



What we know about God

**- insights from
the Twenty-first Century**

Kristina Post



Kristina Post is a music- and math-teacher in the Swedish small town of Motala. She is also a choirmaster and active in the Uniting Church of Sweden.

To reflect upon all issues life brings together with friends and try to put the outcome into practice is one of her bigger interests.

I sang a song.

“God, in Your power, in Your power; simpler, braver, more reasonable...”

It touched a longing in me. Theology is important. What we believe and think is important. On a basic level, it guides how we act, whether we’re aware of it or not. That’s why I got this desire to write down everything I can come up with as important; what people have reached as an insight in their experience of life and God; and make it as simple as possible.

This is not a theological treatise! You could read a lot of valuable books which dig deeper into everything I have written about. But right now, I hope that you would rather dig deeper inwardly and listen to God’s voice speaking in your hearts, and then talk about what you hear! Maybe this book could be a starting point or even a speaking partner in your conversation.

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Preface for my English-speaking readers

Welcome into the heart of a member of the diverse Swedish Christianity! I am not a scholar in theology, but I was brought up with a warm and heartfelt trust in God, which has influenced my life profoundly. You could say that my theological orientation is inductive; built on experience. So, please welcome to share my thoughts! I reach out from my heart, hoping to meet your hearts out there.

My experience is that theology world-wide is growing so fast it's almost bursting these days. Due to globalization; encounters with other religions and cultures; the pandemic, which has turned so much upside down; the climate running wild with catastrophes and the flood of refugees in its wake; nothing else could be possible.

My perception is that our relationship with God grows because of all this. And we try to express it in a theology that corresponds to the experience. That is not at all easy! Our theologies carry a load of previously phrased God images. How could a deepened God image be made visible and noticeable without turning over everything that has been? Or – maybe some old-fashioned views would do well to be overthrown? How to do that without crushing what we don't want to crush? To come up with new thoughts is difficult! Finally, I understand what Jesus meant when he said that you can't pour new wine in old wineskins... He came up with new ideas and confronted hard resistance.

I have no ambition to present any revolutionary new thoughts in this book. Rather, I'm looking for what we have found that we have in common. However, I do

regard matters from a Twenty-first Century point of view. I try to follow our modern insights of God and ourselves in a logical way, and maybe the conclusions may seem revolutionary to some – I don't know?

I sang a song. “God, in Your power, in Your power; simpler, braver, more reasonable...”¹ It touched a longing in me. Theology is important. What we believe and think is important. On a basic level, it guides how we act, whether we're aware of it or not. That's why I got this desire to write down everything I can come up with as important; what people have reached as an insight in their experience of life and God; and make it as simple as possible. This is not a theological treatise! You could read a lot of valuable books which dig deeper into everything I have written about. But right now, I hope that you would rather dig deeper inwardly and listen to God's voice speaking in your hearts, and then talk about what you hear! Maybe this book could be a starting point or even a speaking partner in your conversation.

¹ Lyrics: Lena Bergström, music: Lena Wohlfeil, listen on Spotify
<https://open.spotify.com/track/18yrjCS07v1nNgTAzRPOCt?si=159f2ba947c4469f>

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Introduction

In all times and all places, people have had trouble *not* believing in God. There has to be something greater than ourselves – this insight we have carried with us throughout the ages. Of course, some have turned their backs on the whole matter for different reasons. I won't argue with them – every person has to find their own path. But I long to summarize experiences made of this being, who is greater than ourselves and that we sometimes call God, and to make that summary as simple as possible. Anyhow, we need to remember that no words will ever be sufficient. Some people prefer to talk about “a higher being” or “life force” because they regard the concept “God” to be so polluted by misunderstandings and limitations that it is impossible to use it any longer when they try to describe this force they experience personally, but find no words for.

Some attempt to talk about “the God of your understanding”. But I intend to use the word God, and try to fill the concept with something meaningful, relevant, and reasonable; such things as people have experienced and feel grounded in.

My starting point is that I am a Christian. Christians base their understanding of God on how Jesus from Nazareth lived and taught. It may seem strange that God would swoop into our world and pick exactly that little country – why there and nowhere else and why at exactly that time? But I guess that we will have to let go of that question. Anyway, it is clear that Jesus meant his message to be for everyone on the entire planet. Humanity had made insights of God long before Jesus, insights that we still find relevant. But it is impossible to write about the many experiences of God and skip

what Jesus had to say. Accordingly, I will return to him later in the book.²

When we, after much trouble and ado, have reached an opinion that we regard as a fundamental truth, we usually call that a dogma.³

Dogmas can be handy; they give our existence stability and a worldview that helps us deal with all that we meet in life. Still, there is a great risk that our dogmas will become rigid and turn into something we quarrel over and use as a cudgel. They may also, in the light of new insights, show up as totally wrong. ("The earth is flat" is one example.)

I think that if we want to summarize our insights into some kind of list of dogmas, we have to practice deep humility, since what we want to put down goes beyond

² I will be using the concept "we" many times – most likely because I always feel like a part of a context. Sometimes "we" will refer to all of humanity; sometimes to "all of us Christians in Sweden"; or "I and my congregation"; or "I and my friends". Please be a little observant of the fact that the implication may differ! When do you feel included in this "we"? The feeling of belonging is important. On the most basic level, we are still one as parts of the same humanity. Are there boundaries we might be able to dismantle?

³ A dictionary explains the word *dogma* as "a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true." I wonder which authority they refer to? It sounds like dogmas are written in stone. Maybe I refer more to paradigms than dogmas? "Paradigm" is a Greek word, meaning something like thought patterns. I have heard it used as "thought patterns, or widely spread concepts that are so deeply founded so as people don't question them or maybe even aren't conscious about them." But I would like to reclaim the word dogma! Who is that authority? Maybe it is you and me, reading this text?

words. The contents of the concepts are broader than the words suggest. Nowadays, we say the codes of conduct or attitudes we agree upon at a workplace, or a school should be “living documents” that we must always come back to, re-evaluate, and deepen. Maybe that’s how we should look at our dogmas about our existence as well. Maybe we should look at our knowledge as a tree? The trunk is evident, fairly easy to agree upon. But then it branches out in different directions and has consequences, out to the smallest twigs and buds. Every tree that is real lives and grows. That is how we ought to regard our existential dogmas as well. This book represents what we have learned up to now when I write this, in 2021. I look forward to seeing how this knowledge develops!

When does belief turn into knowledge? We say we *believe* in God. When we move around in this greatness that we can’t control, weigh, or measure, we say that we *believe*. But a belief that turns into a deeply felt experience, stops being a belief. It turns into certainty. That’s where we can start talking about the *knowledge* of God. An experience, shared by many, taking visible expressions. Even if words are not enough for it, it turns into a shared knowledge we can build our lives upon. This doesn’t necessarily imply that our lives will turn into a path strewn with roses, but that there is a strength and joy to support us.

I hope this book will become a living document, which will encourage and inspire us in our existence together – as we feel the world wavering due to things like climate crisis, globalization, refugee flows, hunger for power, and fear. We need to be able to look into each other’s eyes, no matter our cultural background, and recognize ourselves and our common background in

each other. Only thus can we move towards the future and build something together that will be both long-term and sustainable.

In this book, I look for a belief that makes sense. I think we all feel better if our beliefs make sense in a heartfelt way. This book contains a number of short chapters concerning different aspects of our experiences of God. It holds no claims whatsoever to cover everything. But at the end of every chapter, I have dared to put to words a few points that could be our current dogmas about God and ourselves.

Now it is your turn! Do you feel at home in what I have written? If our existence is like I think, our understanding is built upon conversations and fellowship. If this book might be the starting point for conversations and our continued growth, that is sufficient a reason for why I should write it.

Suggestions for study groups:

- Start by reading the book individually, in order to get the bigger picture.
- Each person should pick a chapter or form a question of their own choice.
- Start meeting with the study group. Each time you meet, talk about the chapter or question one of you has chosen. Continue until everyone has covered their topic. If you have more questions or thoughts, do another round. Keep on meeting until you feel content and ready to move on.
- The atmosphere of the meetings should be one of openness, curiosity, and generosity. Try to practice the thesis of chapter seventeen – to leave space for the diversity of your thoughts, doubts, discussions, and divergence. Meet each other with acceptance even when you have different opinions. Dare to try new views! Keep those who bring fruits of love.
- Never stop talking about what is important in life! Spread the conversation to new people. And if you find some inspiration in this book, try to let the ideas come to life! You may be happily surprised by the results.

The most simple truth

This little “pre-chapter” may be regarded as a summary or as the core of my outset for the rest of the book. That, which I experience with such strength that my belief has turned into knowledge, and that I understand that I share with many others. We may fall out with each other concerning details, or how to put one thing or another, or how to handle our different cultures, but this initial list is the heart of faith, as many Christians (me included) regard it.

To Jesus, the children were very important. He said that unless we don’t become like little children, we won’t be able to enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ This must mean that the heart of the faith is so simple that you can comprehend it even before you have a language. It comes down to intimacy, trust, and reliance. Maybe the meaning of life is intimacy?

After this page you may stop reading. Or continue and get a little deeper a few pages more.

⁴ Matthew 18:1-4 All Bible quotes in this book are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

- ✚ God loves me.
- ✚ God is always close to me.
- ✚ God is for ever.
- ✚ When I die, God is there also. In God you live forever.
- ✚ God is always with me, and shares everything, no matter what happens to me.
- ✚ I can always talk with God about everything.
- ✚ Jesus showed us how God is.
- ✚ Jesus was killed but was resurrected. That's why we know that life is stronger than death and love is stronger than evil.
- ✚ Jesus loves the little children⁵. God's love is for EVERYBODY, always and everywhere.
- ✚ Love is the only gift which you get more of the more you give away.

⁵ This is a song many of us know from Sunday School, but few know the background. The lyrics was written by Clarence Herbert Woolston, 1856 – 1927, a Baptist reverend in the northeastern part of the USA, and he borrowed the melody from a popular song from the American civil war, "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!", composed by George Frederick Root, 1820 – 1895. The verse we use to sing is only the refrain of the original song. Woolston points out that we are equal in the eyes of God, no matter our skin color. That was an important issue as early as in the 1860s, and we still struggle with it.