



April 1, 2026

MESSENGER

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WHO'S MADE IN WHOSE IMAGE?

When Michelangelo thought about how to portray on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, the creation of the first man, the only models he had to work from were humans. That's why both Adam and God look like men. The artist painted Adam naked. To portray God, he flipped to a mirror-image of Adam, put a robe on him, gave him a gray beard and surrounded him with a bunch of chubby angels. He saw God as an older (and wiser), clothed, connected (to his angel-gang) version of Adam. Michelangelo was doing what humans have always done: **making God in his image** --- which is backwards!

Even if we know theoretically that God must be unimaginably "other," far beyond any picture our minds can form, we still can't avoid reducing him to understandable human terms. We inevitably **make God in our image**. The many godlets human societies have worshipped in the history of the race are the result of this near-sightedness. We see divine activity in the natural world, so we formulate godlets of water, or of fire, or of love. We capitalize them into Water, or Fire, or Love. We turn statues of them into idols and name them Poseidon, or Vulcan, or Aphrodite. We build magnificent temples to them and honor them with extravagant sacrifices, even human lives. We fight wars on their behalf against enemies who make the mistake of worshiping different godlets.

The Old Testament Prophet Isaiah expresses God's insistence that we fully embrace the awesome mystery of who he is, rather than reducing him to manageable dimensions:

*You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.*

Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.

I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior.
I am the one who declared and saved and proclaimed, not some strange god among you;
you are my witnesses, says the Lord, and I am God.

Indeed, since that day I am he; there is no one who can deliver from my hand;

I work, and who can hinder it? (Isaiah 43:10-12).

The phrases in bold repeat the theme over and over again: God is exclusive; God is the one and only. We can't change that; we need to respect it.

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There's another repeated theme in these verses; it's about **our role** as his followers: "You are my witnesses" (repeated twice) . . . "whom I have chosen" . . . "you know . . . believe . . . understand that I am he." Once we see the light about who he truly is, we will be able to identify "some strange god among you." As "witnesses," it's our responsibility to explain all of this to others.

Holy Week is a time in the Christian calendar when we celebrate the fact that God entered his created world **in Jesus Christ**. He took on a form we can understand so that he could live and fellowship with us, suffer and die as we do, then overcome those dark forces by his Resurrection. But let's not make the mistake of thinking that's **all** of who God is. Some Christians unconsciously try to fit all of God into the human personification of Jesus. While he was here in our little dimension of reality, Jesus himself prayed to the **greater awesome Reality of the God** who is beyond all "reality" in our experience, beyond the earth on which we live, beyond the ever-expanding universe in which our earth is a tiny speck, beyond all our images of him, far beyond the edges of our imagination.

In the fourth century, the great St. Augustine wrote, "If you comprehend it, it is not God."¹ Every attempt to define God is destined to fail. "We want a God who reflects and confirms our biases, our economic, political and security systems."² The Reality about God is not multiple choice; we can't select the version of him we're comfortable with. Through Isaiah, God seems to be saying: "I'm your only option; deal with it! Don't keep trying to give me a makeover in your image!"

Pastor George Van Alsine

¹ You can read Augustine's sermon on this subject at <https://cit.catholic.edu/if-you-comprehend-he-is-not-god>

² Quote from devotional blogsite <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/letting-god-be-god/#:~:text=The%20human%20ego%20wants%20to,and%20our%20understandi ng%20of%20God>