

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 5th September – God's image and likeness

(Taken from notes for the introduction to a retreat at Hawkstone Hall, December 2014)

1. In the documents of Vatican 1 and Vatican 11 there's an image of God, when creating Adam and Eve, seeing, in imagination, a unique man, Jesus, who would exist in the distant future. It was God's image of God's own self made human in a real person. As he shaped and moulded Adam and Eve from the mud, his artist's eye was on that inner picture of divine incarnation in a certain baby, nearly 14 billion years later, 2000 year ago. In creating the world God was preparing the way for the Messiah. Jesus was imagined, from the beginning, in the divine heart before he lived in space and time.

God created everything with so much love at the beginning. God could not wait to become human at the heart of creation. It is Love from the start. Creation was Love's first step towards living in space and time. Not all that long ago that Love emerged in the shape of a baby.

We are Love incarnate. Our very being, our energy, our life-force is what we call God. God fell in love with the world long before He fell in love with Mary. God was incarnate in the world long before he became incarnate in Mary. The religions of the world are too small for big souls. Self-protective churches stifle souls who need infinite breathing space.

Carolina story about the country boy who had a great talent for carving dogs out of wood. Every day he sat on his porch whittling away, letting the shavings fall around him. One day a visitor, very impressed, asked him the secret of his art. 'I just take a block of wood', he said, 'and whittle off the parts that don't look like a dog.' He had a clear picture of the dog in his imagination before he created the actual wooden dog. The Michelangelo saw in a block of marble an angel/lion/David. i) 'How did you know there was a lion in the marble?' story.

ii) 'In every block of marble I see a statue as plain as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I only have to hew away the rough walls that imprison that lovely apparition to reveal it to other eyes as mine see it. I just took away everything that was not David. I carved until I set him free.'

2 From the beginning people have had some notion of a deeper, higher self within them. At the first Christmas it was revealed to the world that this inner self was none other than God's own self. Now we all have a clearer idea, an astonishing intuition of our true inner self. This is what we're after. We continue to do our whittling, carving; we make the effort. We go to Mass when we can, we say our prayers, we go off things for Lent, we diet, do Pilates, do the Camino; we prepare for Advent, we go on retreats, we read books. You are here this evening, full of hope, still searching, still believing in God's love for us - not always believing the picture I've just painted of our deepest selves being divine. Most Catholics still do not believe that because we were never really told that.

3 How to purify, nourish, perfect our souls? How to move from being created in the image of God and grow into God's likeness: (as expressed in Eastern Christianity). We are like an outline to be coloured-in: (Mystics). Our Baptism promise is to be fulfilled – we are baptised by the daily waters of life . . . that grows and ripens the seed so that the seed can blossom: Lost inner child to be recovered child: False self to true self: from lost voice to finding your voice: from outer authority to inner authority: making the inner journey: doing the inner work. (The sculpting, creating, crafting stories only just hint at the transforming work.)

4 Going the soul's way – rather than the mind's way. Peace of mind – no such thing. Our thoughts are rarely at peace. We must go outside them, or inside them, or underneath them. When we are in our mind we mostly fretting. When we are at peace it is rarely the fruit of our thinking. How do we find another way of being present to our restless ourselves, to the negative effect of others on us?

We look for a place of a larger freedom, a larger field that includes body, mind, soul, spirit – all at once. A place of bigness without barriers. “May what I am and do flow from me like a river; no forcing, no holding back” (RMR). Krishnamurti (Indian philosopher) – ‘If you trust the river of life, the river of life has an astonishing way of taking care of you.’ Think of God as a flow rather than a disembodied person, or a substance.

The key, I think, is about staying connected with the source, the energy, the love, at the deepest levels possible. A sinking in to the inner wholeness of Love in our deepest hearts. Every morning, every evening, to choose to live from the core of love – to stay connected at all points of our awareness with mystery itself, to feel a part of a greater flow, current, ocean; to be immersed in the surrounding energy of Being. That unconditional love is always available, always pressing in on us, always breaking out of us; always supporting us; it is a place of no fear; it leads to a new calmness, a peace at your centre.

It has little to do with the way the mind works; it is beyond the mind, beyond trying, beyond mental control, beyond will-power, beyond strategic planning. It is more a kind of leap into the abyss, a vision of possibility (‘I can do all things’), a mind released into a sudden! freedom. It is about a bigger picture. ‘If you want to build a ship do not drum up people to collect wood, and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.’ (Antoine de St Exupery).

‘Wanting’ and ‘longing’ . . . Place the beckoning horizon before our imagination – that is what motivates, inspires, makes possible. It is what re-aligns us, re-heals us, reconnects us inside the incarnate heart of God. It is not about starting from scratch. We are somehow already at one with God. But we have slipped our moorings, dragged our anchor, and find ourselves adrift from a grounded, centred and safe place. (The church, sacraments, the Eucharist, our friends our inner teacher keep reminding us of that place.)

We have become disconnected. But we essentially are at one with God. We are like tiny flickers of the fire that is Life itself, Love itself, consciousness itself, Being itself, God’s very self. But we keep almost going out, losing the light.

‘A door opens in the centre of our being, and we seem to fall through into immense depths’ (Do all of us have glimpses of what this might mean? Or some experience of such depth?) All eternity seems to have become ours in one breathless moment. We fall into this wholeness when we transcend our negative, fearful thinking. No more denying or rejecting. You are now learning to see this Oneness, Wholeness, everywhere.’

All of this is not an esoteric vision out of touch with reality. The goal of it all is to consciously and fully live our ordinary lives from this perspective, this ground of our being. ‘If you split a piece of wood, I am there. Lift a stone, you will find me there.’ (Gospel of Thomas.) The oneness, the intimacy with God we are considering is very earthy and incarnational indeed. It teaches us to be fully alert to what is happening around us, to take full advantage of every moment. The deepest contemplation enables us to close a door mindfully, to notice the person passing by.

Put another way – the human form is how God lives in creation. God is present directly and completely in the human being; experiences the God-self in everyone. The divine permeates the whole world. The turning world is the incarnation of God. This sinking into God does not mean opting out of this world, but rather being totally IN this world, and loving it for what it is. This reality is experienced by us as a state of extraordinary clarity, love and joy, and brings enormous freedom.

Each individual person is unique, like a single stitch in a great cosmic tapestry. It is within this sacred scenario that we become more fully human, more alive, more passionately engaged as humans within the framework of an incarnate God.