

## *The Everlasting God*

by Rev. Joe Connolly

“Do you not know? / Have you not heard? / *Yahweh* is the everlasting God, / the Creator of the ends / of the earth.” — Isaiah 40:28.

As many of you know, I am a Vietnam veteran. My MOS in the Army— MOS is Army speak for what your job is— my MOS in the Army was cook. Hence, I landed at Tonsonuit Airbase and was transported immediately to a mess hall in downtown Saigon.

It was a different kind of mess hall. Only Field Grade officers— Field Grade officers is Army speak for officers who have attained the rank of Major or above— only Field Grade officers were served in this kind of mess hall. It was also frequented by high ranking American Embassy personnel.

But the mess hall was not yet operational when I arrived. That was in process. The Army had taken over a four-star hotel in downtown Saigon just a block and a half from the national assembly building to act as a barracks for those Field Grade officers. The mess hall was located, naturally enough, in what had been the hotel restaurant.

Even though the building was just 6 stories high, it was one of the tallest structures in the city. The eating area on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor also had an open air patio where meals could be served. That veranda afforded a beautiful vista of downtown Saigon and the Mekong delta.

As I said, the mess hall was not yet open. The target date for that opening was only four days after I arrived.

There was one really big problem. While the restaurant equipment was largely adequate for an army mess hall, the old stove housed there was not. So a huge Army issue stove sat in a crate in front of the hotel waiting to be installed 6 floors up.

The only elevator in the building was just big enough to hold three people, barely. No Army stove was going to fit into that elevator, which presented an interesting challenge: how to get the stove up six flights of stairs. Seven GIs, myself included, were assigned the job of lugging that sucker all the way to the kitchen, six floors up by dint of brut force.

This is where I could insert a long and harrowing story about getting that stove up those stairs. I will not. Suffice it to say we did it.

Now, here’s another piece of Army speak: nearly every last piece of equipment issued by the Army has on a tag or a plate on it. These are called a nomenclature tags or nomenclature plates. Their purpose is to name and describe the equipment to which the tag, the plate is attached.

Only after we got that stove up 6 flights and in place did anyone bother to look at its nomenclature plate. One aspect of that description caught our eyes— weight: 2,000 pounds. Ouch! We had moved a piece of equipment weighing one ton up 6 flights of stairs. At least that’s what the nomenclature plate told us: one ton. (Slight pause.)

We find these words in the Scroll of the Prophet Isaiah: “Do you not know? / Have you not heard? / *Yahweh* is the everlasting God, / the Creator of the ends / of the earth.” (Slight pause.)

Nomenclature is an interesting word. For the Army it means name this thing and describe it. It's a stove— its length, width, height, weight is.... Some would argue that's a boring but a very necessary thing to do: naming, describing.

In a very real sense, theology does exactly the same job as a nomenclature plate. Theology does nothing more than name God, describe God.

After all, the very word theology means the science of the study of God. That science, any science, gets deeply involved in naming, describing.

Now, on occasion people will ask me what my theology is. What they are really trying to ask is am I a liberal or am I a conservative. What is interesting about that is, while everyone, even some very serious theologians succumb to the temptation of using those terms— liberal and conservative— they have nearly no theological meaning.

Indeed, I say there are two ways to describe my theology. I am a Monotheistic Trinitarian or I am a Trinitarian Monotheist. Please notice, this is a theological description, a naming which proclaims God is Three and God is One.

Also please notice I am not simply a monotheist. You see, each of us knows there are churches all over America who claim only Jesus is God. That's monotheism. Others make a claim only the Spirit is God. That's monotheism. Still others claim God is some central, unifying force. That's monotheism.

These descriptions are really hard positions to justify in terms of historic Christianity which says God is Three and God is One. The Christian description, the Christian naming, the Christian nomenclature, if you would, is much more fluid than for what most people allow and is not easily categorized.

The three monotheistic positions to which I just referred are, paradoxically, easy to describe, easy to explain. That is, perhaps, what makes them attractive. The Trinity— that's hard to describe, hard to explain.

So, given that I say the Trinity is hard to explain let's look at the reading from Isaiah, and the awesome language found therein and try to see how these words explain God. Several things should be obvious here.

First, this is a poem. Hence, it does not in any way address a naming, a description, a nomenclature of God. A poem nearly by definition is about an emotional understanding of God, an emotional connection with God.

Second, we know this text was written somewhere around 2,500 or 2,600 years ago. We can be fairly confident no one knew what it was like to fly back then. And yet, this poem addresses what God might see from a great height, higher than any structure.

It speaks about God Who is (quote:) "...above the circle of the earth, above the vaulted roof of the world, and its inhabitants look like grasshoppers;..." That language is just amazing, incredible, especially given that it is ancient.

Then on top of that, these words invite the reader, the listener, to see things from God's perspective. (Quote:) "...those who wait for *Yahweh*, God, / shall renew their strength, / they shall mount up, soar with / wings like eagles,...." (Slight pause.)

It is said, I have said from this pulpit, the Hebrews did not have a theology. The Hebrews did not bother to

name, to describe. Why? For the Hebrews God is about an emotional understanding of God, an emotional connection with God.

In fact, I think if we look for an exact description of God, a nomenclature, in both the Hebrew Scripture and the Christian Scripture we *will not* find one. I maintain Scripture is about an emotional understanding of God, an emotional connection with God.

In fact, it is not just said the Hebrews did not have a theology. It is said, rather, the Hebrew did theology. The Hebrews acted. They acted out of their emotional understanding of God, their emotional connection with God.

Indeed, after the reference which invites people to soar with wings like eagles, that verse continues and says this about those who wait for God. (Quote:) "...they shall run and not be weary, / they shall walk and never tire." In short, those who connect— and not just connect but emotionally connect with God— are empowered by God to act.

All that leaves the obvious question, the one which I think the poem from Isaiah with its language, both fluid and articulate, asks. What is our emotional connection to the reality of God who clearly seeks to be emotionally connected with us?

Indeed, for me this is a question asked throughout Scripture. Are our hearts open to God? The question is just that simple. Are our hearts open to God? Your call. Amen.

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**ENDPIECE:** It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: "Theologian Walter Brueggemann says the revelation about God found in Scripture is an inscrutable disclosure, not a manageable package. The God found in Scripture, says Brueggemann, is portrayed with remarkable, intentional, artistic illusiveness. I would suggest, thereby, the use of poetry and its ability to address emotions is a natural way to listen for God, especially when trying to discern anything about the will of God."

**BENEDICTION:** Surely God will empower our ministry; surely God will supply for our needs when we are about the work of God; may this God, the God who formed the universe, bless us with the courage, the knowledge, the wisdom and the fortitude to serve the Gospel of Christ, empowered by the Spirit, this day and forever more. Amen.