the difference between angels and resurrected people. The appearances included eating as well as being touched, seen, and heard. But these were "appearances," which involved activities that angels have also done (Genesis **18**:1-15, *etc.*). Our "spiritual body," however, evidently differs from a physical body somehow made immortal; so our resurrected state is closer to that of the angels than it is now, but that does not make their natures the same. In *The Battle for the Resurrection* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, l989), Norman Geisler interacts with the various options interpreters have proposed on both Jesus' resurrected body and every person's resurrection body.

[17]Depending on the author involved, the notion of "perfect number" can mean simply the "full number" of original angels before their fall. But particularly in eighteenth-century theology, "perfect number" progressed from the basic actualities in "the chain of being" to the notion of "plenitude," the possibilities in that chain. The reasoning carried forward the idea that **(a)** God's goodness required him to create other actualities to shower with his goodness. The added factor was **(b)** that God's goodness would not allow him to refuse the goodness of existence to all good possibilities in the scale. Not only, then, did he have to create what was good, but he had to create every possible thing that was good, if not by "now," at least eventually. This thought then got turned into a basis for optimism, the belief that **(c)** this world is the best of all possible worlds. "All good possibilities" became more like "all possibilities" and so plenitude involved the whole range of pain-causing entities as well. Lovejoy remarks that such reasoning made optimism indistinguishable from Buddhist pessimism (*The Great Chain of Being*, p. 218).

[18]Many interpreters have understood that service to include "guardian angels" for some individuals (Matthew **18**:10; Acts **12**:15; Luke **15**:10?; **16**:22?; Matthew **24**:31, *etc.*), nations (Daniel **10**:10-15, 20-**11**:1; **12**:1), or churches (Revelation **1**:20; **2**:1, 8, *etc.*), although the last set of examples probably refers to the evangelist in these churches or to a personification of the churches themselves.

[19]Two translation questions come up in this passage. First, the word "angels" in Hebrews **2**:7 follows the Septuagint Greek translation of Psalm **8**:5, which reads ἄγγελοι (*angeloi*) where the Hebrew says אֱלֹהִים (*ʾelohim*). The Hebrew text reads, *"You made [mankind] a little from God."* In this case, the regular word for "God" was rendered "angels" by the Septuagint (the Hebrew word is plural in form and is translated plural when referring to other than God, that is, to the pagan "gods," angels, or men as in Psalm **82**:1 + 6 and perhaps Exodus **21**:6?; **22**:8?). In general, Hebrews follows the distinctives of the Septuagint and so reads "angels" in **2**:7, 9. The LXX also has "angels" for אֱלֹהִים in Psalm **137**:1 (= MT **138**:1) and in some readings for Daniel **2**:11. Since Hebrews bases its argument on "angels" in **2**:7, 9, we take it to be a correct understanding of Psalm **8**:5. If Psalm **8** compares our rank to God's, it would not relate to the question about our place in the chain of being insofar as that concept provides a background for the idea that our purpose was to replace fallen angels).

Second, "little" could be translated "little while." Depending on context the adverb βραχύ τι (*brachu ti*) means "a little" in the sense of distance (Acts **27**:28), time (Acts **5**:34; cp. LXX Isaiah **57**:17), or amount (John **6**:7; Hebrews **13**:22). The first two options fit with the context of Hebrews **2**, but they yield opposite conclusions about the

comparative rank of people and angels. In favor of "a little while" is the fact that Christ's incarnation made him lower than the angels during that time; previously he was above them, as argued in Hebrews **1**. In favor of "little" is the fact that the original Psalm discusses mankind rather than mankind represented by the Son in mankind's role as caretaker of creation. In his substitutionary role the Son might himself be "a little while lower" without implying that people in their own order and role are a little while lower until people rise above the angels.

[20]John Milton meant deification in the sense of holiness: *Paradise Lost* **6**:731-33; **11**:43-44 (note John **17**:20-21 and the "all in all" expression in 1 Corinthians **15**:28; cp. **12**:6; Ephesians **1**:23).

[21]In John **8**:51 Jesus says, *"If people keep my word, they will never see death."* Commentators usually agree that Jesus meant spiritual death, particularly since the Hebrew writer says in a familiar quotation*, "It is laid up for people to die once and after that the judgment"* (cp. Genesis **3**:19), which assumes the situation after the fall.

[22]Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855 (Vol. I, pp. 50-51.

[23]Statement by Lorenzo Snow, one-time President and Prophet of the Mormon Church, as recorded in *Millennial Star*, ed. by Brigham Young (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1892), Vol. LIV, p. 404.

[24]Helpful writings on Mormonism include Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Modern Microfilm Co., 1972. enl. ed.) and Harry L. Ropp, *Are the Mormon Scriptures Reliable?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, [1977], rev. ed. by Wesley P. Walters, l987). The foundational writings for Mormonism are *Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*.

[25]Origen expounded this idea in his *De principiis* **1**:6:2-3; **2**:9:2, 6.

[26]In Jewish apocalyptic literature and in modern interpretation, "sons of God" in Genesis **6**:1-4 has often been taken to mean angels who cohabited with women. Jude says there were angels that did not keep their principality and proper habitation, and the 2 Peter **2**:4 parallel mentions angels who were cast down just before it refers to the flood (**2**:5). Genesis **6**:1-4 introduces the flood account; so the New Testament references may refer to the Genesis incident with the implication that "sons of God" would mean angels. If that represents the correct understanding of these texts, Genesis **6** provides an example of attempting to breach God's intended pattern of continuity of kind. Among several other proposals we tend to prefer Meredith Kline's view, however, that "sons of God" is a term for ancient tyrannical kings (*Westminster Theological Journal,* Vol. 24 (l962), pp. 187-204); in that case the passage does not apply to our subject.

Jude's statement that the angels *"did not keep their own <u>principality</u>* [archēn, ἀρχήν]*, but left their <u>proper habitation</u>* [*oikētērion*, οἰκητήριον]*"* sounds something like Paul in his Areopagus speech when he says of mankind that God *"made . . . every nation to reside all over the world, having appointed/set* [ὁρίσας, *horisas*] *. . . the boundaries [ὁροθεσίας horothesias] of their habitation [κατοικίας katoikias]."* He may mean simply that God has determined where on earth each ethnic group will live (Deuteronomy **32**:8; cp. Job **12**:23, *etc*.), but Paul could mean that God determines the boundaries of human habitation in contrast to other orders of being including that of the God whom they are to seek. If so, he might be referring to the concept of continuity of kind.

[27]The phrase עַל־דִּבְרֵי we have translated "out of a concern for." When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he did not command sacrifices to get them offered to him. Translations sometimes read, *"I did not speak to you fathers . . . concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices,"* which can then mean that Jeremiah was criticizing the sacrificial system as a later development in Israel's religious history. Jeremiah did not object, however, to animal sacrifices as such because he recognized their legitimacy elsewhere in his writing (**17**:24-27; **31**:14; **33**:10-11, 17-22). He supported Josiah's reform, which included the restoration of Passover observance (2 Chronicles **35**:1-9). The phrase in question is relatively infrequent, appearing elsewhere only in Deuteronomy **4**:21*; 2 Samuel **18**:5*; 2 Kings **22**:13; Psalm **7** (heading); and Jeremiah **4**:21*. The asterisked references show the distinctive flavor "out of concern for." Literally the expression means "on the words of"; so it seems to deal with meaning. Sacrifices were not instituted for God's benefit; that is not what they "meant."

[28]James Weldon Johnson, *The Creation* (see in *Caroling Dusk*, edited by Countee Cullen. N. Y.: Harper & Row, 1927, p. 19). Even under poetic license, a statement like this is misleading.