



## The Search for Divine Presence

“IN THE BEGINNING” (Genesis 1:1), mankind was ever conscious of One, Supreme God.<sup>1</sup> If a man went forth to hunt with bow and arrow, he sensed that God went forth with bow and arrow to hunt with him. Moreover, to the hunter God’s bow and arrow were present in his own bow and arrow. Likewise, if a woman went down to a stream to fill her pitcher with water, she sensed that God went down to the stream to fill his pitcher with her. To her, also, God’s pitcher was present in her pitcher. “Everything here below was seen as a replica or copy of a reality in the celestial world.”<sup>2</sup> God’s bow and arrow, his pitcher, were the originals — the “archetypes.”<sup>3</sup> Earthly bows, arrows and pitchers were types or representations of celestial reality. Man (male and female) could attempt and accomplish nothing unless man’s “types” had the presence of God and his “archetypes.”

---

*Earthly bows, arrows and pitchers were types or representations of celestial reality.*

---

Even today, religious ritual is based on this same understanding. For example, as a young man I looked forward to sunset on Friday evening because I knew this was the beginning of the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> The Sabbath was God’s day — the original or archetypal day on which he had rested after completing his work of Creation. Moreover, since the Sabbath represented his rest, I knew that God would be present on that day and that I could rest with him. Since the Sabbath day was both archetypal and representative, God would inevitably be present.

On the Sabbath day I often read about the experience of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai and of how God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle after the “pattern” or archetype of the temple in heaven. From my religious upbringing I knew that everything that Aaron and the other priests performed in the earthly tabernacle actually had their origin in the heavenly temple. God was present in the earthly services because they were a representation of the archetypal services in heaven.

The Lord’s Supper or Eucharistic Feast is another example of God’s presence through representation of the archetype. To many, the sacramental bread and wine not only symbolize the divine presence; they *are* or *contain* the divine presence because

they ritually return us to the archetypal meal — the bread (flesh) broken and wine (blood) poured out at the Lord’s Last Supper and at his crucifixion.

## The Meaning of Divine Archetypes for Mankind

It is important for us to understand the meaning of divine archetypes for mankind. While recognizing the distinction between God and himself, ancient man recognized that he and his activities had significance only through participation in the appropriate archetypes. No one would consider doing anything unless he or she knew that God was present with his archetypes to perform the same duties.

As a consequence of this ancient mindset, early man did not need or have a sense of time or space — that is, a sense of history. He assumed that everything he did was performed in God’s own timelessness and spacelessness. It therefore came as a profound shock when, about three to four thousand years ago, there was a sudden and almost universal loss of “god-consciousness.”<sup>5</sup> How could man survive without a sense of God’s presence? How could he continue to live in God’s absence? How could mankind engage in even the ordinary activities of life without man and his representations meeting the divine presence in God’s mediating archetypes?

Eventually, however, mankind began to adapt to the apparent absence of the One, Supreme Sky-God. Yet man was convinced that God continued to be archetypally present as “spirit,” “mana,” “jinn,” the “numinous,” etc. This “spiritual” presence of God was believed to be “attached” only to those times, places, objects, events and entities for which there already were divine archetypes.

---

*Because they were thought to mediate divine presence as representations of God’s archetypes, “rocks and rills” and “templed hills” were divinized.*

---

Thus, earthly representations of heavenly archetypes quickly became “gods” who mediated or bridged the “distance” between divine presence and divine absence. Likewise, if divine presence was associated with a representation of an archetype, that representation itself became sacred. For example, when Jacob fled in fear from his brother Esau, he stopped at night and slept with his head on a rock. There he dreamed that God had placed a ladder between earth and heaven upon which angels ascended and descended. When he awoke, he declared that God had been present at that place. Immediately he took the rock upon which he had rested, turned it upon end, and poured oil on it. That rock, representing the archetypal ladder between earth and heaven, was sacred. Jacob called that place “Beth-El” — the “house of God.” In future years the Israelites gathered to worship at that rock.

Thus, because they were thought to mediate divine presence as representations of God’s archetypes, “rocks and rills” and “templed hills”<sup>6</sup> were divinized. In this way mankind acquired a multiplicity of gods — gods of the sea, gods of the mountain, gods of the forest, gods of the harvest, gods of the storm, gods of war, gods of fertility, *ad infinitum*.

By the time of the Axial Age — 800-200 BCE<sup>7</sup> — it had become clear to mankind around the world that the multiplication of gods for every represented archetype was

confusing and counterproductive. In India, Gautama Siddhartha (563?-483? BCE), the founder of Buddhism, turned from the gods and their antics to the welfare of mankind itself. While Siddhartha did not deny the existence of the gods, he declared that man and his destiny alone merited consideration. In China, Confucius (551-479 BCE) launched a similar ministry. About the same time in Greece, the philosopher, Plato (427?-347? BCE), and his pupil, Aristotle (384-322 BCE), came to comparable conclusions. The antics of the Greek gods greatly distressed these scholars. In response, Aristotle proposed that there was just one, supreme God — the Unmoved Mover — who was absent from the universe and wholly disinterested in its affairs.

Plato had already proposed a limit on archetypes and their representations, declaring that ultimate reality was found in conscious thought and reflection. To Plato, mankind's "thoughts" were the representation of God's archetypal thought. Thought and reason were therefore fundamental modes of divine

---

*To Plato, mankind's "thoughts" were the representation of God's archetypal thought.*

---

presence. Plato and Aristotle hoped that these philosophical innovations would "clear the landscape" of the multitude of raucous and rapacious Greek gods.

## Archetypes in Christianity and Humanism

With the birth of Christianity a few hundred years later and the extension of its influence into the Greco-Roman world, the church virtually ignored the significance of Christ's resurrection for the reality of God's presence. Instead, Christianity largely followed Judaism's archetypal traditions, proceeding to marry these traditions to Platonic and Aristotelian thought. The church therefore concluded that God the "Father" and God the "Son" were absent from the world. However, Christ's own body was the archetype, and the church was its earthly representation. God the "Spirit" could therefore be present through the representation of ecclesiastical individuals, agencies and forms. Thus, Peter's alleged successors claimed to represent God on earth. The pope was the person of God's presence. The cathedral was the place of God's presence. The holy days were the times of God's presence. The bread and wine were the substances of God's presence. The canonized Scriptures, theological reflection and ecclesiastical doctrine, dogma, law and tradition were the words and thoughts of God's presence.

After 1,300 years, the multiplied weight of ecclesiastical representation had nearly suffocated mankind's life and culture. God's imagined representational presence in the church had enslaved mankind and reduced almost everyone to serfdom, death and apparent extinction. Then, from the darkness and degradation of surrogate presence, mankind emerged into the dawn of the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. In place of the "I Am that I Am" of deity (Exodus 3:14), mankind proclaimed, "I think, therefore I Am"; "I reason, therefore I Am"; "I feel, therefore I Am;" "I believe, therefore I Am." Now, for nearly 700 years, mankind has been embarked on a seemingly new pilgrimage. Yet that journey harks back to Platonic claims that man's own thoughts, reason, feelings, beliefs and consciousness are representations of God's thoughts,

reason, feelings, beliefs and consciousness. For humanism, man himself is the ultimate representation of the divine archetypes. Man himself embodies the person, place and time of divine presence. In fact, as the very image of God — *imago dei* — man himself may well be God's only presence in the world. Man can therefore make himself in history.

In the framework of this humanist view, the historical Jesus becomes a prototype of modern man. The “illiterate, Mediterranean Jewish peasant” called Jesus is seen as simply inaugurating the new era in which man himself is God's

---

*In our age, every man becomes God to and for and by himself.*

---

earthly presence. Furthermore, since Jesus fulfilled and transcended “law,” mankind also exists autonomously beyond the imposition of law. Humanist sentiments such as these are today mediated to men and women through our religion, culture and civilization. Therefore, in our age, every man becomes God to and for and by himself. It should be no surprise that the predatory instincts to possess and be possessed, with which man emerged from stark animality, have become the order of global existence. We are reminded of the time when “there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6).

## The Final Deception

Humanism has thus ushered in the final deception. The claim that man himself is divine presence has brought us to the end of civilization. Today we view the wreck of Western culture. The only apparent future seems to be death. We stand aghast and ask, How and why has it come to this?

Humanism [has] failed because man is not the centre of creation, in the sense of being creature and creator in one. The “I am” is subordinate not preeminent, and honour on its own is not enough. There is no free-will in any important sense of the term, and human reason is powerful only on a narrow front within strict limits. What is of nearly infinite capacity in man is his imagination, his fancy. It was here that humanism flourished, with its fantasy of freedom and reason, that I can become what I will. It was this fantasy . . . [that] set the demonic free. . . . At the same time the domain in which the humanist imagination became concrete, that of science and technology leading to the Industrial Revolution, produced an opulence of material power and comfort that allowed man to think, as long as he narrowed his consciousness down to his animal needs and repressed his conscience, that he had become what he wanted. Moreover, Darwin told him he was an animal. Thus while the humanist castle was tumbling down in the face of the psychological and spiritual reality, it was cemented together at the level of material comfort. . . . The predominant thinking of the twentieth century has been that of an animal, that the good life is to consume, to procreate and to sleep, and in those terms there has been giant progress. . . .

Not only is man not creature and creator in one. He is not, as Darwin would have us believe, a highly evolved and supercharged fish. True, endow a fish with consciousness and what you get is modern man, material life lived under the terror of the inevitable future, which is Death, an unconscious terror which poisons the pleasure: The creature is turned to stone. Under the humanist

constellation, Death rules. But this metaphysics of man, a fish endowed with consciousness, set him too low. It is the dregs of humanism. Consciousness is mind, it is intellect, it is reason. . . . It is not the fragment of divinity. . . .

What will come next we do not know. . . . There are, however, lessons from the past. . . . It will have to bring about a Second Reformation. . . .

The success of whatever new culture emerges . . . will be decided by whether it can . . . achieve a death of death. This is why its decisive move will be a Second Reformation. . . .

However forbidding the task there is always reason for hope. . . .

To say it once again, it is time to bury the dead, and to start the difficult business of restoring our capacity for life.<sup>8</sup>

## The Truth of the Risen Christ

We have seen that the age-long search for God's presence has led to the conclusion that we ourselves are divine presence. By ostensibly finding ourselves, we have thought to find Presence. Yet, by finding such presence, we have found death. Now, in our utter extremity, perhaps we can begin to reflect on the true meaning of the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

---

*“It is time to bury the dead, and to start the difficult business of restoring our capacity for life.”*  
—John Carroll

---

By the Christ event God repudiated absence. He repudiated archetypes. He repudiated archetypal representatives. The risen God himself is present (Matthew 28:20). Because as Jesus he adopted mankind as his own reality, he now is humanly present — to create presence.<sup>9</sup> This truly human presence is the opposite of alienation, disaffection, estrangement, suspicion, rejection, scorn and derision. It is the opposite of domination and submission. It is the opposite of predatory possession and absorption. Yes, while we have been engaged in an age-long search for divine presence, that Presence has been searching for us.

---

## Endnotes

1. See Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 401.
3. See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 6-11.
4. I was once a Seventh-day Adventist.
5. See Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990).

6. See Samuel Francis Smith's lyrics to "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)" (1831).
7. See Armstrong, *History of God*, p. 27.
8. See John Carroll, *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 227-232. John Carroll is a sociologist at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. Although born in England, he grew up in Australia. Educated at the universities of Melbourne and Cambridge, he taught at Cambridge from 1968 to 1971 before returning to Australia. Carroll is the author of a number of scholarly works and has edited books on both Australia and its economy.
9. Rather than a nonrelational, *immediate* presence, in which we absorb the Transcendent ("God *in* us") or are absorbed by the Transcendent ("us *in* God"), the evidence indicates that the Risen Christ *mediates* his presence *with* us in history. That is, he reaches us through our neighbors. We reach him through each other. We reach each other and our own objective selves through him. This relational "reaching" may therefore be referred to as Christ's "intermediatorial" presence, which is defined by the gifts of faith, hope and compassionate love. See "The End of Human Alienation," subhead "The True Resolution of Human Alienation," *Outlook* (Prequel 1994.7).

*This article was originally published November 1995 under the Destiny imprint.*

Copyright © 1995 Worldview Publications