

The New Adam

A Homily Preached to the Students at Boston College 10/12/86
by Dom Sebastian Moore, O.S.B.

The statement, in Genesis and in many other places in the bible, that the human being is “in the image of God”, reflects a universal human sense of being God-like. Aristotle calls the human intellect “the power to become all things and to make all things.” This is only the philosopher’s version of the sense of the human as mirroring the infinite.

But the sense of ourselves as Godlike is stuck. It would, if allowed to be itself, move us out into the whole world, to identify with all beings in love, and to participate, through death, in the entire cosmic process. Instead, our sense of being Godlike is arrested at ourselves: I exalt myself above others and in competition with God, I hold back from identifying with others, I fear my sexuality in its dual role of fostering intimacy and of involving me in the cosmic life process, and I shun death as the derisory denial of my divinity.

This arrested condition of human Godhead is dramatized in the story of the Fall. Adam and Eve become intoxicated with knowing, which is the most obvious mark of our divinity, and yield to the temptation to hold this divinity in themselves, to become God. The immediate result is shame at their naked sexuality, the sign of their being part of the cosmic process, the consequent mutual alienation of the sexes, and a state of economic conflict over natural resources no longer trusted to be enough.

In Jesus we contemplate the human being free of the fearful arresting or holding-to-ourselves of our divine nature. In him, the divine nature flows out to all in love, healing the sick, liberating the oppressed and the obsessed, this outflowing reaching its climax and full meaning in death. On the cross we

see him as victim of our arrested divinity in all its political consequences, and as reversing this arrest by dying willingly, thus showing death as what it truly is, the liberation of our divine nature into total participation in the cosmos. There is a profound unity between these two aspects of his death: its being at our hands, and its being the reversal of our refusal of death (paralleled by our refusal of sex as an act of total surrender to love, to life). He receives the death that we inflict in order to keep it away from ourselves—for this is the psychology of human sacrifice in all its forms, from the Aztecs to political character assassination—and reveals it to us as the gateway into the fullness of our divine being.

This account of the matter is found in the earliest evidence we have of faithful thinking about the crucifixion of Jesus: an early Christian hymn quoted by Paul in his letter to the Philippians (2, 6–11). The hymn has had many interpretations. The one I think works best is that of J. Murphy-O’Connor, O.P. who delivered it in one of the Humanities Lectures here at Boston College. The opening phrase, “being in the form of God”, does not—as has been widely assumed—refer to the divinity of Christ as later conceptualized, but to his being in the image of God as the human being is. Unlike other human beings, however, he does not cling to his divine character, as does the human prototype Adam. With this understood, the whole thing flows beautifully. It is contrasting the new Adam with the old. I paraphrase in brackets.

Being in the form of God [as Adam is]
he did not count equality with God
a thing to be grasped [as Adam does]
but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,
being born in the likeness of human beings.
And being found in human form he humbled himself
and became obedient [*obedience* of the form to its source,
that Adam lacks)
unto death, death on a cross.
Therefore God has highly exalted him [that is, the form

becomes *transparent* to its source]
and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father.

The divinity of Jesus is thus stated at the end, not at the beginning, of the hymn which is telling how *a human being* became known as God.

The following passage is from a paper by Moore called "Jesus the Liberator of Desire"

This confusion may lie at the root of all evil—and did not Becker, non believer, say that the root of all evil was our denial of creaturehood?

Could the psychology of Jesus be one in which this confusion was not made, in which the identity with the divine ground was lived but never translated into the order of privilege that pertains to the world of thing and language? This would make the sinlessness of Jesus his divine identity in action. This interpretation fits in with an understanding of the great kenosis hymn in Philippians 2, that is gaining ground among scholars. It runs that Jesus "being in the form of God (as all humans are) did not translate this into being for himself (as all humans do) but on the contrary took our humanness on an extraordinary way, its true way, a way of total self-dispossession, of eventual ego-lessness, in which (upsetting all our ideas of what befits divinity) he made manifest the ultimate mystery that itself is poor, for-all, has no possessions, makes rank meaningless, which fact became fully manifest in Jesus raised from the dead and receiving the name beyond names."

The figure on the facing page is the Japanese word for "self-emptying love":

