

THE IMAGE OF GOD¹

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ADAM, says the Bible, was made to the image of God, and the Church adds that so are all men; and that this imagehood is chiefly in man's soul. What then is 'soul'? In our philosophy the term, or its equivalents, denotes life; anything alive has a soul. But ordinarily, of course, it means the life-principle in man; and human life is very different from that of other terrestrial beings. Whether or not any animals reason, it seems absurd to compare the cleverest dogs or monkeys with the enormous range of human achievement. On this planet at least we stand out pretty clearly. Now this, Catholics say, is due to a radical difference in the human life-principle—that it differs from the rest of the world we know not only as dogs differ from roses or horses from dogs, but as something that is not strictly part of the physical world differs from the entire physical world. The human soul is partly outside the physical and even the animal world. To use a question-begging term, it transcends all bodies animate and inanimate. What does this mean?

The 'transcendence' of man, his 'spirituality' as distinct from mere vitality, is commonly approached negatively. It is said that precisely as a human agent I have certain activities which are not activities of my body or of any part of my body, in which something other than any organ of the body is operating. The body may concur with or condition such activity, it is not precisely the agent acting. The reference is to intellectual activities. Reflecting, then, on these, I think I can make two affirmations about them which, on analysis, yield some understanding of that boasted 'transcendence': that I am aware of things (*a*) as real, and (*b*) as significant.

(*a*) By awareness of things as real I mean that when I attend to any object in the sensible world I have present to consciousness, usually rather dimly, at times clearly (according to the way I regard the object), an idea of reality or being. And this idea, I find, appears to have no limit to it: it seems to include everything

¹ The substance of a talk to the Cambridge 'Heretics' Society.

and only exclude nothing; for it is simply the idea of what is not nothing. Moreover it includes everything not only in the sense of all that I can now imagine or think of, but of all I could ever imagine or think of. It is a sort of minimum contact with the entire field of reality. One might say that nothing is indifferent to it, and only nothing—I mean what is nothing (so to say) in itself; for something may be only nothing *to me*, in the sense that while it does exist I have no awareness of it, e.g. a beetle on Mars. But this latter sort of ‘nothing’ is not excluded in principle from my notion of being, but only by the circumstance that something real has not yet impinged on my senses. Intellectually and in principle the (possible) beetle on Mars is not nothing to me, for in principle I am already in touch with reality in general (including the beetle, if there is one) in whatever condition or circumstance it might be found.

Of course, in another sense one might say that to this reality-awareness all the particular varieties of being are indifferent, simply as particular. The eye attends to colours, the ear to sounds, each sense organ to its special field: only the intellect’s special field is not specialized. In this sense it has a certain indifference to particularities. Thus I can regard awareness of reality *qua* reality as connoting both an indifference to anything less than all things and also as a concern with everything, however trivial, that is not nothing: as transcending all particulars and as focussed on whatever is real in each particular. In either case I seem to be, in principle and potentially, in touch with everything; and my only limit seems to be nothingness; and in this sense, at least, my scope or range to be infinite. Can I not take this ‘infinity’ in me as a sign of my being, as the Bible says of Adam, made to the image of the Infinite? The premiss (to repeat) of this conclusion must be a proof that intellection, unlike sensation, is not an activity of the body; for the body is wholly finite and particular, and therefore so is each of its acts and the object in which each of these terminates.

(b) Awareness of significance. We obviously and continually look for meanings, are forever trying to turn mere experience into understanding, to make it intelligible. All human culture is this effort or its result. What does this imply?

We use the expressions *what* and *why*—noises, surely, which indicate that something is awake in us, or stirring in its sleep at

least, and that to this something some object is present, but not present enough. 'What?' is intellect's way of conveying that it wants to have something more present than it has it, to see something more clearly than it sees it, to *grasp* something as we say. What is this something the mind wants? Can we generalize about it for our present purpose? I think we can. The intelligibility I seek in things (answering the question what?) is always some distinct mode or pattern ('form') from which irrelevancies have been dropped. A dropping of irrelevancies always accompanies understanding as it always accompanies the making of a work of art. The two processes have this in common. But what are irrelevancies to understanding? They are all that hinders the pattern from standing out clearly, from being purely itself and nothing else, to the understanding. Here I note two such hindrances. One is instability: what changes while I look at it cannot be seen as anything in particular; it is neither one thing nor another; has no definite pattern or 'mind-shape'; cannot be defined. Change, then, in some sense, is an irrelevance to be dropped. And if change, then time also perhaps. . . . Yes, in some sense time is alien to intelligibility; for if I boldly ask 'What is time?', no philosopher would answer 'It is six o'clock'. Another such hindrance might be called incidental particularity. Socrates asked, 'What is holiness?', and he added, 'Please do not answer that it is what the gods love or what is observable in Euthyphron. What is it in itself?' So if I ask you to define Prime Minister, do not answer 'Harold Macmillan'. In short, do not offer the intellect the incidental for the essential, the particular instance for the universal type, the here and now for something else that may be located here and now but cannot be defined in terms of this here and this now.

All this, I know, begs questions, but it at least suggests a radical trend of intellect-activity—that it is continually occupied, in many different ways and as to many different objects, with seeking what is not involved in the particular and contingent—or if involved, the involvement must be ignored if intellect is to *see*. Intellect seeks the unconditioned—the absolute, if the term may be admitted. Or one might say that in all its encounters with the real the mind tends to draw this into a condition of timeless and absolute necessity, to a condition in fact that reminds one of what theists say of God. Granted, of course, that a chief test of in-

telligence is a supple sensibility to the momentary and particular and all the variety of sensation; but even where this is most required—in the natural sciences, in history, in art, not to speak of bringing up children and house-keeping—is not the process of intelligence always a pattern-finding and pattern-fixing, a holding together of contingencies in a stable order? And why should this be? Consider that everything known must, to be known, measure up or down to the knower. The moon you see is measured down to the eye wherein you see it. Add a telescope to the eye and the moon changes accordingly. Whatever is received, says the old tag, takes on the mode of being of the receiver. If then the world, as it enters the intelligence, tends to a condition of stable, consistent patterns, to an order of cause and effect, is not the fact suggestive? Consider the notions of cause and effect. Effect means that which depends outside itself and is real only because something else is real; its reality, as such, is relative only. But the cause it depends on need not, precisely as cause, depend on anything else. A cause can be real absolutely. To order the world then in terms of cause and effect is to relate it to the absolute; and this in the degree that it submits to the measure of the mind or intellect. The mind then surely either *is* absolute being or has a special affinity to absolute being. The latter alternative is the Catholic one.

Our philosophy would explain both the characteristics I have sketched—the mind's extension to the infinite through awareness of being and its concern with the absolute through the demand for significance—it would explain both as due to the human soul's special relation to God, that it receives existence directly from the absolute Source and not through effect-causes already operating in the created world. The life of a rose or a rabbit is created through the material composite which bounds its activities. Not so our life-principle: acting beyond the body's range, it must *exist* beyond its range. Hence too it survives the body's corruption.

Three conclusions follow with regard to man's relationship to God. First, as an intelligent spirit man is only properly related to God if he be consciously related to him, confronting and addressing God consciously. Secondly, as a created spirit man is only properly related to God if he acknowledge his total dependence on God, that is, if he submits himself to God. Thirdly, as an incomplete spirit, aware of the infinite and the absolute as

transcending him, man is only properly related to God as a petitioner, in plain English a beggar, asking God to complete and fulfil him. Note that these relationships spring directly out of our created nature and would be required of us even had this nature remained pure and uncorrupted by sin. Sin deeply affects, however, the way in which these relationships have now to be realized by us; for it has affected the way in which God in fact has called on us to do this—in the manifestation to us of a crucified Redeemer.

And now that Christ has been mentioned, a further conclusion may be touched on. God's self-manifestation to man is—in line with a principle already stated—measured down to the human mode. God has become human, incarnate. But the human mode is to be a created image of the Creator. Now between any created image of God and God there may be many degrees, but they must all be degrees of imagehood. To step beyond imagehood would be simply to become God—an impossibility. Therefore whatever benefits might have come to man from God, whatever enhancement of our nature in terms of knowledge, direction, fulfilment of desire, could only have been either a restoration of our divine imagehood, if this has been lost or defaced, or some sort of elevation of it to a higher degree. God's beneficence to man can only work within the field of imagehood, to restore it or increase it. And this may help us with the doctrine of the Trinity. That man should be restored to spiritual well-being by God incarnate may be much to believe; but this once granted, it become clearly appropriate that both the means to and the model for that restoration should be him whom our creed calls God the Son, the Word of the Father, the Godhead's own perfect Image of itself.
