



Introduction to “The Divine Presence”

Background Review

One property that fundamentally distinguishes mankind from lower animals is a consciousness that is based on language and that focuses on God. For this reason the human species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, might better be defined as *Homo sapiens religiosus*. Available evidence suggests that mankind became consciously aware of “god” about 10,000 BCE. This consciousness apparently resided in one of the two (bicameral) temporal lobes of the brain. The *symbolic* visual and auditory presence of “god” facilitated advances in technology and in the domestication of plants and animals by mankind. However, when this process of domestication extended to the subjection of rival peoples by so-called divinized power structures, god-consciousness became a profound problem. It was in this context that the Mediterranean catastrophe of the Dark Age (ca. 1200-1000 BCE) occurred. This volcanic disaster brought the disruption of civilization and was accompanied by the termination of bicameral god-consciousness.

Overview of This Article

For three millennia mankind has lived in the tension between the necessity for the distinctive “other” (if there is to be a genuinely self-conscious “I”) and the fear, denial and rejection of mutual “otherness.” It is in this context that mankind has struggled to define itself with respect to God. Some have believed that there is no ultimate “Other” (atheists). Some have contended that an ultimate “Other” cannot be known (agnostics). Some have contended that the ultimate “Other” has abandoned the universe (deists). Some have claimed that everything *is* God, and God *is* everything, so that everything *is* “Other” (pantheists). And some have claimed that God is *in* everything, and everything is *in* God, so that there is no meaningful distinction between the “Other” and mankind (panentheists). Then there are those dualists who believe that the “Other” – i.e., themselves (the good, uncreated god above) – is imprisoned in

the flesh by the evil creator-god below and can be liberated only through appropriate spiritual knowledge (Gnostics). Unfortunately, such views have seriously compromised the emergence of human self-consciousness, often with disastrously inhuman consequences.

Contrary to all these views was the astonishing development of Davidic Judaism (ca. 1000 BCE). David and his scholars introduced an awareness of mutual “otherness” and a consequent self-consciousness that, except for the Christ event itself, has not been surpassed to this day. God was seen, not as a “transcendent” god wholly *above* us, nor as an “immanent” god wholly *within* us, but as the “paramanent” God, who *remains beside* us (pa-rá-ma-nent: a new word from the Greek and late Latin *para-* = near, beside, with, alongside + *manere* = to remain).

Tragically, the Davidic breakthrough was never adequately perceived or accepted by the Chosen People. As a result, particularly under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jewish exiles returning from Persia adopted Zoroastrian perspectives from the land of their captivity. Now the covenantal (relational) YHWH of history was perceived as a contractual (possessive) god immanent to (remaining in) the people. In Judaism, this immanence was defined as the divine presence of indwelling Law.

The adoption of divine immanence – and thus the virtual abandonment of mutual “otherness” – carried grave implications. For example, with divinity enthroned in the hearts of believers, there was no need for an enthroned king, the prophetic office, or for further Scripture. Believers, who had chosen the “good” of divine immanence, must now be separated from nonbelievers, who were possessed by “evil.” A walled theocratic power structure was created to exclude the “evil” of surrounding aliens. Even the dualistic Zoroastrian distinction between a “good” god and an “evil” god began to be adapted to a Jewish framework, so that finally “Satan” became the Jewish equivalent of the “evil” god of Zoroastrianism.

In this context, only the human manifestation of God as Jesus Christ could ultimately reconcile mankind’s persistent rejection of its ultimate “Other.” Only the Christ event could provide the human self-consciousness that says “No” to mankind’s inhumanity to the “other” and that says “Yes” to mutual “otherness.”

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