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God is a Person

Revd David Gaffney writes:

Not only is God a Person, He is THE only complete Person.

I have heard it said that: ***“God is not a Person, God is Love and Wisdom.”***

Well, yes, God is certainly Love and Wisdom but He is also a Person. In fact He is **The** Person, and it is of the utmost importance to our eternal lives that we understand why.

A lovely chorus written by *Helen Howarth Lemmel* emphasises the point that we can only look into the face of the Lord if we believe that He is a Person:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*

This is clearly stated in the Writings of the New Jerusalem: (True Christianity: 787, Rose translation, also known as: The True Christian Religion):

“This New Church is the crown of all the churches that have ever existed on this planet because it will worship the one God, who can be seen, within whom is the God that cannot be seen, like a soul in a body. This is the only way we can form a partnership with God, because we are earthly and we think in earthly ways; and such a partnership must be formed in our thinking and then in the desires that belong to our love. This occurs when we think of God as a Human Being.

Establishing contact with a God we cannot see is like trying to make eye contact with the limitless vastness of outer space, or like being on the lookout in mid-ocean but not being able to see anything but endless sky and sea.

Establishing contact with a God we can see is like making eye contact with a person in the air or on the sea, whose arms then reach out, inviting us into an embrace.

Any partnership between God and us must also be reciprocated as a partnership between us and God, and this second aspect of the partnership is not possible unless we can see God.”

The New Church believes that we worship the Lord Jesus as ‘the visible God in whom is the invisible God.’ This is important to us because the Lord through His Word in the Bible places demands upon us about the way we live our lives, and sometimes these can be difficult. If we weren’t able to imagine Him as a Human Being, the Writings of the Church tell us, that we wouldn’t be able to resist the temptations which come our way. We need to see the Lord as a real person to communicate with and to answer to. So the Writings of the church tell us clearly that we need to believe that God is someone whom we can relate to, **as a Person** and have a relationship with.

As I write this, I am reminded of the Israelites when Moses went up the mountain (Mt. Sinai) to bring down the Ten Commandments: Moses brought the Israelites to the bottom of the Mountain and told them to wait for his return. But he was delayed up the mountain, and the

Israelites soon lost faith in him and their camp degenerated into idol worship and revelry (Exodus 32). It seems that Moses' visible presence, kept them in line. Especially as they knew that the LORD was behind him. In the New Church, the risen Lord acts not only as a representative for God as Moses did, but is God Himself in Human form.

The Lord, as The Divine Human Being, since His resurrection, resides behind the Sun above Heaven, and sometimes he has been seen by the seer Swedenborg, actually walking about and talking to people in heaven itself. He somehow has this dual ability. I find this a comforting thought, but also possibly a slightly daunting one to think about being face to face with the Creator of every perfect thing. (For an example see extract from "Heaven and Hell 121", below)

So for Christians, the Lord God is the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus throughout His life on Earth fought against a continual onslaught of temptations from the hells; up until His final and most difficult temptation of the cross. Through these temptations he glorified His Human Body and **unified** it with His Divine Soul within (His Father) to become for ever The Lord Jesus Christ - the Divine Human - God. Through this process the Lord achieved **UNION** with the Father (The Divine) and at the same time He sent us His Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ is in fact the only real and complete Human Being because He took His entire glorified flesh, blood, and bones body with Him into heaven. We leave ours behind on Earth when we 'die' and take only our spirits, which are nevertheless in a completely human form.

The Lord now resides above the heavens as The Divine Human, His substance is Divine Love and His form is Divine Wisdom. By correspondence, Divine Wisdom looks like the most beautiful Human Being and this is His 'Form'. Every part of the human body represents a particular quality of Wisdom, for example, the eye represents understanding and, say the kidneys, the ability to separate truth from what is false. As I see it, all the Lord's 'organs' are perfect examples. His Love is so hot and His Wisdom so bright that the effulgence which radiates from Him looks like a Sun above the heavens at a permanent altitude of 45 degrees above the horizon in the East.

This effulgence, obscures His Divine Human Form.

*"Thou appearest beautifully on the horizon of heaven,
Thou living Aten, the beginning of life!
When thou art risen on the eastern horizon,
Thou hast filled every land with thy beauty.
Thou art gracious, great, glistening, and high over every land;
Thy rays encompass the lands to the limit of all that thou hast made..."*

This exceptionally beautiful hymn is from Ancient Egypt. It is believed by most Egyptologists that the Egyptians were pagans because they worshipped the sun in the sky,

but in more ancient times, according to Swedenborg's writings, they worshipped the Living God whom here is called Aten whose shining and warm appearance illuminates the Heavens.

It is the same Sun which is referred to in both this Egyptian Hymn and Psalm 84:10-12, behind which is **now** the risen Lord:

*"For better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the
tents of the wicked.*

***For the LORD God is a sun and a shield;
the LORD gives grace and glory;
He withholds no good thing from those who walk with integrity.
O LORD of Hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You!..."***

It seems that the concept of 'Lord' as deity has been associated with the human form since time immemorial.

Some supporting quotations from the Writings of the Church:

We are made in His image and likeness: Genesis 1: 26-27 (KJV):

26 And God said, Let 'us' make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (my emphasis on 'us')

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

(Note: Here God speaks to His angels - 'us' (in the text) - who will help Him to make us His spiritual creation which is to offer us regeneration in His image and likeness.)

The Lord's coming in His Divine Human is prophesied: Isaiah 9:6-7 (KJV):
*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a **son** is given: and the government shall be upon **his** shoulder: and **his** name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting **Father**, The **Prince** of Peace. Of the increase of **his** government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon **his** kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the **Lord** of hosts will perform this."* (my emphasis in bold as to the coming of the Lord as a male person)

An angel tells Mary of the Lord's immanent arrival: Luke 1:31 (KJV):

*"31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a **son**, and shalt call his name **JESUS**."*

(Note the emphasis in bold denoting that Jesus was a male person)

He ascended into heaven as they watched; this is an abiding image to mankind that God is a Human: Acts 1: 6-11 (KJV):

6 *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*

7 *And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

8 *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

9 *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

10 *And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*

11 *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

Jesus shows his disciples his future appearance as the radiant Divine Human for ever: Arcana Coelestia, 4692 (Elliot translation):

"He also showed Peter, James, and John that He was a Divine Man, when He was transfigured."

God is in a Divine Human Form for ever: Divine Love and Wisdom 11 (Dole translation):

*“God is **the essential person**. Throughout all the heavens, the only concept of God is a concept of a person. The reason is that heaven, overall and regionally, is in a kind of human form, and Divinity among the angels is what makes heaven. Further, thinking proceeds in keeping with heaven's form, so it is not possible for angels to think about God in any other way. This is why all the people on earth who are in touch with heaven think about God in the same way when they are thinking very deeply, or in their spirit.*

It is because God is a person that all angels and spirits are perfectly formed people. This is because of heaven's form, which is the same in its largest and its smallest manifestations. (On heaven being in a human form overall and regionally, see Heaven and Hell 59-87, and on thought progressing in keeping with heaven's form, see 203-204 there.) It is common knowledge that we were created in the image and likeness of God because of Genesis 1:26-27 and from the fact that Abraham and others saw God as a person.

The early people, wise and simple alike, thought of God only as a person. Even when they began to worship many gods, as they did in Athens and Rome, they worshiped them as persons. By way of illustration, here is an excerpt from an earlier booklet.

Non-Christians--especially Africans--who acknowledge and worship one God as the Creator of the universe conceive of that God as a person. They say that no one can have any other concept of God. When they hear that many people prefer an image of God as a little cloud in the centre, they ask where these people are; and when they are told that these people are among the Christians, they respond that this is impossible. They are told, however, that Christians get this idea from the fact that in the Word God is called a spirit; and the only concept they have of spirit is of a piece of cloud. They do not realise that every spirit and every angel is a person. However, when inquiry was made to find out whether their spiritual concept was the same as their earthly one, it turned out that it was not the same for people who inwardly recognised the Lord as the God of heaven and earth.

I heard one Christian elder say that no one could have a concept of a being both divine and human; and I saw him taken to various non-Christians, more and more profound ones. Then he was taken to their heavens, and finally to a heaven of Christians. Through the whole process people's inner perception of God was communicated to him, and he came to realise that their only concept of God was a concept of a person--which is the same as a concept of a being both divine and human.”

Further: Heaven and Hell 86 (Dole translation):

"People in heaven are amazed that people here believe they are intelligent when they think of something invisible in the process of thinking about God, something that cannot be comprehended in any form, and that they call people who think otherwise unintelligent and even simpleminded, when the opposite is in fact the case. They assert that if people who regard themselves as intelligent on this account would examine themselves, they would find nature in the place of God - for some, the nature in front of their eyes, for others, a nature they cannot see with their eyes. They would find that they are so blind that they do not know what God is, what an angel is, what a spirit is, what the soul is that will live after death, what the life of heaven is for us, or many other things that are matters of intelligence. Yet all the people whom they call simple know these things in their own way. They have an image of God as a Divine Being in human form, an image of an angel as a heavenly person, a concept of their soul that will live after death as being like an angel, and a concept of the life of heaven for us here as living by the divine commandments. Angels refer to these people as intelligent and fit for heaven, but the others they call unintelligent."

And further: The Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are the substance and form of the Divine Human Being of the Lord Jesus Christ who is THE PERSON WHICH IS GOD: Divine Love and Wisdom 40 (Rogers Translation):

"Divine love and wisdom are both substance and form. People commonly have an idea of love and wisdom as abstract entities flying about or floating in the subtler air or ether, or as exhalations emanating from something of that nature. Scarcely anyone thinks that they are really and actually substance and form."

Here is stated, as hinted upon above that everything in the Lord's body corresponded to perfect divine qualities, stating finally that Jesus is the only true human being: Arcana Coelestia: 1414 (Elliot translation):

"... In Him alone there was a correspondence of all things of the body with the Divine. This was a most perfect, or infinitely perfect, correspondence, and from it there resulted a union of bodily things with Divine celestial things, and of sensory things with Divine spiritual things. Thus He became the Perfect Man, and the Only Man."

And further from: True Christianity (also known as The True Christian Religion) Rose translation: 109:

The Lord's process of glorification was a transformation of the human nature that he took on in the world. The transformed human nature of the Lord is the divine physical form. A proof of this is that the Lord rose from the tomb with the whole body he had had in the world. Nothing was left in the tomb. Therefore he took with him from the tomb every aspect of his earthly human form. This is why after the resurrection he said to disciples who thought they were seeing a spirit, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Feel me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:37, 39).

*From these words it is clear that through the process of glorification his physical body became divine. Therefore Paul says, "All the fullness of divinity dwells physically in Christ" (Colossians 2:9); and John says that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the true God (1 John 5:20). From these teachings angels know that in all the spiritual world, **only the Lord is a complete human being.***

The Lord as a person is also often seen in the heavens outside of the Sun: Heaven and Hell 121 (Harley translation):

"... When, however, the Lord appears in heaven, which often happens, He does not appear encompassed with a Sun, but in Angelic form, yet distinguished from angels by the Divine shining from His face. For He is not there in person since the Lord in person is always encompassed with the Sun, but He is present by view. For it is a common occurrence in heaven for persons to appear to be present in a place where the view is fixed or terminated, even when the place is very far from where they really are. This presence is called the presence of internal sight, which will be treated of in what follows. I have also seen the Lord on high, outside the Sun in an angelic form a little below the Sun, also near by in a similar form with shining face, also once in the midst of angels as a flame-like brightness."

Rev. D Gaffney. General Conference of the New Church. June 2024.