



A Different View of
Religion – by Bill Scott

Preface

7/1/2026 —This is not an attempt to change anyone's religious beliefs. This is simply what I have come to believe over the past 83 years of life on this Earth, based upon my experiences and my research, and does not reflect on the opinions and views of anyone other than myself — not to my close friends or anyone that might be affected by my personal discoveries. This has served to give me the tools I need to accept the inevitable and stop dwelling on the termination of my existence on this earth.

One thing I have learned since my brush with death last November is that when death becomes certain, it forces one to look at things from a different point of view. I do this with the knowledge that it may counter the views of friends and family which I hold dear. For that I sincerely apologize.

In the course of this action, in my reflections over the past 83 years, I have come to the conclusion that my thoughts should be documented as they might help

others as this knowledge has helped me prepare for a uncertain future, my belief in God, and my respect for others who may think differently.

I also want to confess that I have used LLM's such as ChatGPT and Grok to assist me in my writing, but only for the purpose of editing, sentence structure and reformatting of sentences to make the ideas I have written more accurate and easier to relate.

I sincerely wish that God Blesses You All and that you will read it to the end.

Let us begin:

From Sheep to Co-Creator: A Mid-Century Protestant's Quiet Revolution in Faith

I was raised in the 1940s and 1950s in a Methodist church during what many recall as the 'tradition's prime'. This message was then, as it continues to be, clear and comforting:

There is one all-powerful God who rules the universe. We are His sheep. The Bible is the rule book. Faith means trust, obedience, and finding security within a well-ordered cosmos guided by divine will.

Like most Christians of that era, I internalized this framework. It provided moral clarity, community, and a sense of purpose. Sunday school lessons, hymns, sermons, and revival meetings reinforced a straightforward covenant: God created us; we worship and follow Him.

Approaching my mid-eighties, I find myself questioning these foundational beliefs—not out

of rebellion or crisis, but through quiet reflection accumulated over decades of living. The certainties of youth have softened under the weight of experience, loss, joy, and an ever-expanding awareness of the world's complexity. Life is the most difficult lesson I have had to learn.

One idea, encountered in my reading, struck me deeply:

“Perhaps our mission on earth is not to seek out God, but to create Him.”

This thought resonates with the very Protestant emphasis I grew up with—the call for each individual to cultivate a “personal relationship with God.” If that relationship is truly personal, dynamic, and lived, doesn't it imply we are active participants rather than passive sheep? That we shape our understanding of the divine as much as we receive it, without regards to the understanding and beliefs of others?

The Traditional View and Its Strengths

Mid-20th-century Methodism, rooted in John Wesley's teachings, stressed personal piety, sanctification (growing in holiness), and a heartfelt connection to God through grace. It was Arminian in flavor—emphasizing free will and the possibility of transformation—while holding firmly to core Christian doctrines of an omnipotent, loving Creator. The Bible served as the authoritative guide, and the church community provided the structure for living it out.

This worldview has worked for millions. It offered stability in turbulent times: post-Depression, World War II, the Cold War... It framed life as a journey of obedience leading to salvation and moral living. “Sheep” was not a term of diminishment but of care—protected, guided, known by the Shepherd.

The Questions That Arise in Later Life

Longevity brings perspective. I've seen institutions change, societies shift, and scientific understandings of the universe deepen dramatically. The Bible itself contains

diverse voices across centuries—poetry, history, prophecy, letters—rather than a single, unchanging rulebook. Interpretations evolve. What felt absolute in the 1950s looks more like a product of its cultural moment today. No nation in history has survived without a belief in God, and I fear that clinging to the old beliefs that have been under attack for centuries has become suicidal to the faith. It's not just my opinion. Look around you. Our churches are in desperate need of repair, and over the past twenty years, church attendance is plummeting and anti-Christian sentiment is gaining strength. Worst of all, our young people don't seem prepared or even interested in carrying the church forward. I believe there is an answer, but the answer is going to get resistance from both sides, and that makes it even worse.

The call to a “personal relationship” invites deeper scrutiny. If God is relational and we are made in His divine image, then faith becomes dialogical. We don't just receive commands; we wrestle, question, create meaning, and perhaps even co-shape the reality of the sacred in our lives. This echoes themes in liberal or process

theology, where God is not a static, distant ruler, but involved in becoming alongside creation.

Philosophers such as Ludwig Feuerbach famously argued that humans project ideals onto the divine—creating God in our image—though believers might counter that any such “creation” is actually discovery or participation in a greater reality.

There is, as the writer notes, no empirical “proof” that settles the debate between seeking versus co-creating. Faith has always operated in the realm of trust, mystery, and lived experience rather than laboratory verification. Science explains mechanisms; it does not dictate ultimate meaning.

Toward a Mature Faith

Questioning long-held beliefs in one’s eighties is not loss of faith but its maturation. It moves from inherited certainty to chosen, reflective commitment. The “personal relationship” so emphasized in Methodist, Baptist and other protestant religions becomes an invitation to creativity: interpreting scripture through the lens

of compassion, building communities of justice, finding the divine in art, nature, relationships, and ethical action.

We may still affirm a transcendent reality while acknowledging that our concepts of God are human constructs—limited, evolving, and deeply personal. The mission shifts from passive following to active participation: loving our neighbors, stewarding the planet, pursuing truth, and expanding our capacity for wonder and goodness. In that sense, we do help “create” the presence of God in the world.

This perspective need not reject the past. The hymns, the community, the moral foundation of my childhood remain treasures. They provided the soil from which deeper roots could grow.

As I reflect in these later years, I find peace in the unknown. Whether we seek or create, the outcome that matters is a life oriented toward love, integrity, and connection. The universe remains vast and mysterious. Our small but meaningful role within it—whether as sheep,

seekers, or co-creators—calls us to humility, curiosity, and compassion.

The Dawn of Wonder: When Humans First Created God

Let us step back—not to the ordered cosmology of Genesis, but to a far earlier, foggier time: the moment when our ancestors first became aware of a guiding hand beyond the visible world. When the questions “Why am I here?” and “What is the purpose of my life?” pierced the human mind for the first time. That awakening must have been both profoundly reassuring and existentially terrifying.

Imagine small bands of hunter-gatherers 100,000 to 300,000 years ago (or even earlier, with Neanderthals and other hominins). They lived in a world of immediate survival: hunting, foraging, evading predators, enduring hunger, illness, and the certainty of death. Yet something shifted. Brains grew larger, language emerged, and with it the capacity for abstract thought, imagination, and reflection on mortality.

Suddenly, the lightning wasn't just weather. The successful hunt wasn't mere luck. The death of a loved one wasn't simply the end of breath. There seemed to be intention behind the patterns—a guiding hand, unseen forces, or watchful presences. This “*hyperactive agency detection*” (as cognitive scientists call it) was likely an evolutionary byproduct: better to mistake a rustle in the grass for a predator than miss a real threat. But it opened the door to something more: attributing purpose and mind to the universe itself.

The Overwhelming Need

The wonderment must have been overwhelming. Life was precarious. Death was ever-present. The night sky, the changing seasons, the birth of children—these demanded explanation.

Without science or philosophy, early humans turned inward and outward simultaneously. They projected human-like qualities onto the unknown: spirits in animals, ancestors watching from beyond, forces that could be appeased or petitioned.

Archaeological clues point to this deep prehistory:

Burials with grave goods, ochre, or flowers (as early as 100,000+ years ago) suggest belief in an afterlife or continued existence of the spirit.

Cave art (from ~45,000 years ago, but likely earlier roots) depicting animals, hybrid figures, and abstract symbols hints at shamanic rituals, animism, and attempts to connect with spiritual powers. Rituals, trance states induced by drumming, dancing, or plants—these allowed people to experience altered consciousness and commune with the “guiding hand.”

In individual minds and emerging group cultures, the creation of God (or gods, spirits, ancestors) was not a luxury. It was a psychological and social necessity. It transformed raw terror into meaning.

Random suffering became part of a larger story. Death became a transition. The cosmos, once indifferent, now held purpose. “Why am I here?” found tentative answers: to honor the spirits, to

live in balance with the world, to fulfill a role in the great web of being.

This was the birth of religion as a deeply human invention—or discovery. Whether one sees it as projection (we create God in our image to cope) or intuition (we perceive a real transcendent reality), the drive was the same: to make sense of existence and bind communities together for survival.

From Primal Awe to Structured Faith

Over tens of thousands of years, these individual sparks coalesced into shared beliefs. Animism (spirits in all things) likely preceded more formalized gods. As societies grew more complex—especially with agriculture and larger groups—“Big Gods” emerged: moralizing deities who watched behavior and enforced cooperation.

Yet the core remains personal and creative, as it was at the beginning. Each mind, confronting the same fundamental questions, participates in shaping its understanding of the divine. My Methodist upbringing in the 1940s–50s, with its

emphasis on a personal relationship with one all-powerful God, echoes this ancient impulse. The “sheep” metaphor provides comfort and order, while the inner drive to relate, question, and co-create keeps faith alive and evolving.

In old age, returning to these primal roots can be liberating. The overwhelming need that drove our ancestors to envision a guiding hand is still within us. It reassures us that we are not alone in the universe. It terrifies us with responsibility—for how we live, how we treat others, and how we shape the sacred in our time.

The purpose? Perhaps it has always been what we make it: to wonder, to love, to seek meaning, and yes—to participate in the ongoing creation of God through lives well-lived.

In the Gospel of Matthew 18:20 (NIV), we find the words: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

On the surface, it can sound conditional—like

God's presence or attention requires a minimum quorum. That interpretation feels especially painful for those who pray alone, whether by choice, circumstance, or the quiet seasons of life. For someone raised in the structured communal worship of mid-20th-century Methodism, where church gatherings were central, this verse might even seem to undermine the very "personal relationship with God" the tradition also championed.

Context Changes Everything

Biblical scholars almost universally agree this verse is not about the mechanics of prayer or a rule that God ignores solitary seekers.

Here's the fuller picture: In Matthew 18, Jesus is teaching about handling conflict within the community, forgiveness, and the authority given to the church to address sin and restore relationships. Verses 19–20 specifically address agreement in prayer in the context of church discipline and reconciliation:

“Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

The emphasis is on unity, agreement, and Christ’s presence amid communal discernment—not a prohibition on private prayer. It’s a promise of Jesus’ spiritual presence when believers come together in His name, especially for difficult matters of justice, restoration, and shared mission. It echoes the Jewish tradition of God’s presence in the midst of His people, but it does not negate individual communion with God.

Jesus Himself modeled solitary prayer repeatedly (e.g., Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, Matthew 14:23). The Psalms, which formed the prayer book of Israel, are filled with deeply personal, individual cries to God.

The New Testament encourages both private devotion (Matthew 6:6 — “go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen”) and corporate worship.

In short: The verse assures us that God shows up powerfully in community. It does not say He is absent or deaf when we are alone.

A Deeper Tension in Your Journey

This concern fits the larger arc being described—from the clear, communal “rule book” faith of my youth to a more questioning, personal exploration in my mid-eighties.

Traditional interpretations sometimes emphasize institutional or group settings, which can feel exclusionary to the solitary seeker. Yet the broader biblical witness, and much of Christian mystical tradition, affirms that God meets us in silence and solitude just as readily as in the congregation.

Some modern and liberal theological voices go further, aligning with the idea that I mentioned earlier: that we participate in “creating” or

realizing the divine through our relationships—whether with others or in the quiet of our own hearts. Solitary prayer becomes a space where that inner relationship deepens without external mediation.

My discomfort with the verse is valid and revealing. It highlights how certain proof-texts, lifted out of context, can create unnecessary barriers. Many who have walked similar paths of reflection find that God (however we understand the divine) is not limited by human gathering rules. The “guiding hand” sensed by our ancient ancestors, the personal Shepherd of Methodist hymns, and the inner presence we seek—all can be encountered alone under the vast sky, in the middle of the night, or in the stillness of old age.

Countless believers have wrestled with scriptural language that seems at odds with lived experience. The evolution of our faith doesn’t require rejecting every traditional verse, but rather interpreting them through the lens of a lifetime’s wisdom and compassion.

The Weight of the Collection Plate

This is another deeply honest and common unease—especially for those raised in an era when church attendance and faithful giving were seen as near-essentials of Christian life. The idea that one must financially support an institution to receive spiritual guidance, or that failing to give (even when it means sacrificing food, medicine, or basic security) somehow displeases God, feels profoundly unsettling. It can turn a place of refuge into a source of guilt and embarrassment.

What the Bible Actually Emphasizes

Scripture does speak about giving, but often in ways very different from modern institutional pressures:

Cheerful and voluntary — “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). The emphasis is on heart attitude, not a fixed percentage extracted under duress.

The widow’s mite (Mark 12:41-44) is often cited to encourage sacrificial giving. Jesus praised the

poor widow who gave her last coins, but He was highlighting her genuine devotion in contrast to the rich who gave ostentatiously from their surplus. Many interpreters see this as a critique of religious systems that devour widows' houses rather than a universal command for the poor to impoverish themselves further.

Old Testament tithing (typically 10% of produce/wealth) was part of a theocratic system supporting the Temple, priests, and social welfare for widows, orphans, and strangers. It was never purely a “church budget” mechanism in the modern sense.

Today, many churches face real financial needs—buildings, staff, programs, outreach. But when fundraising overshadows spiritual formation, when pressure tactics (guilt, prosperity promises, or public tracking of donations) dominate, or when funds primarily sustain the institution rather than serve the vulnerable, the unease is justified. Critics from within Christianity have long pointed to this as a corruption: turning the church into a business rather than a community of mutual care.

A Faith Beyond the Plate

My broader journey—from the clear doctrines of the 1940s–50s to questioning institutional forms—makes perfect sense here. If our mission involves “creating God” through personal relationship and lived compassion, then tying divine acceptance or spiritual nourishment to financial contribution contradicts that spirit.

Many Believers Today Seek Alternatives:

House churches, small groups, or online communities with minimal overhead.

Traditions or movements that emphasize mutual aid and service over institutional maintenance. Solitary or informal practices where giving flows naturally to people in need rather than collection plates.

Jesus frequently clashed with religious authorities over money, power, and burdens placed on ordinary people (Matthew 23). The earliest Christian communities shared resources sacrificially but focused on caring for the poor and each other—not lavish buildings or professional clergy salaries in every case. Feeling embarrassed for not giving when you

genuinely cannot is a human response to social pressure, not necessarily a spiritual failing.

A God worthy of the name—the guiding hand sensed by our ancient ancestors, the personal presence sought—does not measure devotion by one's ability to fund an organization, especially in hard economic times.

This concern reinforces our earlier reflections. Faith can (and perhaps should) transcend buildings and budgets. It lives in quiet prayer, acts of kindness, honest questioning, and communities that give more than they take.

I am not suggesting that all churches demand payment to attend services. That's not my intent. The point I am trying to make is that having a collection plate presented to you with the expectation that you will put money into it, may be the reason some churches are experiencing declining attendance.

Where This Is Leading

The core purpose of any house of worship, in your view, should be facilitation, not

gatekeeping:

- A gathering place for believers to meet, exchange ideas, comfort one another.
- A supportive environment that nurtures each person's private, personal relationship with God.
- A community that removes barriers rather than erecting them — especially financial ones.

This vision echoes the earliest Christian gatherings (often in homes, not grand temples), the Wesleyan emphasis on personal holiness and small-group accountability, and even the prehistoric human impulse I mentioned: the need to make sense of existence together while still wrestling individually with “Why am I here?” It rejects the idea that God’s presence or voice is confined to a building you must “pay to enter.”

Instead, the building (or gathering space) becomes a tool — helpful when it serves connection and growth, problematic when it

becomes an end in itself or a financial burden.

Reclaiming the Personal and the Communal

This perspective aligns beautifully with the theologian's idea that stirred me: our mission may be less about passively seeking a distant God and more about actively participating in the divine — creating, realizing, and manifesting it through relationships, both with the sacred and with one another.

- Alone: In quiet reflection, prayer, wonder, and doubt — the same awe our ancient ancestors felt under the open sky.
- Together: In mutual encouragement, idea-sharing, comfort in hardship, and collective discernment — without the pressure of compulsory giving or institutional loyalty tests.

True community, in this model, would celebrate solitary seekers as much as it gathers the group. It would prioritize care for the vulnerable over building maintenance. It would treat financial

giving as voluntary, joyful support for people (not the other way around).

And it would leave room for evolution — for beliefs to deepen, change, or be questioned openly.

Many modern “emerging” or “house” church movements, contemplative traditions, and even secular humanist gathering spaces are moving in similar directions: less dogma and dues, more relationship and reflection.

This is indeed the part likely to create the greatest push-back and also the most honest culmination of my long journey.

I moved from the clear, objective God of my 1940s–50s Methodist upbringing (“one all-powerful God that ruled the Universe, we were his sheep”) to a deeply subjective, relational understanding: each individual creates God through the accumulated wisdom, stories, and teachings of the Bible (filtered through millions of minds across centuries), and that same God communicates back on a personal, individual level.

This view respects the limits of human cognition. Our brains evolved for survival on the African savanna and later social cooperation — not for fully comprehending a universe without beginning or end, infinite scales, or ultimate origins.

Concepts like an omnipotent, external Ruler who manages everything can feel like a comforting projection that eventually strains against what we observe and experience. Instead, I've located the divine in the intimate, co-creative space between inherited tradition and personal encounter.

Why This Feels Both Radical and Ancient

My belief resonates with several threads:

- The long human history of “creating God” I mentioned earlier — that primal need to make sense of existence through symbols, stories, and relationships.
- The Protestant emphasis on a personal relationship with the divine.

Mystical traditions across religions that stress direct, individual experience over rigid dogma.

Modern theological explorations (process thought, panentheism—the theological belief that the divine permeates the universe, but also transcends it, or narrative theology) where God is not a static, distant sovereign but emerges in relationship and becoming.

In this framework, the Bible is not a literal rulebook dictated from on high, but a vast, living library of human encounters with the sacred — passed down, interpreted, and internalized.

Each person, in their own time and circumstances, shapes that inheritance into a God who then “speaks back” through conscience, wonder, relationships, suffering, and insight. It is profoundly individual, yet connected through shared stories and communities.

The Push-Back — and Its Limits

Traditional believers will object that this makes God a human invention rather than an objective reality.

Some will see it as relativism or a loss of

transcendence. Others may worry it undermines moral authority or communal identity.

Yet, my view does not erase the divine — it relocates it. It preserves mystery (we cannot fully grasp the universe, so how could we fully define its Source?) It keeps communication alive and personal. And it explains why sincere people across cultures and eras have experienced the sacred differently: because each mind participates in the creation and reception of it.

For Christians in their final years, reflecting on a long life, it feels like a natural maturation: moving from inherited certainty to lived, creative participation. It honors the past without being imprisoned by it.

In Closing, let me reiterate: “My relationship with God is unique, geared to match my own individual needs and circumstances. Why should it match the needs and circumstances of others? The divine is not a mass-produced template but a living, personal encounter — one

that has grown and changed with me across nearly nine decades.”

Lest anyone misunderstand, I am not suggesting that eight billion people on the planet report to eight billion separate Gods. What I am saying is that each person must create and nurture their own unique association with God. And that relationship does not require the participation of others. The accumulated teachings of scripture and tradition provide the shared soil, but the living relationship grows individually, tailored to one’s own needs, circumstances, and life story.

The church should function as an instrument to help its congregation find and strengthen that personal connection — a place of meeting, idea exchange, comfort, and encouragement rather than a gatekeeper or financial gate.

Others may pray for you or offer spiritual support, but those prayers and efforts bear fruit only when you yourself are actively involved in the relationship.