

On a long flight from Melbourne to Athens, an Australian carpenter, an Indian college professor in hydrology, and I had a memorable late-night theological discussion. The three of us were seated in one row, and the subject of God came up because our meals were accompanied by a little card on which was printed a short prayer of thanksgiving.

The professor made some remarks about *not* being thankful to *any* of the gods for this particular food. The carpenter composed a prayer of complaint. And the discussion was off and running.

The carpenter declared his theology had a lot to do with fleas and a dog.

Arguing whether or not a God exists is like fleas arguing whether or not the dog exists. Arguing over the correct name of God is like fleas arguing over the name of the dog. And arguing over whose notion of God is correct is like fleas arguing over who owns the dog.

We three ate our meal in silence for a while—digesting the godforsaken meal and the Australian version of theological Truth.

Later on, the Indian professor and I stood in the forward alcove of the 747 where the galley and rest rooms are, comparing the route map with what we could see out the porthole in the door.

Across Australia, Indonesia, to Singapore; across

Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and into Athens. Much of what we crossed was ocean.

Theology again. The Indian professor of hydrology this time. Hydrology is “the scientific study of the properties, distribution, and effects of water in the atmosphere, on the earth’s surface, and in soil and rocks.” He had this printed on his business card since he always had to explain about hydrology. In sum, a water expert.

He noted that we had just left a country where people worshiped the sun—on the beach with most or all of their clothes removed. And we were flying over countries whose people believed it was the will of Allah that women should be completely covered, even on beaches. The name of God varied from country to country; the holy book was not the same; the rituals and dogmas and routes to heaven were not the same. And so certain were the followers of the different religions of their rectitude, they would gladly war with one another—kill each other—to have their beliefs and metaphors prevail. Yet in this same plane, flying peacefully along, are these same people.

Clearly this troubled the professor—grieved him.

He shook his head and asked why this must be so. Why? Why?

The professor pointed out the Indian Ocean beneath us at the moment.

He spoke of water, his specialty.

WATER  
ON MARS!  
DISPLACED  
BY WIND  
IN NEWS!

“Water is everywhere and in all living things—we cannot be separated from water. No water, no life. Period. Water comes in many forms—liquid, vapor, ice, snow, fog, rain, hail. But no matter the form, it’s still water.

“Human beings give this stuff many names in many languages, in all its forms. It’s crazy to argue over what its true name is. Call it what you will, there is no difference to the water. It is what it is.

“Human beings drink water from many vessels—cups, glasses, jugs, skins, their own hands, whatever. To argue about which container is proper for the water is crazy. The container doesn’t change the water.

“Some like it hot, some like it cold, some like it iced, some fizzy, some with stuff mixed in with it—alcohol, coffee, whatever. No matter. It does not change the nature of the water.

“Never mind the name or the cup or the mix. These are not important.

“What we have in common is thirst. Thirst!

“Thirst for the water of Life!”

As it is with water, so is it with God.

“I don’t know much about God,” said the professor of hydrology. “All I know is water. And that we are momentary waves in some great everlasting ocean, and the waves and the water are one.”

He poured us each a paper cup full of water and we drank.