

# GOD IN HUMAN FORM:

## A THEME IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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God's becoming man in Jesus Christ is of course a unique event. It is unique not simply in the sense in which all historical events are unique, that is, unrepeatable because they are bound up with particular times, places, and persons. It is unique also in the sense that it is an extraordinary *kind* of event. Many events can be categorised and grouped with other similar events; we even speak, loosely, of history 'repeating' itself, when we mean that we recognise a pattern or category of events that we have seen before. But that is not in any strict sense true of the incarnation. There have been no other incarnations of God; nowhere else in human history has a human life expressed in its totality the reality of God.

But that is not to say that the incarnation of God in Christ has no analogies or parallels at all. What I will be suggesting in this paper is that a central element in the incarnation, namely God's manifestation of himself in human form, is not a bolt from the blue but the supreme example of a whole category of similar manifestations. There has never been another God-man, but that God should take human form and clothe himself with flesh as he did in the incarnation is a fact that has its antecedents and anticipations, its reflections and repercussions. The incarnation is not an eccentric item in our theological vocabulary, but may be seen as the outworking of what we might speak of as a tendency in the divine nature towards incarnation.

None of the similarities to the incarnation which I will be discussing here is equivalent to the incarnation; there is more to the incarnation than the elements for which I can find analogies elsewhere in the Bible. So there is no question of minimising the uniqueness of the incarnation. To take a parallel situation: if one were to point out the parallels between the teaching of Jesus and that of the Old Testament and of contemporary Judaism, one could undoubtedly show that much of what he said was not unique or original to himself. But such a demonstration would not undermine the authority or the truth of what he taught. No more should it undermine the significance of the incarnation—rather it should enhance it—to show that in himself becoming man God has not done some totally novel, quite unprecedented thing, but has climaxed a manner of his self-manifestation.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Anthropomorphic language.* Biblical language which speaks of God in human terms is part of the divine movement towards revealing himself in human form.

Frequently in the Bible, God is spoken of *as if* he were a man. Three types of anthropomorphism in Old Testament language can be distinguished:<sup>2</sup> 1. Bodily parts are attributed to God. He is said to have eyes (Am. 9: 4), ears (Isa. 59: 1), a face (Gen. 32: 31), a mouth (Jer. 9: 12),

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hands (Am. 9: 2), fingers (Deut. 9: 10), feet (Isa. 60: 13), a heart (Gen. 6: 6). 2. He often is said to behave like a human being: he can walk in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3: 8), lock the door of Noah's ark (7: 16), smell the smoke of sacrifice (8: 21), come down from heaven to see the tower of Babel (11: 5); he can speak (Gen. 1: 3), laugh (Ps. 2: 4), and whistle (Isa. 7: 18). 3. Perhaps even more surprisingly, he is credited with human emotions: he rejoices (Zeph. 3: 17), has delight (Jer. 9: 24), loves (Deut. 4: 37), and also hates (Lev. 20: 23); even jealousy (Ex. 20: 3), anger (Deut. 29: 20), and change of heart (repentance) (Gen. 6: 6) are attributed to him.

Such anthropomorphisms have long been an embarrassment to Jews and Christians alike. Already in the second century B.C. the translators of the Septuagint removed many of the anthropomorphisms of the Hebrew Bible, though whether they did so on theological or literary grounds is a matter of dispute.<sup>3</sup> But certainly the first-century Jewish theologian Philo was affronted by the Biblical anthropomorphisms. In his treatise *On the Unchangeableness of God* he affirms that although the Bible says both that 'God is not like a man' (Num. 23: 19) and that he is like a man, 'the former statement is warranted by firmest truth, but the latter is introduced for the instruction of the many (*hoi polloi*)',<sup>4</sup> those 'whose natural wit is dense or dull, whose childhood training has been mismanaged, and are incapable of seeing clearly'.<sup>5</sup> But to suppose, for example, that God really had second thoughts about the creation of man (Gen. 6: 6) would be blasphemy: 'what greater impiety could there be than to suppose that the Unchangeable changes?'<sup>6</sup>

While Christianity has produced some extremists who have believed, like the fourth-century Audiani,<sup>7</sup> that the Biblical anthropomorphisms were to be understood literally and that in view of man's creation in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) God must have a body, the bulk of Christian thinkers have tended in the opposite direction. Few have gone as far as the second-century Marcion, who totally rejected the Old Testament representation of God, partly on the basis of its anthropomorphism, as depicting another God than the God and Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> But most have attempted, in one way or another, to explain away Biblical anthropomorphic language.

One method of explaining away anthropomorphisms has been to say that they belong to a primitive stage of revelation and are replaced later by more 'spiritual' and 'refined' conceptions of God. A second method is to regard them as mere metaphors. Both these methods are employed in the short entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* under 'Anthropomorphism': 'Scripture, especially in the earlier books of the OT (e.g. Gen. 3: 8, 32. 24ff., Exod. 4: 24) in order to be intelligible to less developed minds, frequently uses anthropomorphic language, which is in most cases clearly metaphorical'.<sup>9</sup> But the objections to both these methods are overwhelming. To the first it can be objected that anthropomorphic language is not confined to, or even most concentrated in, the earliest parts of the Bible; it is in the prophets, for example, that we find some of the most striking anthropomorphisms, as when God is depicted as screaming and panting like a woman in childbirth (Isa. 42: 14) or as a warrior returning from the slaughter, red with the blood of his slain

enemies (Isa. 63: 1f). Furthermore, anthropomorphism is not left behind when we reach the New Testament; 'God loved the world', 'God sent his Son', are no less anthropomorphic sentences, though the anthropomorphism involved there is not so striking.

To the second method it may be objected that while the first category of anthropomorphisms, those that speak of the 'bodily parts' of God, can be understood as metaphors for his activity, it is difficult to imagine what the other categories of anthropomorphism could be metaphorical for. For, while statements about God's hand or eye may easily be interpreted as metaphors for his activity or providence, for what is the speech or the love of God a metaphor?<sup>10</sup>

The impossibility of interpreting all anthropomorphic language about God as mere metaphor is made plain by a study of the anthropomorphisms of Hosea, one representative prophet. Here, as U. Mauser has pointed out,<sup>11</sup> God himself is presented as acted upon by and participating in the experiences of his people. In five oracles of retrospect (9: 10, 13; 10: 11f.; 11: 1ff.; 13: 4ff.) God's disappointment with the way Israel has turned out is expressed poignantly, so humanly that, had we not been told in advance that it was God who was speaking, we might suppose it was the voice of a frustrated father or a betrayed lover. Even more significant is the note of bafflement or tension in God's response to the faithlessness of Israel: at some points he determines upon abandoning Israel (4: 6; 9: 15; 11: 5ff.), but at others he is overcome by pity and will not execute his anger (11: 8f.; 14: 4). Even as he contemplates the fate in store for Israel, he says 'My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender' (11: 8; cf. 6: 4). One need not doubt that God has known the end from the beginning, that nothing in Israel's history has taken him by surprise, that he has always known what he will do and how he will act. But the prophet says nothing of that. If that kind of language about the unchangeability of God were all that could truly be said about God, Hosea's prophecy, full as it is with the anguish of God, would be false and hollow. What can most truly be said of God in relation to Hosea's Israel is that he is wholly implicated in the history of his people, suffering, puzzled, or rejoicing. This is not some extended poetic, metaphoric, fancy on Hosea's part, but the prophet's experience of the personhood of God.

Anthropomorphic language is, therefore, not some element in the Biblical texts for which excuses have to be made, but part of the revelation itself. It is to be evaluated, not negatively as accommodation to human language or as God's condescension to human understanding, but positively, as a vital element of our knowledge of God. It is not simply a question, either, of our being unable to do without anthropomorphism when speaking of God, or of all talk of God being of necessity anthropomorphic to some extent. It is rather that God has willed to reveal himself anthropomorphically, and that is how he has been experienced by men.

G. van der Leeuw, the comparative religionist, has affirmed that 'the one-sided opposition to anthropomorphism is always a sign of rationalism and religious decadence',<sup>12</sup> and Kornelis Miskotte in his fascinating book *When the Gods are Silent* has made the striking point that 'wherever the naiveté of the Old Testament [in which he includes its anthropomorphisms]

is lacking, the exposition and application of the New Testament always runs into the danger of evaporating into 'spirit', 'light', and 'love'—the supreme expressions of a universality which is tenderly cherished by natural theology as the most elegant form of flight from the reality of God'.<sup>13</sup>

The positive function of Biblical anthropomorphism is twofold at least. In the first place, it has prevented the Hebrew-Christian tradition from developing any idea of God in animal form (theriomorphism). That such an idea is ludicrous to Western men, whether themselves believers or not, is testimony to the influence of the Biblical anthropomorphic outlook. For in most, if not all, of the religions of the ancient Near East, among Egyptians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Mesopotamians, gods were frequently conceived of in animal form (cf. also Rom. 1: 23). Many animals possess superhuman qualities, whether of size, strength, speed, fecundity, or terror, and in so doing were not unnaturally thought to embody the divine. In Israel, however, not only is the making of theriomorphic images of God forbidden (Ex. 20: 4), but the whole conception of the created order of the world explicitly ranks animals beneath man (Gen. 1: 28; 9: 2; Ps. 8: 6ff.), no animal being even a 'helper equivalent to' man (Gen. 2: 20). It is likewise noteworthy how infrequently metaphors and similes from the animal world are used in the Old Testament in connection with God.<sup>14</sup> In societies in which animals rank above man, or are equal to him, there is a different atmosphere from that inspired by the calm, orderly process of creation pictured in Genesis 1. Animal gods are usually the focus of religious terror,<sup>15</sup> and in totemistic societies where animals are humanised as the ancestors of the community little room is left for the personal freedoms essential for man's development and humanisation.<sup>16</sup> From what depths of human bondage and ignorance of God the Biblical anthropomorphisms have rescued us can only dimly be imagined.

Secondly, the Biblical anthropomorphisms have assured the recognition in the Jewish-Christian religion of the personality of God. 'They avoid the error of presenting God as a careless and soulless abstract Idea or a fixed Principle standing over against man like a strong silent battlement'.<sup>17</sup> Against all tendencies to reduce the personhood of God to an abstract idea, such as 'the deity', or 'heaven' or 'providence', or as in Rabbinic terminology, to call God simply 'the name' or even 'the place',<sup>18</sup> the Old Testament bears witness. 'The faith of Israel sets its face against both an abstract concept of deity and a nameless "ground of being". Both the intellectualist and the mystical understandings of God are rejected'.<sup>19</sup> Whatever may be the force of those theological arguments which urge that God is 'beyond personality', not 'a person', since there are many ways in which the categories of personality are not applicable to him, we must accept that in our religious tradition, especially when it has been faithful to its origins in the Bible, the personhood of God has been stressed. But the doctrine that God is personal is not taught anywhere in the Bible in so many words; it is entirely grounded on the fact that he is everywhere represented as acting as only a person can; that is, he is spoken of anthropomorphically. If we would make excuses for the Biblical anthropomorphisms we had better begin to make excuses for the idea of a personal

God which rests upon them.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, I would argue, the Biblical anthropomorphisms are not the accidental form of the substance of the Biblical message, but announce a tendency in the divine nature toward self-incarnation in human form.

2. *The angel of the Lord.* The figure of the 'angel of the Lord' is a manifestation of God in human form.

In many cases of the appearance of the angel of the Lord, his identity seems to merge with that of God himself. Thus when the 'angel of the Lord' finds Hagar in the wilderness, he speaks to her as if he were Yahweh himself: 'I will greatly multiply your descendants' (Gen. 16: 10). Hagar is said thereupon to have 'called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, "Thou art a God of seeing"'. "God and his emissary are practically interchangeable concepts".<sup>21</sup> Similarly when in Judges 2 the angel of the Lord goes up from Gilgal to Bochim, he says, 'I brought you up from Egypt . . . I said, "I will never break my covenant with you".' (2: 1). Here also it is plainly God himself who is speaking.

The angel of the Lord, however, is obviously regarded by men as another human being. Frequently it is only toward the end of the conversation with the angelic messenger that his real identity is revealed. Thus Gideon, when he receives a visit from the angel of the Lord, speaks as if he were another man, and speaks of Yahweh in the third person: 'Pray, sir, if Yahweh is with us, why has all this befallen us? . . . But now Yahweh has cast us off'. (Judg. 6: 13). At that point the reader learns that the heavenly visitant is no other but Yahweh: 'Yahweh turned to him and said, Go in this might of yours . . .' (v. 14). Gideon has not yet realised whom he is speaking to, for he continues to address him as 'sir' (Heb. *'adōni* 'my lord', a polite form of address) in v. 15.<sup>22</sup> It is only after Gideon's gift has been miraculously consumed and the visitor has disappeared that Gideon 'perceived that he was the angel of Yahweh' and was dismayed, saying, 'Alas, my Lord Yahweh, for I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face' (v. 22). Here the 'angel of Yahweh' is clearly a substitute for Yahweh, and the word 'angel' may even have been inserted by pious scribes, for it is seeing Yahweh himself, not his angel, that is dangerous ('no man shall see me and live', Ex. 33: 20,<sup>23</sup>), and it is because Gideon has had a sight of Yahweh that the word is spoken: 'Do not fear'.

It is similar with the case of the three visitors to Abraham (Gen. 18), who, although they are not expressly called 'angels' until the beginning of chapter 19, plainly have the same function as the 'angel of the Lord'. Here too it only gradually transpires who the visitors (or, the visitor with two attendants) are. At first Abraham receives them as ordinary human guests, but in vv. 10, 13 it is 'Yahweh' who is speaking. When he has finished speaking—and eating—the 'men' set out (v. 16), but 'Yahweh' speaks (vv. 17, 20); and the 'men' go toward Sodom (v. 22). Strangely, when the 'men' depart, 'Yahweh' remains (v. 22); presumably two of the 'men' leave for Sodom, while Yahweh the third stays to speak with Abraham. But the two who visit Sodom speak to Lot as if they too were themselves Yahweh (19: 13 'We are about to destroy this place').<sup>24</sup> Not all the problems of this episode can be speedily resolved, but the main point at issue is clear: Yahweh has appeared on earth from time to time in human form.

Several explanations of the figure of the 'angel of the Lord' have been offered which evade this conclusion. The first is that the 'angels' of these narratives are no more than messengers (the Hebrew *mal'ak* means 'angel' or 'messenger'), whether human or heavenly beings. They are not Yahweh himself, but only speak as if they were Yahweh because it is usual for a messenger to deliver his message in the name of the one who sent him. A clearer case which may be adduced as a parallel can be found in Judges 11: 12f.:

'And *Jephthah* sent *messengers* unto the king of the Ammonites saying, 'What have I to do with thee that thou art come unto me to fight against my land? And the king of the Ammonites answered the *messengers of Jephthah*: Because Israel took away my land when he came out of Egypt . . . ; now therefore restore *thou* them peaceably'.

Relevant here may seem to be the use by the prophets of the messenger speech-form, in which they speak as if they were God himself, even sometimes omitting the introductory 'Thus says Yahweh' (cf. e.g. Isa. 3:4; 13: 11; 41: 1; 52: 13).<sup>25</sup> But while such speech-forms may explain why the 'angel of Yahweh' speaks as if he were Yahweh, they cannot explain why the narrators themselves frequently identify the 'angel' with Yahweh.

The second explanation is a development of the first. Aubrey Johnson has claimed that such instances as that of the messengers of Jephthah are evidence that the messengers of a man were regarded as 'extensions' of their master's personality; they are 'treated as actually *being* and not merely as representing their *'adōn* ('lord')'.<sup>26</sup> In parallel fashion, the 'angel of Yahweh' is spoken of as if he *were* Yahweh, although he is only an 'extension' of Yahweh.<sup>27</sup> But it has become clear recently that the concept of 'extension of personality' and that of 'corporate personality' on which it is founded are misleading as they have been applied to Hebrew thought.<sup>28</sup> Corporate decisions and responsibility were no more familiar to the Hebrews than they are to us, and we have no reason for doubting that the Hebrews saw the distinction between a man and his messengers as clearly as we do. That being so, it would be strange to find such oscillation between the 'angel of Yahweh' and Yahweh himself had not the narrators accepted the identity of the two.

A third explanation that has sometimes been offered is that the references to the 'angel of Yahweh' have been introduced into the text of the Old Testament only at a comparatively late date in its transmission, when it was felt improper to represent Yahweh himself as appearing in visible form to men. Certainly in the development of Jewish religion in inter-testamental times there was a tendency to believe that God acted in the world only through intermediary angels or messengers, and not directly himself. Some early signs of this tendency may be traced in the Old Testament itself, most clearly in 1 Chronicles 21: 1 where the accusing angel, Satan, incites David to number Israel, whereas in 2 Samuel 24: 1 it is Yahweh himself who incites David. But such an explanation, while suiting some passages, does not suit all, for the substitution of 'Yahweh' by the 'angel of Yahweh' has not been carried through consistently; it is impossible to believe, for example, that the 'angel' whose blessing is invoked in Genesis 48: 16 is intended to be a substitute for an original

'Yahweh', since God's name is already used twice in the preceding verse. Rather this passage is further evidence that the angel of Yahweh is nothing else than a manifestation of Yahweh in human form.

W. Eichrodt reaches the same conclusion in his study of the 'angel of Yahweh': 'The ancient narrators . . . saw in the *mal'ak* Yhwh ['angel of Yahweh'] in certain cases the operation of God himself . . . In the quasi-human form of the messenger he can temporarily incarnate himself in order to assure his own that he is indeed immediately at hand'.<sup>29</sup> For Eichrodt, however, the 'angel of Yahweh' is only a 'dummy' or 'mask' by which God reveals himself. Yet the Old Testament does not, I think, hint that there is any question of the humanity of the 'angel of Yahweh'; the 'angels' (Gen. 19: 1) who visit Abraham are equally 'men' (18: 2).<sup>30</sup> There is undoubtedly a metaphysical puzzle here, but the main thrust of the 'angel of Yahweh' passages seems clear enough: it is that God chooses to manifest himself in human form.

3. *Man as the image of God.*<sup>31</sup> God is permanently present on earth in human form in the person of his representative image, man.

This remarkable statement springs from a consideration of the idea of the image of God in man as it is expressed in Genesis 1: 26 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. What precisely is meant by this affirmation of the creation of man in the image of God?

The image of God is not some *part* of man, such as reason, personality, creativity. The whole man is the image of God.

Throughout most of the history of Biblical interpretation, theologians have attempted to identify some part or aspect or faculty of man as the image of God. The result has been a wide variety of opinions about what it is in man that is the image of God. Karl Barth has shown in a brilliant survey of the history of the doctrine how each interpreter has given content to the doctrine solely from the anthropology and theology of his own age.<sup>32</sup> For some of the Fathers, the image was the soul, or rationality; for the Reformers it was the state of original righteousness enjoyed by Adam before the Fall, the 'entire excellence of human nature' which since the Fall is 'vitiating and almost destroyed, nothing remaining but a ruin, confused, mutilated, and tainted with impurity'.<sup>33</sup> According to some nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars, the image of God has been variously thought to be man's self-consciousness, capability for thought, immortality, reason, personality, vitality and nobility. In all these respects, it is true, man is to some degree *like* God, but it is very much to be doubted whether any or all of these aspects were in the mind of the author of Genesis 1. Barth in fact concludes his catalogue of interpretations with the sardonic remark: 'One could indeed discuss which of all these and similar explanations of the term is the most beautiful or the most deep or the most serious. One cannot, however, discuss which of them is the *correct* interpretation of Genesis 1: 26'. For it is only by considering what meaning the phrase could have had to the author of Genesis 1, and not at all by working from general philosophical, religious, or even Biblical, indications of the likeness of man and God, that we can discover in what exact sense we may use the term if we wish to expound the content of the Biblical revelation.

In the last few decades it has come to be realised by a number of scholars that the image of God is not to be sought in some part or aspect of man. Several kinds of evidence have pointed in this direction:

(a) The word for 'image' (*tselem*) is used normally for three-dimensional objects, viz. statues, sculptures, reliefs, of gods, men, or other living beings. A metaphorical sense of 'image' is not attested in the Old Testament. But has God such a physical 'image' according to which man could be created, a form which could serve as the model for man? The anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament do not prove that. For the significance of such depiction of God in human terms is not that He has a body like a human being, but that He is a person and is naturally thought of in terms of human personality. Nor do occasional references to the physical appearance of Yahweh, notably in Ezekiel 1: 26 ('a likeness as it were of a human form'), amount to sufficient evidence, for it is always noticeable how reticently such statements are phrased: Ezekiel does not say he saw a human form, but only a 'likeness' 'like the appearance' of a man, i.e. the divine appearance is at two removes from human form. The typical Old Testament experience of God is that while He may be heard He cannot be seen; thus when Israel stood before Yahweh at Horeb, they 'heard the sound of words, but saw no form' (Deut. 4: 12).

Further, the human form in which Yahweh appears as the 'angel of Yahweh' does not seem to be anything more than a form which he has temporarily assumed. H. H. Rowley is probably basically correct in saying: 'In the teaching of the Old Testament God is nowhere conceived of as essentially of human form. Rather he is conceived of as pure spirit, able to assume a form rather than having in himself a physical form'.<sup>34</sup>

It seems best, therefore, to take the 'image of God' phrase, not as meaning that God has some image according to which man has been made, so that he resembles his Creator in some respect, but that man himself is the image of a God who has no image of His own. 'In our image' may in fact be translated 'as our image', 'to be our image', and several recent scholars have followed this interpretation.<sup>35</sup> A classic example of such a meaning for the particle 'in' is to be found in Exodus 6: 3 'I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty (El Shaddai)', where 'as' is literally 'in', that is, 'in my capacity as, in my nature of'. In similar fashion it can be claimed that Genesis 1: 26 means 'Let us make man to be in essence the image of God'. Thus man does not *have* the image of God, nor is he made *in* the image of God, nor is some *part* of him the image of God, but he is himself the image of God.

(b) This understanding is confirmed when we consider the meaning of images in the rest of the ancient Near East. Of course the meaning of images cannot be satisfactorily deduced from the Old Testament, because Hebrew faith was strongly opposed to the use of images and accordingly no rationale for them can be found in its pages. The only Old Testament references to images scorn those who make them and are obviously not sympathetic attempts to understand what images signify. In order to discover their meaning, we must find out what they signified to those who used them in worship. In only this context of the 'image of God' doctrine was the thought of images acceptable to Old Testament faith, and so we



are forced outside the Old Testament itself for the background of the concept of an image.

The function of images of gods in the ancient Near East was to be the dwelling-place of spirit or fluid emanating from the god. This fluid was not immaterial, but was usually conceived of as a fine, rarified, intangible substance which could penetrate ordinary matter, so it is often spoken of as 'breath' or 'fire'. The essential thing about an image is its possession of the divine fluid or spirit; it is that which relates it to the deity whose image it is, and which makes it an object of worship. The image does not necessarily look like the deity or like anything at all; some ancient images were unhewn lumps of rock or mere standing stones without any particular form. So obviously a representational portrayal of the god is not the chief purpose of making an image, though of course most images did look like something and were intended to portray some aspect of the deity. As the bearer of divine spirit, the image was consistently regarded as a living being, and invested with a life and daily routine of its own. In Babylonia, for example, the images of the gods were ritually awoken in the morning, dusted and washed, presented with a meal, and so on. An injury done to the image was a crime against the deity and was punished as such; hence images were seldom destroyed in war, but rather carried into captivity, where the image still remained an image of the god. It is along these lines that the Genesis doctrine of man as the image of God is to be understood, with the necessary adjustments, of course, to the fundamental beliefs of the Old Testament.

(c) A third type of evidence consists of the references in ancient Near Eastern literature to human beings as the image of God. Thus, for example, an Assyrian court-official can write to the seventh-century king Esarhaddon, 'The father of the king, my lord, was the very image of Bel', using the Assyrian word *tsalmu* cognate with the Hebrew *tselem* as employed in Genesis 1: 26. An Assyrian proverb says: 'A free man is like the shadow of a god, a slave is like the shadow of a free man; but the king is like unto the very image of god'. The use of the term 'image of God' for the king was even more common in Egypt, where especially in the 18th Dynasty (16th century B.C.) of the New Kingdom the pharaoh is often entitled 'image of Re (the sun god)', 'living image on earth', etc. Amosis I is 'a prince like Re, the child of Qeb, his heir, the image of Re, whom he created, the avenger, (or, the representative), for whom he has set himself on earth'. The god Amon-Re addresses Amenophis III: 'You are my beloved son, who came forth from my members, my image, whom I have put on earth. I have given you to rule the earth in peace'. Although these passages concern the king alone, and not mankind, their resemblance to the Genesis passages is plain, and once more the image is regarded as the whole person.

Since man is made as the image of God, and the function of the image is to be the local and bodily representative of the God who is neither local nor corporeal, we can see in this doctrine yet another sign of the movement on God's part towards enfleshing himself. When God wishes to be present in the world, according to Genesis 1, the manner of his presence is the uniting of spirit with matter which man, his image, is. God's image is neither spirit nor matter, but a unique union of the two. There is more

than a hint of the incarnation here, for the very creation of man seems designed to make possible the incarnation. It is no accident, therefore, that in the New Testament the language of the image of God is used to express the mystery of the incarnate Christ. He is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1: 15), like Adam the 'first-born of all creation', the 'likeness of God' (2 Cor. 4: 4), the image who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his character' (Heb. 1: 3). Thus Christ is, in a heightened sense, what Adam was, what man is; in him man sees what manhood was meant to be. The movement towards the realisation of true humanity does not begin with Jesus, but is climaxed by him; it begins with the creation of man as the image of God.

4. *The Christian believer as 'incarnation' of God.* Several aspects of New Testament Teaching about Christian believers represent them as, so to speak, 'incarnations' or 'enfleshments' of God: they are indwelt by the Spirit of God and by Christ, they are sons of God, images of Christ, and partakers of the divine nature.

First, it is surely worthy of attention that in our religion in which the incarnation of God in Christ is of central importance as a unique event, it is legitimate also to speak of the indwelling of God in Christians. Both the Holy Spirit and Christ himself are said to be 'in' or to 'dwell in' Christians. It is true that the Holy Spirit is not said to have indwelt Jesus, though the Spirit did descend upon him at his baptism (Mk. 1: 10; Mt. 3: 16; Lk. 3: 22), and according to John remained 'on' him (1: 32). And if the indwelling Spirit is the source of all good in the life of the believer (Gal. 5: 22f.), it is inconceivable that Jesus himself was not indwelt by the Spirit. To understand Jesus as a man in whom the Spirit of God dwelt without let or hindrance in fact goes quite some way toward appreciating the mystery of the incarnation.

Against this background it is significant to find in the theology of Paul that the Spirit of God indwells in believers: 'You are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you' (Rom. 8: 9; cf. 11).<sup>36</sup> They are the temple of God and God's Spirit dwells in them (1 Cor. 3: 16).<sup>37</sup> The Spirit has been sent into their hearts (Gal. 4: 6), and has been given as an earnest of the eschatological redemption in their hearts (2 Cor. 5: 5; cf. 1: 22). Other references to 'receiving' the Spirit (e.g. Gal. 3: 2, 14; 2 Cor. 11: 4), and to being 'in the Spirit' may have the same background of thought of the indwelling Spirit (cf. Rom. 8: 9 which means 'You are in the Spirit if the Spirit is in you'), but it is not certain in such places whether the Spirit is being regarded as indwelling, or simply as a gift; so such references must for the present be left out of account.

In Johannine thought, the same concept is clearly expressed: the 'Spirit of truth' which believers receive 'dwells with you and will be in you' (Jn. 14: 17). The 'rivers of living water', symbolising the Spirit, which flow out from the inner being (RSV 'heart'; AV 'belly') of the believer (Jn. 7: 38f.) plainly presuppose the indwelling of the Spirit. A John-like passage<sup>38</sup> in Matthew (10: 20), encouraging Christians on trial before magistrates, presumably has the same implication: 'what you are to say will be given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you'; that the believer is to be simply a mouthpiece of

God appears too shallow an interpretation, and<sup>39</sup> it may be that the indwelling Spirit controlling the words spoken is to be thought of here.

Not only the Spirit, but also in a few passages Christ is said to indwell believers. Romans 8: 9f. makes plain that to be indwelt by the Spirit of God is to be indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, and that in turn is equivalent to Christ being in the believer. The mystery of the ages that has now been made manifest is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1: 27). Paul himself says, 'Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2: 20), which, whatever it means precisely, is surely more than a mere reversal of the familiar phrase 'in Christ'.<sup>40</sup> Jesus himself, according to John 17: 26, prays that he may be 'in' his disciples, and in 1 John 4: 15f. we find that God himself abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

What all these passages show is that it is possible, in New Testament language, to speak of God, Christ, or the Spirit dwelling within a human person. It is not easy to see what the difference is between this concept and incarnation. We would doubtless not be content to say that the incarnation of Christ meant only that Jesus was indwelt by God in the same way, though to a higher degree, as Christian believers are; yet this must be a substantial part of what we mean by the incarnation.

Secondly, the sonship of believers may be related to the same set of 'incarnational' ideas. For not only is the son an expression of the father in human form (Adam begets a son in his own likeness, after his image, Gen. 5: 3), but also the Son of God is a name for the incarnate Christ. Once again it is surprising that the term 'son of God' should not in New Testament language be reserved exclusively for Jesus Christ as part of the New Testament understanding of his person. In fact it is applied also to Christians. This would signify that the New Testament writers, while conscious of the uniqueness of Christ, were conscious also of the similarities that exist between him and believers.

Thus the Spirit who indwells believers is precisely the one who makes them conscious of their status as sons of God: 'Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"' (Gal. 4: 6). 'All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God' (Rom. 8: 14), the Spirit himself 'bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (8: 16). The Spirit of adoption as God's sons has been received by believers (8: 15), and 'adopted sons are no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature'.<sup>41</sup> Christ is the 'only son' of the Father (Jn. 3: 16), yet he is also the 'first-born among many brethren' (Rom. 8: 29).

This characteristically Pauline conception of sonship is not however peculiar to him; it may be found also in the Johannine and Petrine literature, and in Hebrews, as well as in the teaching of Jesus. In 1 John we have: 'See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are' (3: 1 RSV; cf. also 3: 2, 10); 'every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God' (5: 1). Though John uses *tekna* 'children' for believers and reserves the term *hyios* 'son' for Christ, no important distinction is implied.<sup>42</sup> Both Christ and Christians are equally 'born of God' (1 Jn. 5: 18; cf. 4: 7; 5: 4); believers are 'born of' Christ (2: 29) or of the Spirit (Jn. 3: 5-8). They are even perhaps regarded

as sharing the virgin birth of Jesus, being born, like him, 'not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God' (Jn. 3: 13).<sup>43</sup> In 1 Peter also the concept of Christians as 'children' of the 'Father' appears (1: 14-17), though not so markedly as in Paul and John. In Hebrews, Jesus as the Son is seen as 'made like his brethren in every respect' (2: 17), 'bringing many sons unto glory' (2: 10), his 'brethren', the 'children God has given me' (2: 12f.). In the teaching of Jesus, the peacemakers are called 'sons of God' (Mt. 5: 9) because they display the character of God, and in the same fashion Jesus' followers are exhorted to 'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven' (5: 45).

Since the son is an expression of the father, the sonship of believers, so well attested in the New Testament, signifies that God expresses himself in human form in the person of his sons.

Thirdly, the references to believers as the image of Christ may point to the same kind of idea of the expression of God in human form. As we have seen above in connection with the Old Testament doctrine of the image of God, the image is a representative of the character and quality of the one it represents. Christ himself is several times said in the New Testament to be the image or likeness of God (e.g. 2 Cor. 4: 4; Col. 1: 15; Heb. 1: 3), and believers likewise are thought of as the image of Christ. Those whom God foreknew he also 'predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8: 29); as they behold the glory of the Lord they are 'being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor. 3: 18). Complete conformity with the image of Christ is not yet attained, and it is only in the future that 'as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Cor. 15: 49). Yet already the vitality of the image of Christ is at work in believers: 'You have put on the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator' (Col. 3: 10). So that already Christians are the image of Christ, and so express the character of God in human form.

Fourthly, perhaps the most striking examples of the application of incarnational ideas to believers are those where Christians are said to share the divine nature. Admittedly such statements are rare and on the whole do not belong to the mainstream of New Testament tradition, but it is noteworthy that within the New Testament we find that to believers it has been granted that they 'may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1: 4).<sup>44</sup> Similarly in 1 John we find: 'No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature (RSV; lit. 'seed') abides in him' (3: 9). In Hebrews we have it said that 'he who sanctifies [Christ] and they who are sanctified have all one origin' (2: 11), and that believers have 'become partakers of the Holy Spirit' (6: 4). These various expressions must prove difficult to those who would maintain an infinite qualitative difference between the nature of God and the nature of man. Certainly they suggest that it is in the divine nature to share itself in some way with men, and thus to be revealed in human form.

The result of the present section is to disclose, according to the New Testament, the same tendency in the divine nature toward self-manifesta-

tion in human form which we have observed earlier in the Old Testament material.

5. *The incarnation of Christ.* Although this paper is not directly concerned with the incarnation itself but with ideas that are analogous to it, some brief reflections on the significance of our observations for the understanding of the incarnation may be in order.

First, the basic thrust of the present paper has been toward establishing that the incarnation is not without its analogies, and represents but one example, albeit the climactic one, of a set of self-manifestations of God in human form. This fact has its bearing upon our approach to the interpretation of the incarnation, for its character may be illumined and its mystery further explored by reference to those analogies to it which we have commented upon.

Secondly, to see the incarnation as the climax of a number of self-manifestations of God illuminates the significance of those manifestations. Thus, for example, the Biblical anthropomorphisms take on a new character as anticipations of the incarnation, as well as being significant revelations of the divine nature.

Thirdly, the prevailing tendency to represent the incarnation almost exclusively as an act of condescension of God's part is modified when we recognise how much the manifestation of God in human form has been part of his activity throughout human history. That the incarnation imposed limits upon Christ goes without question, but it is clear that the acceptance of self-imposed limitations is not always to be viewed as an act of condescension. When a poet or composer determines to express himself in sonnet form or sonata form, he takes upon himself a host of limitations which do not depreciate but only enhance the quality of the work, and do not diminish but only make possible the adequate self-revelation of the artist. May we not speak likewise of the incarnation as a self-expression of God which is not only an act of condescension, but also a self-expression whose limitations do not prevent it from being a perfect expression of God's intentions. In becoming man God suffered no diminution of his godhead, any more than a composer suffers a diminution of his talent when he adopts sonata form; and just as a Beethoven can produce a quintessentially Beethoven sonata by taking on sonata form, so God produces a quintessentially God man by taking on human form.

Fourthly, this tendency we have observed in the divine nature toward self-manifestation in physical human form makes us wonder whether the distinction between spirit and matter which is so fundamental to modern man's world view is really so important after all. In a perceptive essay Karl Rahner<sup>45</sup> has argued that though spirit and matter are separate entities they are fundamentally alike, not dissimilar, since God is the author of both. In our mind, because they are different, they are conceived of as polar opposites, but for God one is not inferior to or opposed to the other.

Fifthly, may we go on from here to suggest that for God incarnation in physical form is as natural as existence in spiritual form? Was not Duns Scotus correct in maintaining that the incarnation would have occurred even if sin had not entered the world? To enter upon such questions would

take us too far beyond our present purpose, but it may be emphasised that such a question is not at all speculative in intent, though it is cast in a speculative form, for it really enquires about the relationship between incarnation and salvation.

Sixthly, may it be that the New Testament analogies to the incarnation provide us with some helpful insights into the nature of the incarnation itself? Donald Baillie has suggested as a clue to the nature of the incarnation of God in Christ the 'paradox of grace', as he calls it, by which Paul can say, 'I live and yet not I, but Christ liveth in me', and by which any Christian can say that the good that he does, while his own act, is nevertheless not his own, but all God's doing. 'May we not find a feeble analogue of the incarnate life in the experience of those who are His 'many brethren', and particularly in the central paradox of their experience: 'Not I, but the grace of God'? If this confession is true of the little broken fragments of good that are in our lives—if these must be described on the one hand as human achievements, and yet on the other hand, and in a deeper and prior sense, as *not* human achievements but things actually wrought by God—is it not the same *type* of paradox, taken at the absolute degree, that covers the whole ground of the life of Christ, of which we say that it was the life of a man and yet also, in a deeper and prior sense, the very life of God incarnate?'<sup>46</sup> And again, 'Jesus Christ is the one in whom human selfhood came fully to its own and lived its fullest life, as human life ought to be lived, because His human selfhood was wholly yielded to God, so that His whole life was the life of God. That was the one life which was wholly divine and wholly human. He lived his life in such a way that it was the life of God incarnate; but also, since the initiative is always with God, He lived it as He did *because* it was the life of God incarnate'.<sup>47</sup>

Our examination of the analogies to the incarnation therefore leads outward, to the disclosure of a tendency in the divine nature toward self-manifestation in human form which expresses itself in various manners, and inward, toward a re-appreciation of the significance of the incarnation itself in the light of its Biblical analogies.

## NOTES

- (1) This is not a subject that has attracted the interest of theologians greatly. I can mention only the following works as being on the same lines as the present paper: U. Mauser, 'Image of God and Incarnation', *Interpretation* 24 (1970), pp. 336-58, an extract from his book *Gottesbild und Menschwerdung* (Tübingen, 1972), which I have not seen; H. M. Kuitert, *Gott in Menschengestalt. Eine dogmatisch-hermeneutische Studie über die Anthropomorphismen der Bibel* (Munich, 1967). Several points made in the paper may also be found in G. A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers No. 1) (Edinburgh, 1953).
- (2) See for further examples L. Koehler, *Old Testament Theology*, (Eng. trans., London, 1957), pp. 22 ff. Most comprehensive is F. Michaeli, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* (Neuchâtel, 1950).
- (3) See S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 270f., 311.
- (4) *Quod Deus immutabilis sit*, XI.53 (Loeb edition, ed. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, London, 1930, vol. iii, p. 37).
- (5) *Op. cit.*, XIV.63 (Loeb edition, p. 43).
- (6) *Op. cit.*, V.22 (Loeb edition, p. 21).
- (7) See F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London, 1957), p. 104. Since we know of the 'Anthropomorphite' Audiani, followers of the layman Audius, only from their opponents (principally Epiphanius, *Refutation of All the Heresies*, and Cyril of Alexandria, *Against the Anthropomorphites*), it is possible that they have been maligned, and that they were in fact a rigorist sect with an anti-cultural attitude, of which their refusal to join in contemporary philosophising of the Biblical anthropomorphisms was only a part (see Kuiper, *op. cit.*, pp. 16f.).
- (8) On Marcion and his followers (Schleiermacher, Harnack, Fr. Delitzsch, Hirsch, Bultmann), see J. Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London, 1967), pp. 60-79. A similar rejection of the anthropomorphisms may be seen in the possibly third-century *Clementine Homilies*, where for example Genesis 6: 6 ('God repented') is said simply to be 'false' (3: 43) (J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. ii, p. 139).
- (9) *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 61.
- (10) Thus against H. H. Rowley's remark: 'Most of the anthropomorphisms we find in the Bible are mere accommodations to human speech, or vivid pictures used for their psychological effect rather than theological significance' (*The Faith of Israel*, London, 1956, p. 75), we may set the judgment of B. W. Anderson: 'Something more than metaphor is involved; for the OT, without engaging in metaphysical speculation, unhesitatingly and consistently views Yahweh as a distinct person' (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, New York/Nashville, 1962, vol. i, p. 423).
- (11) Mauser, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-55. Similarly Anderson, *loc. cit.*
- (12) Art. 'Anthropomorphismus' in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1950), vol. i, col. 449, quoted by T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1958), p. 173 n.l.
- (13) K. H. Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent* (Eng. trans., London, 1967), pp. 177f.
- (14) Cf. J. Hempel, 'Die Grenze des Anthropomorphismus Jahwes im Alten Testament', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 57 (1939), pp. 75-85.
- (15) K. H. Bernhardt, *Gott und Bild* (Berlin, 1956), pp. 52f.
- (16) Cf. C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London, 1966).
- (17) Koehler, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 24f.
- (18) See G. F. Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), vol. i, pp. 430f.

- (19) W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Eng. trans., London, 1961), vol. i, p. 206.
- (20) A similar point is made in the interesting article by E. Lab. Cherbonnier, 'The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism', *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962), pp. 187-206, in which he examines the consequences for traditional language about God, such as the terms 'infinite', 'unchangeable', of taking Biblical anthropomorphism seriously.
- (21) R. A. Stewart, 'Angel', in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas et al. (London, 1962), p. 37.
- (22) The Masoretic text of v. 15 actually has 'adōnai 'my lord', the form of address reserved for God, but the development of the story makes it plain that the reading 'adōni 'my (human) lord', attested by some Hebrew MSS and Codex Vaticanus of the Septuagint, is to be preferred.
- (23) That is to say, unless God deliberately permits a man to see him and live (cf. e.g. Ex. 24: 10f).
- (24) Cf. also G. von Rad, *Genesis* (Eng. trans., London, 1961), p. 206.
- (25) See C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Eng. trans., London, 1967), pp. 98-128.
- (26) A. R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*, 2nd edn. (Cardiff, 1961), esp. p. 6.
- (27) *Op. cit.*, p. 29.
- (28) Cf. J. Rogerson, 'The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-examination', *Journal of Theological Studies* 21 (1970), pp. 1-16.
- (29) Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Eng. trans., London, 1967), vol. ii, p. 27.
- (30) Cf. also the 'angel of the Lord' (Mt. 28: 2) who is the same as the two 'men' of Luke 24: 4 and the two 'angels' of John 20: 12.
- (31) On the whole subject, see for further detail and references my article, 'The Image of God in Man', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968), pp. 53-103.
- (32) *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/1 (Eng. trans., Edinburgh, 1958), pp. 192ff.
- (33) J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. i (Eng. trans. by H. Beveridge repr. London, 1953), pp. 164f.
- (34) *The Faith of Israel*, pp. 75f. I would query the phrase 'conceived of as pure spirit, as being not an Old Testament expression, and would be more prepared than Rowley to entertain the possibility that Yahweh has a 'form', but one which is rarely visible to men. Like Cherbonnier (cf. n. 20 above), I would tend to accept R. Bultmann's statement: 'God is not invisible to the senses as a matter of principle . . . God is invisible because he wills to be so' (*Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* (New York, 1956), p. 22).
- (35) So e.g. von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 56; E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Eng. trans., London, 1958), pp. 167f.
- (36) Commentators do not usually remark on this analogy to the incarnation, though F. J. Leenhardt calls the indwelling of the Spirit 'mystical', by which he refers to 'the belief that the gulf separating the divine and the human may be overcome and a union established between them' (*The Epistle to the Romans*, Eng. trans., London, 1961, p. 208).
- (37) In 3: 16 the reference is probably to the Spirit's indwelling of the Christian community (see C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1968), p. 90; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London, 1971 pp. 44f.).
- (38) Cf. D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London, 1972), p. 189.
- (39) A. H. M'Neile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London, 1915), p. 140, rightly observes that 'the Spirit, though it is that of the transcendent Father, is immanent in the disciples'.



- (40) As H. Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (Eng. trans., London, 1969), p. 209. Nor is it simply that 'he has become so identified with Christ, that what Christ does, he does' (D. Guthrie, *Galatians* (London, 1969), p. 93).
- (41) F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London, 1963), p. 166.
- (42) Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
- (43) Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London, 1955), pp. 137f.; W. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Eng. trans., London, 1968), p. 142.
- (44) J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London, 1969), p. 304, notes here 'the substitution of a metaphysical terminology for the earlier language of sonship and fellowship, and the postponement of the realization of the promised grace to the consummation'.
- (45) 'The Unity of Spirit and Matter: A Christian Understanding', in *Man Before God* ed. D. Burkhard et al., pp. 25-51; see also O. Schilling, *Geist und Materie in biblischer Sicht* (Stuttgart, 1967), esp. pp. 18-34.
- (46) D. M. Baillie, *God was in Christ. An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (London, 1948), p. 129.
- (47) *Op. cit.*, p. 145.