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THE NATURE OF MAN AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

WE have seen in our generation a wholesale repudiation of the Classico-Christian conception of Man. In its place we have seen the emergence of a very different conception, in which the specifically Christian virtues of mercy and equal justice, to mention only one or two examples, are held up for ridicule and regarded as signs of weakness rather than of strength.

Once more the question of man's essential nature is in the melting-pot. "In our day", says the Report presented to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 1942, "it is more and more coming to appear that the central area of conflict is in the doctrine of Man." The report adds: "nothing is more important for the world of to-day than a recovery of the true Christian doctrine of man."¹

The Scriptures cover a wide range of human history and experience. They show us man in his original perfectness, his degradation and his recovered glory. They constitute the only authentic record of the life of the only perfect Man that has ever walked this earth, the Man Christ Jesus, Who, as God and Man, is both the Judge and the Saviour of fallen humanity. It is to the Scriptures that we must turn for our delineation of the Christian doctrine of Man.

We find there two things:

I. THE UNITY OF MAN AS SOUL AND BODY

There are two elements in the constitution of man—*body* and *soul*. Through the body, which is a *material* substance, man has affinity with the rest of created matter. "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."² Through the soul, which is a *spiritual* substance, he has affinity with his Creator. "The spirit shall return unto God Who gave it."³ Personality resides in the soul and can survive the disintegration of the physical organism. The dead are "in Sheol", "asleep", "at rest"; but they are still *alive*. Nevertheless

¹ *God's Will in Our Time*, pp. 7, 20.

² Gen. iii. 19.

³ Eccles. xii. 7.

their existence is a shadowy one until they are once more clothed with a body. The Bible never seems to envisage a final separation of soul and body. We shall always remain *physical*, albeit the new post-resurrection physical organism will be of a far higher order than our present earthly tegument. "We know", says St. Paul, "that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life."¹ "We wait", he says, "for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."² Without both substances, soul and body, the one expressing itself through the other, human personality is regarded as incomplete.

Two considerations bear this out:

(a) *The Hebraic Psychology.* Just as the O.T. insistence on monotheism was a necessary preparation for the revelation in the N.T. of the Divine Trinity, so the monism of the Hebrew psychology safeguarded the Church in New Testament times and afterwards from the dangers of an undue dichotomy. This, as we know, was a real menace when the Church came into contact with the docetic tendencies of Hellenistic idealism. But the faith of the Church was anchored in the O.T. scriptures in which dualistic ideas had no place. Niebuhr says:

"In Hebrew thought the soul of man resides in his blood and the concept of an immortal mind in a mortal body remains unknown to the end. It is true that certain distinctions are gradually made. At first both *ruach* and *nephesh* mean little more than 'breath'; but they are gradually distinguished and *ruach* becomes roughly synonymous with spirit or *nous* and *nephesh* with soul or *psyche*. But, unlike Greek thought, this distinction does not lead to dualistic consequences. The monism of the Biblical view is something other than the failure to differentiate *physis*, *psyche* and *nous*, which characterised Greek thought before Anaxagoras; nor is it merely the consequence of an undeveloped psychology. It is ultimately derived from the Biblical view of God as the Creator and of the Biblical faith in the goodness of creation."³

(b) *The Incarnation.* 'Ο Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. This pregnant, arresting assertion in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel sets the divine seal upon the monism of the O.T. For when

¹ 2 Cor. v. 1-4.

² Rom. viii. 23.

³R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I. pp. 13, 14.

God in Christ invaded human nature in order to cleanse and restore it, He associated Himself with *total* humanity, soul and body. In the body He served and suffered and died. In the body, changed and glorified, He made Himself known to His wondering disciples after His resurrection. In the body He shall come again to receive His saints. Since Bethlehem the Incarnation is a permanent fact. The Lord Jesus Christ "being the Eternal Son of God, became man and so was and continueth to be God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man? Christ, the Son of God, became man *by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul*, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary".¹

"A true body and a reasonable soul." The realistic monism of the Scriptural view of man thus stands opposed to materialism on the one hand and to rationalism on the other. It stands opposed to all forms of naturalism which conceive of man in terms of natural vitality and Nietzschean will to power, a view which tends to moral nihilism, and to all forms of idealism which regard the mind as essentially good and the body as essentially evil. The body, as the use of the word *σῶμα* in Pauline soteriology shows, may be the *vehicle* of sin, but it is not in itself *evil*. Through the body man is joined to the rest of the world of matter which revelation assures us comes from the hand of God and is "very good". The seat of sin is not to be found in *material* things. The *σῶμα-σῆμα* equation is false. The body is not a tomb but a temple in which man may hold converse with the living God.

II. MAN'S SPECIAL RELATION TO GOD: THE "IMAGO DEI"

In the O.T. both *nephesh* and *ruach* = spirit or soul. At the same time the essential Hebrew monism comes out in that the locus of *nephesh* is stated to be "in the blood".² Gradually as we have seen, a distinction is drawn between *nephesh* = life principle in man (*ψυχή, vis vitalis*) and *ruach* = man's organ of relation to God (*πνεῦμα, spiritus*). The distinction is relative, not absolute. "Spirit" may be described as "the principle of the soul". It is this "soul-principle" or "spirit" in man which is capable of communion and fellowship with

¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism, 21, 22.

² Gen. ix. 4.

the Spirit of God. While, therefore, man through his body has affinity with the rest of the creatures, and like them is subject to the workings of natural law; through his soul or spirit he has affinity with the Creator Himself and possesses the power of transcending, not only the physical world around him, but *himself as part of that physical world*.

This means more than self-consciousness and the power of forming rational concepts. It means that human life points beyond itself to a larger whole in terms of which alone it receives meaning and purpose. This larger whole is God.

Augustine was, perhaps, the first to grasp the significance of self-transcendence. He saw that it places man so much outside of everything else that his true home can only be in God. We are reminded of this in the words of his familiar prayer, "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself; and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee". "To understand himself truly," says Niebuhr, man must "begin with a faith that he is understood from beyond himself, that he is known and loved of God and must find himself in terms of obedience to the divine will."¹ So, while animals remain content with life on a purely natural plane, man presses out towards God, in conscious fellowship with whom he finds his true being and satisfaction. Such is the high estimate of human nature implied in the Biblical conception of the *Imago Dei*. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."²

This *Imago Dei* is both man's glory and man's danger. Man's glory because he alone of all the creatures has by sovereign grace been singled out for the divine companionship; man's danger because this very Godlikeness can dazzle man into a crazy desire to make himself independent of the God Who gave it, gave it on the condition of loyal obedience and service. *This is man's terrible freedom* and has been abused over and over again. "Thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and there is none else beside me."³ Again and again this spirit of proud self-sufficiency has brought tragedy and suffering into the world. Scripture abounds in illustrations of this theme.

Man tries to establish a security to which he has no right. Security lies only in obedience to his Lord. God's gift to man of freedom means freedom to love and serve Him within

¹ Op. cit., p. 16.

² Gen. i. 26.

³ Isa. xlvi. 10.

the terms of that gift. Freedom conceived as self-liberation from internal and external restraints in the direction of a self-acquired autonomy is not only illusory, but is an act of transgression and rebellion in which man's consciousness of superior status among created things becomes a proud protest against his creaturely obligation, an obligation which, in the nature of the case, can never be outgrown. "Thou shalt have none other gods but me." "Idolatry", says Ivor F. Morris, "is man's attempt to make himself God. It is the attempt to seize the glory which rightly belongs to God alone."¹

How well this is illustrated in the Eden story. Adam is granted his high privilege and made aware of his limitation. One tree in the Garden is singled out as not to be touched. "Why", says Fisher's Catechism, "did God extend the rule and matter of man's covenant-obedience to a thing in itself indifferent?" The answer is: "That man's obedience might turn upon the precise point of obedience to the Will of God, which is the plainest evidence of true obedience."

When the Devil seduced Eve, he did it by depreciating the Deity and flattering humanity. He suggested that God was not all-loving and all-powerful. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of *any* tree of the garden?" The woman replies, "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of (this one) lest ye die". And the Serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die". A subtle insinuation that perhaps God has been unkind or unreasonable and will not be able to carry into effect any punishment for a breach of His arbitrary commands. To this is added a call to self-sufficiency—"God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and *ye shall be as God* (R.V.), knowing good and evil".

The condition of filial trust and obedience is broken and man becomes a fallen creature. The Law of God, once written in his heart and the mainspring of his joyous service, now hangs over his head as a decree of doom from which there can be no escape.

The Scriptural sequence is thus privilege: abuse: ruin: redemption. This stands in sharp contrast with the sequence offered by modern evolutionary philosophy. This is in terms of a gradual apotheosis of man largely as a result of man's

¹ Article "The Doctrine of the Imago Dei and Karl Barth", *Reformed Theological Review* (Australia), Nov. 1942, p. 27.

own successful adaptation to circumstance. The "Fall" is a "fall upwards"—a necessary stage in experience if man is to know and choose the better part. Both Pfeiderer and F. R. Tennant give an entirely empirical account of the origin of sin. Customary morality, says Tennant, leads to personal morality. Sin consists in satisfying the natural impulses (not in themselves sinful) after they have been discovered to be contrary to a sanction recognised as authoritative. Man was "natural" before he was "moral". "Sin", says J. M. Wilson, "was not an innovation, but the survival or misuse of habits and tendencies incidental to an earlier stage of development and whose sinfulness lies in their anachronism."

In the modern view, therefore, morality grows by a long process of trial and error and man by patient experiment fashions and discovers the law of his own being. Sin is a necessary element in the process of development and consists in failure to make a correct reading of experience.

All this is typically modernist, subjective and anthropocentric. It pushes God into the background and relegates Him to a purely passive, almost impersonal rôle. It is of a piece with the modernist doctrine of the origin of religion. Primitive man saw a few trees struck down by lightning and decided there must be some gods. Further reflection reduced the number of gods to one and made the Deity conform to the morality man was already hammering out for himself. Meanwhile God remains shy and elusive, not willing to commit Himself overmuch. Like Baal of old "He is talking or he is pursuing or he is in a journey or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked" if any intelligent theology is to be constructed adequate to men's needs.

The passive, lifeless God of modernism is not the God of the Scriptures, Who not only takes an active part in revelation but has also gifted man with something of His own wisdom. God needed not to sin in order that He might know good and evil. *No more did man*, whom "God made upright",¹ made "after His own image and likeness". The *possibilitas utriusque partis* was there, but its consequences were foreseen. "*In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.*" Man was not left in ignorance of the consequences of transgression. His fall was no fumbling after perfection but a deliberate

¹ Eccles. vii. 29.

breaking of the covenant of works and an example of wilful disobedience.

No covenant of works could ever be made with someone who lived in blissful ignorance of the difference between right and wrong. It implies the scriptural doctrine of Original Righteousness—*Justitia Originalis*, whereby man was constituted to be *like God* and thus capable of moral distinctions even before he fell. "He belongs", says Charles Hodge, "to the same order of being as God Himself."¹ In the Garden of Eden the Serpent tries to twist this affinity into an irrevocable antipathy—"ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil". What was made for communion and fellowship is turned into an instrument of separation and revolt.

Charles Hodge, in the work just quoted, shows how Original Righteousness includes three aspects:

(a) the perfect harmony and due subordination of all that constitutes man—his body to his soul, his affections to his will, his will to his reason, his reason to God;

(b) moral perfection—knowledge, righteousness and holiness (see Col. iii. 10, and Eph. iv. 24 for the implications of the *ἀνακατάνωσις*);

(c) dominion over the creatures as the bearer of God's image.

Niebuhr points out how, in the Protestant Symbols, the Image of God and Original Righteousness are one and the same. The Romish theologians, however, make a distinction between the two. Original Righteousness, instead of being regarded as concreated and natural, becomes a *donum superadditum*, a *supernatural* endowment, lost at the Fall, leaving human nature disorganised and man a prey to fleshly passions. This gives a degrading view of the original constitution of man's nature and is evidently founded on the Manichæan principle of the inherent evil of matter, since the union of soul and body provides no *Scriptural* basis for an evil tendency requiring supernatural correction. Niebuhr states:

"This official Catholic doctrine of a *donum superadditum* given to man beyond his natural endowments and lost in the Fall, leaving him thus with his natural virtues unimpaired, is very confusing. Ostensibly it is a supernatural virtue which is destroyed, but the capacity for it is the same as that which leads to sin, namely, man's self-transcendent spirit. The structure of man is therefore altered after the Fall. He has become an essentially Aristotelian man.

¹ *Syst. Theol.* II. p. 79.

He has a capacity for natural virtue which is subject to the limitations of man immersed in finiteness. He lacks the capacity for the eternal. If this were true, he would also lack the capacity for the sinful glorification of himself."¹

We are on surer ground when we regard Original Righteousness as a *natural* endowment concreated with man and coextensive with the *Imago Dei*. This was lost at the Fall and led to the corruption of man's whole nature, his reason, his will and his affections, "whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness and is of *his own nature* inclined to evil" (Article IX). Nothing less than sovereign grace can restore him to a holy walk with God. That grace was shown in Jesus Christ the only Redeemer of mankind, Who is Himself the *Imago Dei* and is "made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption".

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¹ Op. cit., p. 165 n.