

The evolution of God

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This young man had the ingenious idea of taking pictures of himself (selfies) throughout his adolescence. When assembled, these pictures constituted a remarkable record of his development. He had obviously changed over time. What had changed? He had, to be sure, changed physically. He had most likely developed his character and personality. Has he become a different person? Paradoxically, he is the same and a different person. What about God?

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). As the Creator, God exists both in time and outside time. Our finite mind cannot, as yet, fathom what existed before God. For, strictly speaking, God exists outside of our law of cause and effect. Traditional theology has it that God is eternal, unchanging and absolute. But once God creates the Universe, and especially human beings, He (masculine used for convenience) enters time. He becomes engaged in the human condition, engaged in History, to become, after the fall of man, a Providential God. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden indicates a change in the attitude of God after the fall of Adam and Eve. All seems to indicate God passed from the affectionate tenderness of a caring parent to an uncompromising, a severe judge and mentor. He does not condemn irrevocably, however, but demands and expects, beyond physical development, growth of a spiritual nature. And from then on, His behaviour will accompany the travail, the tribulation and the vicissitudes involved in the transformation of the human condition. This evolution in God is particularly noted in the process of restoration of humankind.

It is necessary to understand that God does not change in the same way that Man does. The development in God is not to be understood as a change from one state to another, from good to better. For there is no insufficiency in God; there is no need for improvement as such. He remains unchanging in His perfection. That very perfection requires, however, that He adapts to the changing condition of Man. (Being enriched in the process of loving, no matter what the circumstances?) God always knows and does the right thing. His omniscience and His omnipotence remain intact.

This Providential God is manifested, particularly in the Old Testament, as a God who constantly speaks to His people, exhorts them, rebukes and chastises them, loses patience with them, is disappointed when things go wrong and can get very angry too. But He is always watchful to warn of danger, as the case may be. He warns Cain that “sin is crouching at your door” (Gen.4:7). He uses angels to instruct Noah to build the Ark and thus escape the flood judgment, puts Abraham through the test of faith in the binding of Isaac, converses with Moses at the burning bush and proclaims He is YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, guides and feeds an ungrateful people for years in the wilderness to the promised land. Why did He bother?

God is absolutely determined to take this bedraggled people from the tribal level to the national level, waiting for the right conditions to send His Son. The advent of Jesus marked the transition from the age of the Father to the age of His Son. The time had come for God to pass the providential baton. “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him” (Mk.9:7).

That Son had come as the “second Adam” (1Cor. 15:45) to fulfill the mandate given to the first Adam, namely to “be fruitful, multiply and subdue the earth” (Gen.1:28). In other words build the kingdom of God through the multiplication of God-centered families. Alas, those the Father had so painstakingly prepared to receive His Son did not recognize Him, did not accept Him, and did not believe in His words or His miracles. Jesus freely took it upon himself to offer His life as a ransom to deliver humanity from the bondage of sin, from the bondage of Satan. The age of the Son was thus of short duration (a mere 33 years). Clearly God the Father had nothing to do with the crucifixion of His Son. Hence the forlorn cry of the agonizing Jesus: “Eli, Eli lama sa-bach-tani” (Mat. 27:46). But God had bided His time, choking on His broken heart, to resurrect Jesus.

The resurrected Jesus re-entered the fallen world as a glorified spirit with power to send the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:16-17). Miraculously galvanized, the apostles moved the providence through Christianity to worldwide dimension. This is different from historical determinism: it is providential determinism, an inexorable drive forward to return to and be reconciled with the pre-fall God, who is more than eager to close the parenthesis of a fallen world. Some Jews, most Christians and some people of other faiths as well, live in expectation of the imminent return of the Messiah. Unificationists, on their part, believe the Lord of the Second Advent has already come and gone in the person of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. He has fully completed the original mandate given to Adam and Eve, becoming with his wife Hak Ja Han the True Parents of mankind. The True Parents have institutionalized new sacraments in a new doctrine of complete salvation. And Rev. Moon has proclaimed the emergence of the final incarnations of the divinity, living “gods of day” in contrast to the invisible “god of night.”

Many are incensed at what is considered as blatant heresy, a shocking displacement of the traditional Trinitarian God. For Unificationists, the shift from God the Father to God-Heavenly Parent accommodates the proclamation of Mrs. Moon as the incarnation of the female component of the divinity. There duly followed the declaration of Cheon IL Guk, i.e. the Kingdom of God on earth, appropriately accompanied by a Heavenly Constitution, aimed at establishing a definitive theocracy. Spiritual and temporal orders are to be merged, with political and economic powers concentrated in the hands of the elect. The thorny question of succession in the Moon family (or the Han family) is wracking the movement. There is passionate debate over the validity of the new sacrament (the "blessing"). Who is qualified to dispense it? Sacraments per se do not solve sin, as Judeo-Christian history testifies. At best they constitute propitious symbolic means towards a supernatural end from which individual principled endeavour under the aegis of God's grace cannot be eschewed. Schism has thus reared its acrimonious head in the Unification movement. Literally, Heaven knows what is going to happen at Mrs.

What is to be made of this development? One could invoke here the Gamaliel principle. This principle is in effect based on what Jesus told his disciples on one occasion. "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said ... Forbid him not" (Lk. 9:49-50). This could be taken to mean: let God work out His dispensation in His own mysterious, albeit painful ways. In this same spirit, Gamaliel could have been inspired to declare, when the Sanhedrin was preparing to slay the apostles: "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it" (Acts

Has God actually evolved, then, to become incarnated in the person of Mrs. Moon, the True Heavenly Mother, now that Rev. Moon has passed on? Have True Parents too, in their personality or otherwise, evolved over time? Evolved in the quality and expression of the love expected of them? Evolved to an apparent indifference to the condition of church members, some of whom seem to have nowhere to go? And others who claim they have indeed noted of late a lack of compassion, no sense of gratitude for years of grueling sacrifice. Also a loss of dignified behavior, manifested in the inappropriate use of vitriolic language, casting curses and brandishing mutual excommunications on to "apostates". Where is God in all this? Has He too evolved in the same way as His eminent embodiments?

It is not unreasonable to imagine God being able to go beyond any incarnation. If there are divine True Parents, then why not imagine God as the Heavenly Grand-Parents of Humanity? Even in our fallen society children often, though not always, find solace and unconditional love in the bosom of their grandparents. God would thus be one step before, one step abreast and one step ahead of the human experience. The quality of the relationship between Father and Son may evolve over time but do their essential status and nature change? (The same considerations apply to Father-God and His begotten Daughter). The Father shall always remain the Father (or the Heavenly Parent) and the Son always the

Son. The Son can become a father but not the Father who begot him. It is reasonable therefore to infer that this position is not interchangeable, is in fact irreversible. The distinction between the two persons is permanent. The other person remains forever other and unique in his otherness. Could this be why Jesus said: "My Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28)? Was he saying that the Creator-God, God the Father, shall always be greater than the Son? In the final analysis, for now, it seems as if God the Heavenly Parent (or Grand Parent), is the only Person to be completely trusted. It is likely that we cannot presently see clearly, as St. Paul says: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor. 13:12). Are not we meant to continue to grow? Why should not God be poised to move to different realms, to different levels of consciousness?