



Introduction to “The Most Painful Difficulty”

Review of Previous Article

On one hand, traditional philosophy intuitively assumes that there is an ultimate, universal substance or essence. All “things” are merely shadows or appearances that are transient and dispensable. On the other hand, the counterintuitive view of patriarchal Judaism is that the universe is not based on ultimate substance(s) or essence(s). Rather, *all reality is relationality*. Primal relationality precedes and preexists all manifest entities. For Judaism the fundamental metaphor for relationality is “covenant.” The concept of relationality or covenant involves three aspects — the covenant itself along with two corporate parties to the covenant. Covenant is therefore a triune relational reality.

Ultimately, God is not a Party or an Agent to the covenant. Rather, God *constitutes* the Covenant. God as divine Reality, Self or Person was not constituted as “Sameness.” God was, is and becomes “Otherness.” In his own subsistent relationality God constituted Original and Internal “Otherness.” Then God proceeded to extend relational “otherness” external to the Godhead. This involved the external “otherness” of the created order.

True “otherness,” whether internal or external, involves communion. It is communal. It is dialogical. Furthermore, for “otherness” to involve true communion, it must be mutually contingent. It must be free. By exercising that freedom, mankind rejected the external “otherness” that God bestowed. Mankind chose to reject the gift of external “otherness” in the false assumption that it could return to the supposed original essence of God himself!

Having exercised the freedom to reject “otherness,” we as creatures find that we are incapable of transforming ourselves to a delusional uncreated essence. Nor are we ourselves capable of creating the genuine triune “otherness” of communion with our neighbor and with God. In this

predicament we must therefore turn to the astounding axial event that embraces all history and all eternity. Through this event the Creator himself acted to become the Human “Other.” He acted to expend the energy and pay the ultimate price necessary to call the “other, again and again, into communion.”

Overview of This Article

Mankind has always exhibited the “rebellious refusal of creaturely status, the desire ‘to be like God’ (Genesis 3.5).” For thousands of years, mankind has fiercely held the conviction that God is self-existent “oneness” and that, since man was originally made in this divine image, he is destined to participate with God in divine, self-existent “oneness.”

However, the principle of self-existence bears fearful consequences. The first consequence of self-existence is narcissistic isolation. To demand self-existence is to demand to be alone. Thus, the inevitable result of the self-existent principle is repudiation of the “other.” The second consequence of self-existence is death. Self-existent “oneness” is never satisfied until all its rivals are exterminated. Ultimately, as Martin Buber observed, the age-long passion for self-existence invariably ends in the deactualization of the self. The third consequence of self-existence is delusional self-deification. The deceptive fantasy of imagined self-existence is the claim of final divinization.

The fundamental truth is that God is not God apart from relationship. This means that, from the very “beginning,” God abandoned self-existence for relational co-existence. Furthermore, since love can only exist in relationship to an “other,” the only way that the One God could express his love and extend his relationality was through Creation.

For thousands of years, God has tried to educate us mortals to his loving purpose. He has permitted our imagined self-existence to run its course so that the fruit of narcissism, death and masquerading delusions might be discerned and finally rejected by humanity. Moreover, in his own manhood God recapitulated or retraced the entire history of Creation. Throughout his earthly existence Jesus, the human manifestation of God, developed relationality with nature, with life, with all mankind. Finally, at Calvary, he cried, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Jesus thus pronounced the end of the old history — the end of death, non-existence, narcissistic evil, and the delusion of self-existent deity. By his triumphal death Jesus reconciled the world unto himself (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19).

Soon we shall be relationally united — everyone for and with the “other” — for an eternity of fellowship, loving commitment and creative enterprise. Soon “the most painful difficulty” will be seen as a most enduring “surety.”