

MAN: THE IMAGE OF GOD

"**L**IFE IS A TALE told by idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." This cry on the lips of Macbeth has a strangely modern ring. Many of today's articulate dissidents claim that there is no given order in the world, that man must make his own order. The experience of the horror of world war and the maddening pace of a sense-oriented society have led some to revolt against what they consider the opiate of religion—God is in His heaven and all is right with the world. There are no pre-set values. Man must face the sound and fury of the world all by himself and make of it whatever he will; he must create himself, make his own laws of reality, be free! But this freedom to re-fashion man to a self-made image is a fearsome freedom. "I emerge alone and in dread in the face of the unique and first project which constitutes my being; all the barriers, all the railings, collapse, annihilated by the consciousness of my liberty; I have not, nor can I have, recourse to any value against the fact that it is I who maintain values in being; nothing can assure me against myself; cut off from the world and my essence by the nothing that I am, I have to realize the meaning of the world and of my essence: I decide it, alone, unjustifiably, and without excuse" (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*).

Studies in comparative religion show this outburst to be a non-traditional reaction to a disorder in the human life-situation. For the ancient and for the primitive alike, the inrush of chaos calls not for self-creation but for imitation, the imitation of the divine. Mircea Eliade, in *The Sacred and The Profane*, points to numerous instances of man's natural urge to consecrate places and times, to surround his life with elaborate ritual so as to model his existence on what he conceives as the divine paradigm. Even on the natural level, the simple man seems to recall that the spirit hovering over the chaotic abyss was the spirit of God, not the spirit of man. There is more here than logic; there is humility. For the unsophisticated, a lost order can be restored only by recourse to the Author of all order.

The natural myths, Oriental and Western alike, never quite reached

the heart of reality; they ground to a wondering halt at the footprints of divinity. "We know the last secret revealed to the perfect initiate. And it is not the voice of a priest or a prophet saying, 'These things are.' It is the voice of a dreamer and an idealist crying, 'Why cannot these things be?'" (G. K. Chesterton). The mythmakers cannot make man divine, nor can man alone divinize himself. The sound and fury of this world is hardly bearable for the man who no longer tries to go outside of himself to find himself, to become other and greater by imitating the true God, but who walls himself up within his loneliness, his mind enervated with the contemplation of his own emptiness.

Basically, the answer to the sound and fury of life is the sound and fury of the Word of God. That Word re-directed the fire of a St. Paul, and it blinded him that he might, out of exterior chaos, find interior order. In the midst of his labors and sufferings for the church of Christ, he was at peace, for he had found the secret of which myth-makers only dream. He went beyond the myths and learned how to be truly God-like, for in the dust of the Damascus Road his sightless eyes saw not the mere footprints of divinity, but God Himself. "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me!" Christ is God, the perfect image of His Father. Unless Christ lives in man, unless man images forth God in this way, he becomes less than human.

What is the true image of God in man? Or, to use the subtitle of a recent critique of the grotesque and irrational in modern art (Hans Sedlmayer's *Art in Crisis*), what, for man, is *The Lost Center*? The answer to our question is found in the moral theology of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The obvious starting point in any search for the elements of the image of God in man is the revealed word of God. In the very first chapter of *Genesis* we find the concept of image. "Let us make man to our image according to our likeness . . ." (*Gen.*, 1:26). Some have claimed the expression "according to our likeness" diminishes the force of the words "to our image" such that man is not *truly* the image of God, but only *metaphorically*. St. Thomas considers this opinion in his commentary on the epistles of St. Paul. "By this statement of St. Paul, 'Man is the image of God,' there is ruled out the error of some who say that man only approaches the image of God and is not truly His image. St. Paul here says the contrary. However, in another place, Paul also says that the Son is the image only: 'Who is the image of the invisible God' (*Colos.*, 1:15). Therefore, we must conclude that man is called both 'image of God' and 'according to the image,' because he is an imperfect image (though truly

an image). The Son is called 'image of God' and not 'according to the image,' since he is the perfect image (of His Father)" (*Comm. in I Cor.*, 11:7, *lect. II*).

"... Let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts . . ." (*Gen.*, 1:26). In this continuation of verse 26, the sacred author seems to indicate the nature of the image. Just as God is "Lord" of all creation, so man is "lord" of the animal kingdom. In chapter 2, verse 19, there is a delightful portrayal of this aspect of lordship or domination. "And the Lord God having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth, and all the fowls of the air, brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: for whatsoever Adam called any living creature the same is its name." This is not, as those who read too much into this colorful procession maintain, an account of the origin of language. It seems to be simply a forceful and typically biblical way of re-stating the fact of man's dominion over the animal kingdom. For, to the Semitic mind, whoever knew the name of a person or thing possessed a definite power over them by reason of that knowledge.

Must we say that man would lose his image of God should he ever leave the zoo and go off by himself or is there some underlying superiority in man's basic constitution that accounts for this remarkable power of domination? No, it is an inner and inextinguishable spirit that places man far above the animal realm. It is this spirit of man which drives him on to know and master the universe, to perfect himself by becoming all things in knowledge and love.

"Man is said to be made to the image of God in so far as the image implies an intelligent being endowed with free will and self-movement" (*Summa Theol.*, I-II, *Prol.*). By reason of the spiritual nature of his intellect and will, man has the power to break through the limits which confine purely material things and he can go outside himself to possess other things and enjoy them. Man's mind can encompass all of reality and make it part of himself by intellectual apprehension. It is through this mental assimilation of things that he reaches intellectual perfection. Following upon this knowledge is will, an inclination or drive to realize his full stature in the moral order. He does this by conforming himself, through his will, to what he finds most lovable of all those things which he has come to know. Man's will drives him to become the very thing he loves.

Man resembles God by using these powers of intellect and will. Indeed, he mirrors the very Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. Our God is

the living God, and His principal vital activity is the pattern for the dynamic, operative image in man. God the Father, knowing Himself, conceives an intellectual word of such perfection that it, too, lives and is divine. This divine word is the Person of the Son. Father and Son, seeing one another's beauty, cannot but breathe forth a love of such plenitude that it also is God. This intense love is the Person of the Holy Spirit. "Therefore, first and chiefly, the image of the Trinity is to be found in the *acts of the soul*, that is, inasmuch as from the knowledge which we possess, by actual thought we form an internal word; and thence break forth into love" (*Summa Theol.*, I, q. 93, a. 7). There is, of course, a vast difference between human and divine knowledge. Man's knowledge is assimilative and self-perfective, while God's knowledge of other things is creative and perfective of them.

Is it enough for man to know and love just anything to be like the Trinity? Is there not some particular object towards which man could direct his knowing and loving to more closely image forth the divine activity? "The Word of God is born of God by the knowledge of Himself; and Love proceeds from God according as He loves Himself. Hence we refer the divine image in man to the verbal concept born of the knowledge of God, and to the love derived therefrom. Thus the image of God is found in the soul according as the soul turns to God" (*Summa Theol.*, I, q. 93, a. 8). In this way, man enjoys the vision of the same Reality in which God delights. To know and love *God* is the perfection of man by which he shares in the dynamic joy of the Blessed Trinity.

There are two vantage points from which man, while he lives on earth, may come to a knowledge of God: on the natural level, metaphysics; on the supernatural level, faith. Metaphysics allows but a glimpse at God, not as He is in all His Trinitarian beauty, but simply as an intelligent cause of all of reality. This was traditionally accomplished through Aristotelico-Thomistic metaphysics, the true natural wisdom. It is quite out of favor today, not because it has lost any of its objective worth, but because the minds of men have been conditioned to reject it. Even on the informal level, the spontaneous "metaphysics" of the poets of Nature and of Nature's God is lost in the modern technological whirlwind.

The reflected light of God's creative and providential intelligence forever shines from his creatures, but it is not visible in the same manner for all to see. The devotee of scientism has raised an opaque shield between himself and the creature. Completely cutting him off from the true light, the shield beguiles him with its own texture and weight and color.

On the other hand, the obscurity of the metaphysician's vision comes not from any external barrier erected by himself but arises from the innate debility of the unaided human reason. The creature does reveal God to the metaphysician, but through a translucent glass showing only the external outline. Finally, the man of enlightened faith sees through creatures as if they were transparent and he reaches out to God as He is in Himself, in His inner triune life. This is not to say that he sees God face to face, the privilege of the beatific vision, but he does clearly recognize the presence of God though still through the medium of creaturely signs and symbols.

Although the natural knowledge of and love for God is a real image of the inner life of the Trinity, God has enabled man to partake of His life in a radically different and higher way. This is the way of Grace which initiates man into a life of sanctifying friendship with God. Grace is a gift by which man is transformed into a partaker of the divine nature. "God has bestowed on us high and treasured promises; you are to share the divine nature, with the world's corruption, the world's passions, left behind" (II *Peter*, 1:4). The infusion of Grace into the soul of man is a re-creation; the sanctified man is a new creature. By Grace, man becomes an adopted son of God. This sonship is such a high calling that St. Thomas, a master of conservative statement, could say, "The Grace of a single soul is a greater thing than the natural good of the entire universe" (*Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 113, a. 9, ad 2).

Since, as we have seen, it is precisely in acts of knowing and loving God that man images God, the new creature of Grace must know and love in a more perfect manner. From sanctifying Grace there must flow special powers into man's intellect and will strengthening them and making them apt principles of supernatural knowledge and love. The special powers enabling man to know and love God intimately, as He is in Himself, are real physical changes in the intellect and will and are called the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Acts of these three virtues are the highest expressions of God's image on earth; everything else is but a preparation for or a derivation of these primary image-acts. Whatever else man does within the framework of his supernatural life here on earth is either a clearing away of the obstacles to the untrammelled exercise of these theological virtues (for example, ascetical practices and the cultivation of the other virtues), or is an outward expression of their interior movement (for example, exterior worship and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy).

"Meanwhile, faith, hope and charity persist, all three; but the greatest

of them all is charity" (I Cor., 13:13). This charity of which the Apostle speaks and which is our concern here is not that humanitarianism or philanthropy which men call charity today, but rather the theological virtue, the love of God above all other things for the sake of His supreme goodness. Faith will disappear when we see God face to face in heaven. Hope will no longer be needed when we possess Him forever. Charity, however, while it vivifies faith and hope during our earthly stay, remains after faith and hope are no more, for it is the very life of God within us.

Man becomes not so much what he knows and hopes for, but what he loves, for it is what he loves that he actually wants to make part of himself. To know all about a virtue like patriotism does not make a man patriotic. On the other hand, it often happens that a man will acquire the attitudes and even the mannerisms of some person whom he deeply loves. Since man's will is that power by which he loves and by which he moves himself to act under God's Grace, it is the will that primarily determines what man becomes in the moral order. To act humanly at all, man's will must be conformed to some desirable goal, which, though it always seems an ultimate good to him, may not be so in reality. The radical conformation of the will to the true ultimate goal is effected through the virtue of charity.

"Everlasting life consists chiefly in the enjoyment of God. Now the human spirit's movement to the enjoyment of the Divine Good is the proper act of charity, whereby all the acts of the other virtues are ordained to this end" (*Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 114, a. 4). The greatest motion of the human will is the act of charity, because through it man reaches out and touches, without seeing it, the face of God. It is the expression *par excellence* of an amazing friendship. According to St. Thomas, moral theology is the science of charity, the study of the progressive return of the rational creature, created and re-created in the image of God, back to the source and pattern and goal of all life, his divine friend.

"The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, Who is given to us" (*Rom.*, 5:5). The gift which makes man holy, sanctifying Grace, and the chief powers which flow from this gift, charity and vivified faith and hope, are all bound up with the special presence of the Holy Trinity in man. Christ promised to his friends not only eternal happiness in heaven but the hundred-fold even in this life. The hundred-fold promised by Christ is nothing less than the actual penetration of the spirit of a man by the Spirit of God. The special presence by which man possesses and enjoys the divine persons even while here on earth is the

indwelling or the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the just. The Holy Spirit brings His seven-fold Gift, culminating in infused Wisdom which allows man, properly disposed, to taste of God and see all things, as it were, through His eyes.

Thus, God makes man to His image by actually dwelling in man in a very special way through sanctifying Grace and charity. To love God is the image-activity to which all other virtues in man are ordered. Since one cannot love another person unless the other is known and able to be possessed, faith and hope must operate before charity although charity is the most excellent.

Faith strengthens the intellect of man, enabling him to adhere to God with such tenacity that he believes what God has revealed, even though he sees no evidence beyond His word. To be convinced that under the appearances of a thin wafer of bread on the altar there stands the Body of the Son of God, is beyond reason. The "leap" involved in the assent of faith is so great that Kierkegaard did not hesitate, in his usual passionate overstatement, to call the act of faith "irrational." This is an unhappy choice of words, for ". . . although faith is above reason, nevertheless, between faith and reason no true dissension can ever exist, since the same God, who reveals mysteries and infuses faith, has bestowed on the human soul the light of reason; moreover, God cannot deny Himself, nor ever contradict truth with truth" (*Vatican Council, Sess. III, Chap. 4*). Although the assent of faith is by no means a blind movement of the intellect, since there are strong motives of credibility such as miracles, etc., nevertheless it demands the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the mysteries of the faith, the secrets of the hidden life of God, remain above reason.

Because faith is a "leap," man needs hope. "Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when he appears, we shall be like to him, for we shall see him just as he is" (I John, 3:2). Is it possible to see God face to face? How can man order his everyday life to a goal which eludes his understanding and is infinitely beyond human power to attain? Hope strengthens man's will and allows him to move toward God with confidence in His omnipotence and in His kindness and fidelity. His strength will overcome man's weakness; His life will conquer death. "Paul defines pagans as those 'who have no hope to live by' (I Thess., 4:13). Nothing illustrates so clearly the pagan's despair and the Christian's triumphant hope as the inscriptions on the tombs of the Appian Way, in Rome. The sumptuous pagan sepulchres

that line the paved road are one long cry of mourning and nothingness, but underground, in the catacombs, a hymn of hope arises from the rude sculptures on the humble tombs of the first Christians: an anchor or a dove and the words *Vivas in Deo* (May you live in God) . . ." (Brunot, *St. Paul and His Message*).

The virtues of faith, hope and charity, directed as they are to the knowledge and love of God, demand for their very existence the help of other secondary virtues, the so-called moral virtues, secondary only in the sense that they are immediately concerned not with God but with man. These moral virtues are vitally necessary, for all men must work out their sanctification in the complicated world of every-day living. This is where the moral virtues operate; they prepare for, maintain, and, above all, express the primary image-acts of the three great virtues of faith, hope and charity. "If any man says he loves God and loves not his neighbor, he is a liar." It is impossible for man to maintain direct contact with God for any great length of time; he spends most of his waking hours in absorbing contacts with his fellow men. If these human exchanges are truly expressions of the interior impulse of faith, hope and charity, man surely shows forth the dynamic image of God in his dealings with others.

As remarkable as the image of God was before the fall of Adam, still more remarkable is the restoration of the defaced image by the coming of the perfect image, Christ, the Son of God. Because of the miracle of miracles, the Incarnation of God the Son, it can be said that man now images God by imitating Christ. This imitation is not just a conformation to an historical model of good behavior. The Christian *is* another Christ. Christ *acts now* in and through and with all those incorporated into his Mystical Body by the waters of baptism. The Spirit of Christ enters into the new creature of Grace so that it may cry out in truth, *Abba, Father!* And the Father responds with mercy and fidelity, for He cannot reject the plea of His own Son.

The cry today is one of anguish. The tensions of an ever more complex work-a-day world, the mounting problems of family life, the threat of imminent nuclear catastrophe: all these aspects of the plight of the group reveal a fundamental disorder in the individual. The outer disorder merely serves to highlight the inner chaos. Sartre claims we cannot escape the inner chaos, the horrible emptiness of human life. For him, the only answer is the terrifying embrace, in fear and dread, of the nauseating absurdity of existence. To be utterly alone and without joy is the inescapable lot of man. Macbeth was right.

But we have another answer, for God has spoken to us through His Son. Christ lived and died surrounded by the greatest chaos. For us, disorder appears as surely but less dramatically in the guise of the burden of common living and we are in desperate need of the virtues of Christ to master this disorder, to shoulder this burden. Patience to withstand the coldness of men, mercy to forgive their weakness and perversity, joy in facing life squarely: these are our common needs. Above all, we need the charity of Christ. Man's inhumanity to man is the major chaos, for men cannot live if they are unloved. A brooding prophet of God's justice has written, "When you die, that is what you take with you: the tears you have shed and the tears you have caused to be shed—your capital of bliss or terror. It is on these tears that we shall be judged, for the Spirit of God is always borne upon the waters" (Bloy). The answer to the sound and fury of every-day living is, in one word, Christ. Christ is the perfect image of His Father and to imitate God, we must imitate the charity of His Son by becoming conscious of our place in His Mystical Body, and loving one another in God.

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MARIAN THEOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

CERTAINLY there is no one reading this article who has not at some time read something about the Mother of God. If it had been written two hundred years ago, the title alone would have raised more than eyebrows. For, two hundred years ago, Marian theology or Mariology¹, the science of all sacred doctrine regarding Mary, the Mother of God, was unheard of as a special theological study. Before our times, whenever discussion about Mary arose there was no special emphasis regarding her place in the scheme of theology. Particular problems concerning Mary were considered with a view toward removing obstacles against Marian piety than anything else. Mostly all treatises on Mary were directed more toward her praise and honor than scientific investigation and theological speculation. Advancements in Marian studies occurred when controversy or error threatened the piety of the faithful. The Council of Ephesus (431), for instance, defined Mary's Divine Motherhood because some were teaching the anti-traditional doctrine that Mary could not be properly called the Mother of God. It was only in these instances that theologians probed into the mystery that is Mary. But to regard the whole of sacred