

The Agony and the Ecstasy

John R Gavazzoni

"As He is, so are we, in this world" (1 John 4: 17) wrote the apostle John in his first epistle. It seems obvious that he was summing up very essential elements of Jesus' high priestly prayer that he, John, recorded in his gospel. In that prayer, we find two affirmations that are crucial to our understanding of who we are and what is our relationship to the world:

- (1) He said that He had given His own the glory that was His from the Father before the world began John 17: 22
- (2) That they were in the world, but not of the world. John 17: 14

We are as He is----risen, ascended, perfected, glorified; sharing the full inheritance of our Elder Brother, Jesus. BUT, we are all that "in the world." You can't escape the tension that is integral to the complex of that reality and actuality. I do not believe that scripture affirms our heavenly state as a present reality merely in the sense that, since it is our certain destiny, God speaks of it AS IF it were already so.

That seems to me to come from a not-yet-sufficiently Spirit-disciplined mentality that, when confronted with the above tension, takes the easy way out theologically.

No, I believe it is already so. I believe that, even now, we are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus and complete in Him. But at the same time, we, his children, born of His Seed, the fruit of His loins, possessed of heavenly citizenship, are also presently in the flesh in an alien orderly arrangement, an alien systemization of humanity that grates against our Christ-nature and subjects us to what we are NOT.

Confronted with the terror of what we are NOT, we reach into the depths of who we ARE to overcome the lie. In that process, the Spirit searches out the deep things of God and confirms us in our true identity.

God intends to translate pure, heavenly, eternal sonship into its equivalent, glorified, dust-formed identity and cause us, in the world, to realize the liberty of our glory and become the catalyst for setting all creation free.

Then the tables shall be turned, and creaturehood will be subject to sonship. But creaturehood is a real dimension, though subject to delusion. The all that God created in which to be all is no figure of our imagination as some seem to believe.

As I look out on the Christian teaching scene, particularly in the fellowship loop in which I more often find myself, I can't help notice the tendency to choose to accentuate one element of the aforementioned tension at the expense of the other. Saints of God, we must take hold of both and find a synthesis in what appears as intolerable intellectual tension and a deeply frustrating paradox.

Toward the goal of rightly dividing the word of truth more precisely, God is calling us to affirm both our sonship AND our creaturehood, for our creatureliness has proceeded out from our sonship, but "in this world," our sonship is subjected to the same futility that all of creation is subject to. This has to do quite fundamentally, with how Deity realizes its destiny of expanding from the simple ALL, to ALL in all.

God is to be, not merely all, but all in all. 1 Cor. 15: 28 The first ALL, the primal source of all good, created another all, an essentially good all, but subject to confusion of identity, which for the child of God, makes for a maddening mix of agony and ecstasy. Jesus said, in regard to ruling in the kingdom, "Are ye able to be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized? Matt. 20: 22b"

Substitute "dip" for baptize (a legitimate translation). Are you able, from the high ground of your heavenly citizenship and transcendent Godness, to be dipped down into "the slough of despond," that God may be all in all?

You know, of course, that God was once simply all. But that wasn't good enough for Him. He decided that He wanted another all in which to be all. Get hold of it. Deal with it. "Quit ye like men, be strong." (1 Cor. 16:13). God has presented Himself with ultimate challenge in Christ, to become sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

In our teaching, we need to be careful that we're not so heavenly minded, we're of no earthly good. God formed Adam of the dust of the ground, Adam, the son of God. God took the son of God and us in Him, and made formed dirt out of him/us, and breathed His breath into what had become an earthen son, a vulnerable son, but a son who still retained, in the inner man, his heavenly nature.

And Emmanuel (God with us) has been with us from that beginning that ended in seeming defeat, and will be with us to the end that culminates in undeniable victory.

We need to sound both notes, the God who is all, in whom we possess all, and the God who is in the process of becoming all in all.

If the message we preach is to have a full-bodied, symphonic sound to it, we must speak as men and women who now have been made to sit in heavenly places in Christ and also as men and women in this world. Be followers of Paul as he was of the Lord Jesus. Share your ecstasy and your agony. Don't deny either.

If I may be so bold as to press upon you how my exhortation is true to the normative apostolic balance. Are you disposed, while relishing your co-enthronement with Christ, to also confess those times when you have been pressed beyond measure, despairing even of life itself? If your brand of spirituality is too princely for such ambiguity, then I find your spirituality to be, at least in some measure, suspect.

You must face the tension of scripture that speaks of an already accomplished, reconciling death in Christ, while also speaking of "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus...2 Cor. 4: 10" You say, "How can both be true?" For now, let it suffice for me to say simply, that what has been eternally completed in Christ is unfolding in time, since He is the One who offered Himself in the aeonian Spirit. In the aeonian Spirit, the eternal Reality which broke through completely into time in our Lord Jesus Christ is now unfolding in the aeons in those who make up His presence in the world.

To find your true identity in Christ does not require that you deny your Adamic ancestry. Remember, that the New Man that came forth out of the tomb, was the old man that was crucified with Christ and raised in newness of life. God is in the business of transformation and

renewal, not the business of discarding and replacement by some utterly other-world humanness. You were raised to new life in Christ's resurrection, but please remember that it is only the dead that need to be raised.

Once, many years ago, during a very stimulating time of fellowship, Harry Robert Fox used two words that are relevant to this message.

They

are: Grandiosity and Triumphalism. The spiritual propensities expressed by those words are an ever-present danger to true spiritual life. In the desperate attempt to rid ourselves of the false identity that we lived with for so long, we become vulnerable to grandiosity.

We affirm an identity that does not take into account the ontological tension that I have attempted to explain, and substitute the vanity of other-world Triumphalism for the reality of God always causing us to triumph in Christ Jesus 2 Cor 2: 14 "in this world."

Stay tuned for future serious, seminal samplings.

John Gavazzoni