



A MINISTRY SCHOOL OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF THE UPPER MIDWEST

Reality in Christ

Part II: Knowledge of Humanity

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"Let me know Thee, O God; let me know myself!" ~Augustine, Confessions.

"It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself." ~John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion.

"Christ fully discloses man to himself." ~John Paul II, Letter to Families.

I. Getting Our Bearings, Gaining Momentum

"For the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because the world neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me" (John 14:16-19).

God the Son came to reconcile and atone for—to crucify and resurrect—our broken and corrupted knowledge of God, to heal the *hermeneutical nightmare* of our broken and corrupted minds by the renewal of our minds in the mind of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:12-16).



II. Parenthetical Statements and Perplexing Oddities

Human life is not self-explanatory. Quite the contrary, our lives are like parenthetical statements, because while parenthetical statements have meaning and significance within their intended literary context, they are reduced to perplexing oddities apart from it.

“That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be built.” ~Bertrand Russell, *A Free Man’s Worship*.

“A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread...they scramble for little, mean advantages over each other. Age creeps upon them and infirmities follow.... Those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief... At length ambition is dead, vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last, the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them; and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence, where they achieved nothing, where they were a mistake, a failure, and a foolishness.” ~Samuel Clemens, *Autobiography of Mark Twain*.

III. Gloriously Good News: We Are the Image of God...in Christ!

i. Genesis 1:20-27

The first thing Scripture tells us about humans is that we are unique among all creatures, because humans alone bear the image of God. The true measure of a worm is a worm; the true measure of a fish is a fish; the true measure of a bird is a bird; and the true measure of a beast is a beast. ***But the true measure of a human is God.***

Yet what does it mean that the first humans, our primal parents, were created in the image of God when—prior to the incarnation—there was categorically, qualitatively ***nothing*** human about God? It means the full splendor of our image bearing shines as God intends only in light of God’s definitive ***human*** image, Jesus Christ.



ii. Colossians 1:15-19.

The apostle Paul uses two designations to stress that *the true measure of a human is indeed God...as human; the human God*: 1. Image of the invisible God; and 2. Firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15).

1. Jesus Christ is the Image of the Invisible God.

It is precisely as the fully human Son of Man that the eternal Word is the image of God, the exact imprint of God's nature, the One in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3).

In other words, Jesus is *the whole fullness of deity in whom there is everything human!* He is the fully human *Logos—the divine Logic, the divine self-exposition—of humanity!*

That is, Jesus is the substance and standard, the meaning and measure, of our image bearing, the only way to understand the truth of authentic human existence. For he is the Way and the Truth of authentic human Life.

2. Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of All Creation.

That Jesus is the firstborn of all creation refers not to birth order, but to supremacy of status. He is before and above all things, the agent and heir of all creation. *He fashioned the first humans in accord with and anticipation of the divine image he would become in the fullness of time as the God-man.*

For Jesus is not simply an inheritor of an extant humanity, but the source, the ground, and the interpretive paradigm for a humanity that is not autonomous, self-referential, or self-explanatory.

As the *redeemer of humanity*, Jesus is the second Adam (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45), but as a *template for humanity*, it is the first Adam who is the second image/firstborn. In other words, Jesus is the antitype of Adam and the archetype of humanity—the model or pattern for all other humans.

- “I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ...” (1 Cor. 11:3).
- Ephesians 5:25-32; Genesis 2:23-24.



“For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created.... When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He...showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image.” ~Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*.

iii. **Discerning Our Authentically Human Face in the Face of Christ**

Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God as the perfect image of humanity, disclosing not only *God’s self* to us, but also *our self* to us—knowledge of God in Christ being the necessary context and content for true knowledge of self.

i. **Genesis 1-2; John 19:30.**

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh (i.e. the body) I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (*Gal. 2:20*).

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died...that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (*2 Cor. 5:14-17*)

“Not only do we only know God through Jesus Christ, but we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ; we only know life and death through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the meaning of our life or our death, of God or of ourselves.” ~Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*.

Jesus is the true measure of a human, the Light who reveals the truth about us humans. To flee the Light is to forsake the true ground and goal of human existence, to consign oneself to inauthenticity by failing to grasp that humans are created by God for God—by the pre-incarnate Word for conformity to the incarnate Word. Yet to abide in the Light is to have him penetrate the springs of our personality with his life-giving, life-transforming presence, such that ***we learn who we are by learning whose we are*** (John 1:4-5; 3:19-21; 8:12).

This happens not by moral achievement, psychological introspection, or therapeutic technique, but by learning one’s true self in the presence of Jesus, by discerning our authentically human face in the face of Christ. That is to say, ***this happens as the cramped circumference of a false self is opened up to include Christ’s self, as self-understanding is reconstituted by an identity forged in and drawn from Christ***. Jesus reveals us to us east of Eden by rectifying the sin-riddled relationship



we have with ourselves, marked by the self being curved in upon the self in self-centered, self-lordship. As such, ***true knowledge of self is not and cannot be the result of mere self-analysis, but of God's self-disclosure in Christ (i.e. by discernment of the self in Christ).***

1. The Liturgical Year: Discerning Our Life in Christ, Conforming Our Life to Christ's

The liturgical year/church calendar patters our life around Christ as a participation in Christ's life. Not as a mere series of important events, but as the unfolding of the grand story of redemption, in which we learn our story.

"The church is called to proclaim continually and act out this central mystery of God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ as it journeys through time." ~Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Time*.

2. Christ's Human Emotional/Affective Life and Ours

Jesus was subject to the full range of authentic human emotion, even those emotions that we tend to consider "negative," such as anger, frustration, vexation, jealousy, and even hatred (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 10:13-16; John 11; Heb. 1:8-9). What does this tell us about our human emotion(s)?