



The Parousia¹ and Destiny of the Human Self I

WE ARE EMBARKED on a journey of human understanding. In this we include theological understanding or revelation. If we are human, it is necessary for us to understand humanly. Whoever or wherever God is, if he wants to talk to you or me, he needs to do so humanly. Because we must approach all matters in terms of human understanding, theology is a scientific enterprise. We build a model and make observations. We test the model, critique it, and revise it. Therefore, our first point is that, because we are human, we should address all questions in terms of human understanding.

A Human Universe

Our second point is that we are addressing ourselves to a human universe. While a person may wish to postulate another kind of universe, we are suggesting that we occupy a human universe. Therefore, in view of our understanding of human perception, it is necessary for us to have a human

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perceptual standard.² Furthermore, in the interest of one humanity — a “*monanthropism*”³ — we need one common, universal perceptual standard for what it means to be human. A person may wish to postulate a Being out on the boundaries of the universe who knows, possesses, controls and dominates everything. However, that is not our model. Nor do we believe that this represents our universe. For example, we do not believe that humanity was created to be possessed. Such territorial possession is a very animal tendency. For instance, it is said that owls in England must have 20 acres in which to “whoop.” But we are moving

from the animal toward the fully mature, developed human. While this “does not yet appear . . . , we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2, RSV). This is our model.

Weak Anthropic Principle. In physics we now know that the universe is remarkably adapted to human existence. If any one of a number of such factors as gravity, temperature, solar radiation and cosmic expansion were changed even slightly, human life would be impossible. The universe would collapse, the sun would incinerate us, or we would freeze to death. Therefore, in a remarkable way the universe is made for human beings. In science this is called the “weak anthropic principle.” Books and scores of articles have been written by quantum physicists on the amazing reality that, for some reason, every aspect of the universe is fashioned for human beings.

Strong Anthropic Principle. There is also the “strong anthropic principle,” which here we will mention only briefly. It was enunciated by the quantum physicist John Wheeler. The strong anthropic principle states that the universe exists because we observe it. Wheeler reached this conclusion because an electron, for example, exists as a particle with a fixed charge, fixed spin and “momentum” only when we observe it in a particular way. If we observe the electron in another way, it does not have those characteristics at all. So the characteristics of the ultimate constituents of the universe vary and are profoundly affected by our manner of observation.

If we acknowledge that Wheeler is correct — that the universe exists because humans observe it — then we can conclude that there was Someone on the way to becoming human who saw it and fashioned it. In other words, the universe exists and we exist because he sees us. Walbert Bühlmann relates this personal story:

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In my first year as a missionary in Tanganyika, in 1951, I had a beautiful experience. . . . There were no missionary sisters at Mchombe station in those days, nor any African medical personnel either, and I had to be on call for the sick two days a week. I handled from fifty to eighty patients on those days, doing what I could for their everyday African ailments. One day there stood before me a youth of about twenty, tall and very thin, with a cough and a fever. I asked him what I could do for him. “Can’t you see?” he replied. I soon determined that he was in the advanced stages of tuberculosis, and that there was simply nothing I could do for him. He was a “pagan” as they say in the books, and had come to our remote mission station for the first time, lodging with acquaintances in the vicinity. I gave him a tonic and promised to come to see him in a few days at the farmstead.

I did go to see him, and brought him more tonic and a small quantity of snuff. I took the occasion to attempt to prepare him for baptism. But before I began to instruct him I wanted to know what he knew about God. “Risasi ya Ngombe, what do you think — how many gods are there?” He answered unhesitatingly, “There can only be one God. There is only one God.” Next I asked, “And what do you think, what does God do?” Risasi ya Ngombe thought a moment, then replied, “*Anatungalia*. He looks at us.”

What a beautiful answer. Few Christians could have given such an answer. This “pagan,” then, exhausted, fatally ill, and hunched at the door of his hut, lived in the gaze of God, in the presence of God.⁴

Yes, God sees us. That is why we exist.

The Universal Human Self

We have observed that there was Someone on the way to becoming human who saw and fashioned the universe. The miracle of the incarnation is the miracle of God’s becoming human. Here he

recapitulates the entire history of mankind (male and female) in himself. He

is conceived, gestated, born and raised. He lives, ministers, suffers and dies. What cosmic significance this has! Here he is fashioning a common, universal perceptual standard for what it means to be a human self. That self is a *being* and a *becoming*. It is relational, historical and creative. That self is life. It is a whole. It is not commandable. It is decisional. And it is free. It is free *from* domination and submission and free *to* live, love, work and play — to *be* and to *become*.⁵

At Calvary, Jesus completes a marvelous metaphor. In a previous article we observed that the ancients developed a worldview with a verticalized, three-level universe — heaven, earth, and the netherworld.⁶ So Christ, in the process of becoming human, descends from heaven. He lives on the earth. And finally, with his expiring cry at Calvary, he descends into hell. Then on the third day he rises from the dead, and in himself he crushes the old verticalized worldview. Heaven and earth and hell are now united in his human Person. In the Risen One is revealed one humanity — one universal perceptual standard for what it means to be a human self.

In this light we can abandon the ideas of a demonic self, a divinized self, an animalized self, an autonomous self, an institutionalized self, and the “no self.”⁷ Now, because of Calvary and the resurrection, we have one universal human Self, one universal human “Other.”

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Endnotes

1. The Greek word *parousia*, translated, means both “presence” and “coming.” See *Wikipedia — The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Parousia,” at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parousia: “Parousia . . . is an ancient Greek word meaning presence, arrival, or official visit.”
2. See “The Nature of the Human Self,” *Outlook* (Prequel 1991.5).
3. See Victor Frankl, *The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1948, 1975).

4. Walbert Bühlmann, *God's Chosen Peoples*, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982), pp. 148, 149.
5. See "The Nature of the Human Self"; cf. Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1942).
6. See "The Origin of the Human Self II," *Outlook* (Prequel 1992.3).
7. See "The Nature of the Human Self."

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