



In the Image of the Father

THERE IS JUST One God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 8:4). Almost universally acknowledged, he has been and, to most, remains:

Father of all! in every age,
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage and by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord!¹

This Father God always has existed and therefore must precede all other reality. Before the “beginning” (Genesis 1:1), he was thus present only to himself and to nonexistence. Beside him there was

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nothing and no one. Because to him there was no “other,” there was for him no realized freedom, responsibility, meaning, purpose, value, caring or commitment. For such attributes exist only in the presence of an “other.” While God was the Ultimate Being, he also was confined to the ultimate bondage of self-existence.

The Father as Self-Existent Creator and Lawgiver

Confronted with his own confinement, the Father acted as Creator (Genesis 1:1). He commanded reality into existence from nonexistence (Hebrews 11:3). At his order, time and space, matter and energy, structure and substance, life-forms, and the attributes of consciousness and thought appeared. In accomplishing this, the Father arranged for the universe to reflect as much contingency (possibility) and opportunity as possible. These possibilities ranged from existence to extinction, from life to death, from domination to submission.

Through his command God thus became primally (originally, primitively) present to Creation, and Creation became primally present to him. Creation was God’s “other.” God was Creation’s “Other.” Although this commanded, imposed presence was necessary in the beginning, it finally became unbearable to both Creator and creature. This is because imposed, controlled presence excludes relationship that is truly purposeful, meaningful, value-based, caring and committed. Only reciprocal co-existence — an existence requiring shared initiative — can achieve such a goal. History is therefore the continuing record of God’s efforts to achieve true co-existence with

Creation. History also is the record of Creation's painful efforts, through mankind (male and female), to identify with God.

On his part the Father originally presented himself to Creation through the agency of law (Job 38:4-11). Thank God for the laws that hold the planets in their courses, that assure the light of the sun, the return of the seasons, and the resources necessary for life! Thank God for the instincts that guide the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the field! Thank God, too, for thus preserving and sustaining life in a highly unpredictable universe!

But this is not all God has done. With the dawn of consciousness, the Father disclosed himself to man through the agency of prophetic instruction and admonition (Matthew 5:17) and through commanded covenantal agreements (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-22; Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5). However, none of these modes of presence represented the freedom and responsibility that God desired for both himself and man. From the beginning he therefore determined to move beyond his own self-existence, beyond his presence through the agency of law, to a true relational co-existence with mankind.

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Man's Attempt to Image Self-Existent Deity

Meanwhile, from the dawn of mankind's consciousness, man presented himself to a God whom he could not observe or adequately describe, understand or know. Nevertheless, man has been aware of his separation from God, subordination to God, and existence under the legal jurisdiction of God (Genesis 3). At the same time, man has regarded himself as existing in the image of the Father (Genesis 1:26, 27). This conviction of uniqueness as God's own offspring has supported and guided mankind throughout the buffetings and tragedies of history (Acts 17:28, 29).

To demonstrate this filial relationship of being sons and daughters of God, mankind has sought to reflect the image of the Father. If the Father is uncreated and self-existent, the image likewise must be uncreated and self-existent. If the Father manifests himself through uncreated laws, patterns or models, the image also must be the manifestation of comparable archetypes (originals). If the Father employs archetypal law to possess, control and dominate profane, fallen, expendable reality, the image of the Father must do likewise.

Thus, with the emergence of world culture and civilization in the East and Middle East over 4,000 years ago, mankind introduced the idea of "emanation." Emanation is the assumed radiation of God — of his uncreated divinity and self-existence, of his presence, power and authority across the universe. Emanation is regarded as having the same essence, substance or "ousia" as God himself. This divine essence is variously likened to rare and precious matter, to the "divine spark," energy, power or force, to mind, consciousness, thoughts or ideas, to

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forms or archetypes, to spirit or soul, to cosmic pulse or rhythm. But regardless of its particular identity, divine emanation is conceived as the means of divine presence to Creation. Emanation is not regarded as *agential* presence (presence through agency). It is thought to be the *substantial* and immanent (within consciousness or the mind) presence of divine authority to predatorily possess, control and command objects and events on earth and then return to cosmic oneness.

In primitive animism, emanation was identified with nature itself. Modern remnants of such animism include contemporary astrology and the lingering use of such terms as *influenza* (occult influence of the stars), *lunacy* and *lunatic* (“moonstruck” — influence of the moon), and *melancholia* (an excess of black bile — dark earth, dark nature). In ancient Egypt, emanation was identified with such astral bodies as the sun, moon and stars, and finally with Pharaoh himself. Because Pharaoh believed himself to be the uncreated emanation of divinity, he claimed the authority to possess, control, subjugate and enslave profane and inferior beings. World culture and civilization thus were built on the premise that divinity was present, not through the agency of authoritative law, but through the emanation of uncreated divine essence or “ousia.”

It was in this historic setting that God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:31). It was in this setting that God led Israel out of bondage in Egypt and into the wilderness of Sinai (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6, 15). It was in this same setting that God admonished his Chosen People to avoid all the imagined emanations and images of the Canaanite gods (Exodus 20:4, 5; 23:13; Deuteronomy 5:7-9). For thousands of years, God entreated mankind to abandon and repudiate every imagined emanation that authorizes the possession, control and domestication of others. Nevertheless, uncreated emanation has been the ultimate and universal goal of a mankind that proclaimed itself to be the very image of self-existent Deity.

By the beginning of the axial age (c. 700 BCE), man concluded that imperial authority, which claimed to be the sole uncreated emanation of Deity, was rampantly subjugating mankind. Simultaneously, in both East and West, the great philosophers and religionists of that age repudiated the concept of a divine emanation restricted to the gods, to the cosmos, nature or imperial authority. In place of such emanation, the axial age embraced the concept of a democratic emanation of Deity identified with

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mankind more generally — an emanation that would grant the democratic authority to holy separation, on one hand, and to predatory possession, control and subjection of others, on the other hand — all in the name of the Father.

It was in this setting that God recalled Israel from exile in Babylon. It was in this setting that he repudiated command, impositional and paternalistic leadership. It was in this setting that he revealed himself to be the humble Messenger, the suffering Servant of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 53; cf. Psalm 22: 1-18). It was in this setting that he became incarnate as a Babe in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Matthew 1:23; Luke 2:7).

God's Determination to Forsake Self-Existence for Co-Existence

Tragically, mankind has not yet perceived God's eternal determination to forsake self-existence. Mankind has therefore continued to nurture the delusion of his own self-evident autonomy as the uncreated emanation of Deity. Man's psychopathic fixation on his identity as the image of a self-existent Father has led this world to global crisis. This crisis is not a crisis of overpopulation. It is not a crisis of resources. It is not a crisis over nature or the environment, over law or diversity. Rather, the crisis is over the imagined and delusional self-existence of man (Daniel 4:28-30). This critical deception tragically excludes the "other." It excludes all human relationality. It excludes all individuality, particularity and identity. It excludes all possibility of true human freedom, responsibility, meaning, purpose, value and commitment. Such a delusion pretends that man's destiny is to be present only as a law to "oneself."

Again, God the Father has long sought to move beyond his own self-existence, beyond his presence through the agency of law, to full relational co-existence with mankind. At the same time, mankind has long been determined to possess and to be the very essence of divine authority through emanation. The time has come to shatter this myth, to expose this delusion, to unmask this deception. God longs to present himself to mankind, not simply through agency or emanation, but as the actual "Other." He longs for mankind to freely present itself as the "other." He longs for the mutually chosen reign of relationality, co-existent togetherness, and joint freedom, responsibility, meaning, purpose, value and commitment.

For these reasons we are invited to move beyond the primal image of a commandable Creation, initiated by Fatherhood (Malachi 2:10), to the second epoch of Creation, disclosed in the historic incarnation of Sonship (Matthew 16:15-17). Beyond this, we now are invited to move to the third and climactic epoch of dynamic, eternal co-creativity, revealed in the embodied and relational presence of our Risen Brother (Matthew 25:40; John 15:15; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Hebrews 2:11, 17).

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Endnote

1. Alexander Pope (1688-1744), "The Universal Prayer," in John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 15th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1980), p. 340.

This article was originally published September 1996 under the Destiny imprint.