

# The Long Search for God

*by Charles Gee*

I grew up in an English village with devout parents, a Church of England School, a calendar of religious holidays, and a landscape containing: cenotaphs, cemeteries, chapels, churches, and cathedrals. One would expect that the search for God would be a simple exercise. To my young mind all one needed was the right place and words. Then we could sit down, have a chat, and the problem would be solved.

With young enthusiasm churches were visited, the question posed, the answer: silence. I attended Chapel with my preacher father, listening carefully, dutifully reading the Bible, singing the hymns, and "Amen-ing" the prayers. Knowledge called for deeper questioning. Still silence. God did not listen to Chapel folk.

My hope rose with Secondary School, complete with Religious Instruction by the local Church of England curate. Here was the chance to ask questions. When access to the Adult Library was gained I read theological tomes to get the language right and raised more questions. I was ordered to leave and go to the Headmaster for punishment. The crime: asking too many questions.

Time passed as I dabbled in Communism, flirted with Roman Catholicism, and investigated Islam, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals and others. One day, life changed. I'm not sure if it were love or lust, but a wedding date was set. That lovely creature wanted a church wedding with all the trimmings, including the High Church equivalent of a Nuptial Mass. My acquiescence was immediate and another Anglican emerged, properly baptized and confirmed. What a delight: the pomp, ceremony, ritual, and rites. Surely, in all of this, God was to be found. I was wholeheartedly doing all the right things and listening for that small voice - still silence.

A few years later came emigration to Canada and life in a remote Northern Ontario logging camp. We were the only English family and the preferred target of Jehovah's Witnesses. One family became good friends and we would visit when in town. Slowly, interest grew, and all four of us became Witnesses. Life would never be the same again. It took almost twenty years including three years of depression, a broken marriage, and alienation from my four children, to lose that

indoctrination. The simple choice: "Jehovah was going to exist or I was." Silence made the choice obvious.

The healing aspect of solitary walking on the beaches of Haida Gwaii produced the only sensible word I ever heard: "Friend". It led to The Victoria Meeting of The Religious Society Of Friends. The plain unadorned Meeting Room now holds many of my most important memories: two marriages, a year as resident Friend, numerous Friends including a spouse, and support in so many ways. The understanding of, "God within" was a great encouragement to continue what had become 'The Quest'.

Home for many of these last thirty years has been Haida Gwaii. For almost twenty years I've been an Isolated Friend. A saving grace during these years has been a continuing interest in Anthropology and the concept of the 'Participant Observer'.

Married for part of the time to Agnes, a woman of Haida descent, I participated in a different culture. Haida practices, developed long before the Europeans arrived, continued, overlaid with a facade of Anglican Christianity of the Church Army variety.

Agnes was to die of breast cancer, but during the last three years of her life she sought out and participated in Native Spirituality. I willingly accompanied her. A conversation with Agnes set off a new exploration. She pointed out that, try as I may, I could not change my ancestry and become a Haida. Therefore I should find spiritual roots among my people.

It was clear and obvious that Christianity was a transplant, so the search went even further back to what was left of the former belief systems. Wiccan, Shamanistic, and Norse Spiritual practices all received deep scrutiny, but none broke the silence. It was time to re-think the basis of the quest.

For years I had accumulated scientific knowledge separately from my spiritual questing. Now they merged. There was no doubt that Charles Darwin had put the pieces together and evolution was a solid basis for advancing knowledge. Regardless of the time and effort expended over multiple generations, theology and its attendant disciplines had failed to prove the existence of God. What came first was at last clear: the selective process of evolution had come up with "The Human Mind" which had conceived of 'God' to fill the gaps in the knowledge base of our early forbears. Where then is God? Friends have the answer: God is within, always was and always will be. This is one of the most complex creations of the human mind, but still our creation.