

products of the fundamental monastic reality -- renunciation -- which was then, is now and ever shall be the foundation of Life, world without end. Amen.

ONE GOD

Now, there is another observation regarding the Prophets that needs to be made. It is that the communion certain of them -- and probably more than we know of -- enjoy with God is of like quality and quantity with that enjoyed by certain Christian saints. One gets the feeling that Elijah did very nicely in his piety without contemplating the Creator through a Crucifix. This has always been an embarrassing possibility for Christian theologians and is rather vividly suggested by the picture of St. Jerome *going* to a Rabbi at night for learning his Hebrew. It is an endless embarrassment for Calvin and many of the Fathers, who somewhat united in proclaiming that the ancients knew God, that is, Christ, in "shadow" form but that we know Him clearly in the Incarnation.

Now, while I am disinclined to throw my puny weight against the daunting witness of the Fathers and Reformers, who pretty much supported the Fathers in this particular, I do feel justified in making some delicate remarks to the general effect that, while I can understand and do heartily appreciate the urge of the Fathers to insist upon the uniqueness of the Incarnation

and the religion It produced and which they were in good conscience and for unimpeachable reasons attempting to propagate, I believe they did let their penchant for system get ahead of the facts of this matter.

The issue here is that of knowing the Father. It is an issue that gets lost in discussion of the Son. And, in my humble opinion, the tradition has tended to stray about here with less than happy effect. Jesus Himself is constantly referring matters to the Father, to "Him Who sent me." As far as He is concerned, the Goal of the religious quest is not Himself but the Father. In one Gospel He is always dodging the title "Son of God" in favor of "Son of Man." Even as the self-conscious Messiah one can understand Him referring matters to the Father. Tradition has indicated the ultimate importance of the Father by referring to Christ as "our only Mediator and Advocate," that is, with the Father, toward Whom we are, in fact, moving. Jesus Himself prays to the Father, pleads with Him, treats Him as the Source and Goal of His life. This much is well-known. But, the primal interest of getting to or being with or seeing the Father gets forgotten during discussions of the Excellences of the Son.

For example, the Fathers were rightly concerned to demonstrate that the Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament. One cannot easily deny that they succeeded splendidly in this task. It is a standard prop of Christian exegesis from start to finish, from Christ to McAfee Brown, from Paul to Peanuts. St. Jerome's Homilies on the Psalter are an excellent, if not the finest, example of the Christological exegesis of the Old Testament. The Fathers, in general, said that Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament like a "shadow" -- a technical term from Platonic philosophy, referring

to the Allegory of the Cave -- but that the real Him is visible in the New Testament. Calvin uses this schematic approvingly and it is safe to say that it lies very deeply in the consciousness of the Christian Intellectual -- rather like the concept of Original Sin. It is a convenient and not unuseful means of correlating the two Testaments. In fact, it can illumine very much all over the landscape.

But, the shadow/reality format is not ultimately valid. It is absolutely true that Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament, rather thoroughly in fact. St. Jerome can show one just how truly He is. But a more accurate metaphor could be found than that of shadow and reality. The best metaphor would be a seed and its tree, especially its fruit. One could speak in terms of a light that is veiled and then unveiled. The point is that one wants to indicate an organic continuity between Old and New Testaments and the shadow/reality metaphor does not do that very well. It probably spoke feelingly to the educated classes of the late Roman Empire, who were familiar with Plato, but it does not evoke as much sense of organic continuity as do the two metaphors I have suggested. The organic continuity of the Testaments has to be indicated or we will end up with permutations of Marcion, recensions of Unitarianism or a real live intellectual scramble such as is with much fondness and, perhaps, insufficient circumspection called The Christian Tradition.

But more than this, the shadow/reality metaphor -- or a similar intellectual inadequacy -- appears to have seduced practically the whole Orthodox Church into a very wrong and stupid derogation of the religious experience of the Pre-Christians -- also the Other-than-Christians. One can say that

the ancients, meaning the Prophets, knew Christ in shadow form only and get away with a few polite demurs from the bleachers. But -- as did happen -- to go on and say that those same ancients, ipso facto, knew God the Father in shadow form only is going to raise such a stir of protest from the gallery -- especially at this late date in history -- that any attempt to maintain that position despite clear, insistent and unequivocal warnings against it is going to be regarded as the breath-taking vaunt of a colossal ignorance.

Let it be said that Christ is anticipated but not fully visualized by the ancients. Fine. But that is not the issue. The issue, the Goal, is not the Son but the Father. The Son we can doubt and demur and dissipate and dilapidate -- as we know we have done -- but the Father cannot be so mutilated. And it is the Father Whom the ancients are experiencing, at least insofar as they tell us anything. Simeon's precognition of the Christ could easily, for anyone familiar with the inner spiritual realms, be one among several or even many experiences of Him in vivid terms that were granted in privacy to Prophets and Sages years, even centuries before His Birth. The record is mute on this subject but that does not exclude the possibility. Rama was visualized by Sages thousands of years before He took Human Flesh. The Upanishads forecast the present Avatar of the Lord. But this is ancilliary to our main point, which is that we must affirm that every experience of God the Father -- meaning the Godhead -- that anyone else has ever had -- Christian, Muslim, Hindu etc. -- was available to and had by the ancients of Israel.

We just cannot go around saying that God is not known fully except in

Jesus of Nazareth. For the common man this may be true, even after he is attracted to Jesus. Certainly it is true until he ceases being common as starts living with the thought of God predominating. But for the Prophets and Men and Women of God of ancient Israel, and also for the saints and sages of the whole earth, one just cannot say that God is not fully known except in Jesus of Nazareth. Christ Jesus is the only Mediator and Advocate for those who call on Him to mediate and advocate for them with the Father, Who, incidentally, is just as happy when we can stand on our own two feet. But the Father is known by Names other than this One. Many, in fact.

Is Moses' Sinai less God than Francis' Alverno? Is Elijah's Cave less God than Teresa's Interior Castle? Is Jacob's Opponent more God than Arjuna's Bil? Is Elisha's floating ax less wonderful than Benedict's? Is Melchizedek more in authority than Dharmaraja (the names are identical: King of Righteousness)? Is St. Laurence's roasting more painful than Prahlada's? Is one grain of sugar sweeter than another?

No. The sugar is uniformly sweet. A gram is as sweet as a ton. One has but to taste it, anywhere, anytime. Men of high impulses do not settle for shadows and foretastes. They are savoring the real sugar whether in the form of a cube, a stick, a square or a ball. One cannot say that a ball of sugar is sweeter than a stick of the same substance. A square of sugar tastes as sweet as a cube of it. It is all sugar, equally sweet. Only the name and form are different. The sweet essence is the same.

God the Father is the sugar. He is Whom the aspirants of all times and

climes are seeking for their delectation. He is Who delectates the Prophets and Saints of all religions. This point has to be kept in mind. It is a sure fact worthy of implicit faith. Christ may be prefigured in the Old Testament, but God the Father is experienced by the ancients quite apart from the Name of Jesus. He is also experienced by those who call on Him with Names originating outside the Hebrew and Christian traditions. He, the same. Sugar is of uniform sweetness, regardless of the name and form it is given. God is One. He Wills to be Many. But He is always just One. God has no second.

The Fathers were trying to distinguish Christianity from its Jewish, Greek and Roman background. They succeeded. In doing so, they elaborated a system of logic regarding Old and New Testaments which, for all of its grandeur, overreaches the facts on some important matters, principally the universality of God, which they did not appreciate. One can understand why they did this and excuse them on account of their context. Look how hard God had to work to get that exclusivist, Peter, just to talk with a Roman. But, no excuse remains for us if we derogate the religious experience of the ancients. We must regard them as on a level par with ourselves, at least, and, very often, this will involve us in some self-flattery. We have to draw a bead on the feeling of exclusivity we have developed regarding the Christian religion and God. We have to eliminate it altogether. God is more than What and Who we think He is.

We may remark in passing that a very interesting result of forgetting that the Father, not the Son, is the Goal has emerged in recent years. It is a new kind of Unitarianism, of the Son, and its proponents seem to

be congregated around the World Council of Churches. These people have developed a very interesting way of exercising the majority of humankind from their definition of religion: by exercising the Father from their faith. The Fathers exercised rather more care than do the theoreticians of the WCC regarding the Doctrine of the Trinity.

It would not be wrong to say that if one has trouble with the principle of the Triune God, then the reason for that is, very simply, that one is an atheist. Again, if one cannot admit Hindus, Buddhists, Mohammedans, etc., to the ecumenical movement, then the reason for that is, very simply, that one is a sectarian. And if, finally, one cannot appreciate the great spiritual benefit accruing to mankind from a diversity of religious forms and practices, they being incapable of reduction to visible, administrative unity, then the reason for that is, very simply, that one is a politician. In other words, if one cannot perceive the world as quite wholly knit together in the One God and in no way broken at all, then the reason for that is, very simply, that one's heart is as bereft of Love and the Holy Spirit as Death Valley is of water in August. All of this happens when we get infatuated with our own reverie regarding the Son and forget entirely, nay, revolt against, the Father.

The ancients of Israel are no more bereft of the highest religious experience or the surety of Salvation, in their own time, than anyone else, anywhere, ever has been, either before or after the Incarnation of God in Christ Jesus of Nazareth. All the doctrines of the Church which propose otherwise may be set aside as either understandable misunderstandings, as in the case of the Fathers and the great Saints, or mere human imaginings (Calvin's

(word would be "ravings," although he would use the term for the point I am making here), as in the case of the Popes and their non-Roman, councillor counterparts. Certain of the ancients knew God the Father quite nicely without any Name of Jesus. In principle, any of them could have known Him so. They were, or could in principle have been, saved, then itself, by that Knowledge. The same is true for every modern man. This truth is the only basis for any ecumenical movement worthy of the name. It is the part of wisdom to leave God to declare what He will and will not permit, also, what He can or will not do.

Whereas Christian theologians have tended to derogate the spiritual opportunities and accomplishments of the Hebrew Fathers, because they did not know Christ (fully), we find among those ancients no such feeling of insufficiency or inadequacy as is attributed to them by their Christian successors. Quite the opposite. The ancient religion of Israel is fully alive and vigorous with the Presence and Practice of God. Monasticism in ancient Israel has already nourished the same spiritual vitality which we meet emerging from it in practically every time and clime. The Name of Jesus is not the only One given for salvation on the stage of human history. It may be the only Name Peter gave the Sanhedrin -- rightly so -- but It is not the only Name God has given mankind for calling on Him -- as the evidence of the Prophets demonstrates.