

“In the Image of God...” - Epiphany

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." [Genesis 1:27]

What does it mean that men and women were created in the image of God? Probably not what you are thinking! Before we get started with some thoughts about this, a few more questions come to mind: What is meant by the image of God? What do we really know about God? What can we really know about God? Where can we find clues for such a study?

This may be a good time to search for some answers as we move to another season called **Epiphany** based on the visit of the Three Kings who traveled to find answers. *"The term epiphany means "to show" or "to make known" or even "to reveal." In Western churches, it remembers the coming of the wise men bringing gifts to visit the Christ child, who by so doing "reveal" Jesus to the world as Lord and King."* [<http://www.cresourcei.org/cyepiph.html>] In this season of Epiphany we might try to learn about God and ourselves as the people of God. In my second blog I pointed out the various religious stories of the creation, our common connection to life in the discovery of DNA, the invention of race as a false way of making serious distinctions among humans; it may be time to ask what being created in the image of God may actually mean. The Magi were astrologers who looked to the heavens to study the planets and human behavior. *"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."* [Matthew 2:1-12]

If you are like me you have come in contact with a lot of people who truly believe they have the answers. They will begin to quote passages from the Bible to certify these answers and discourage us from asking any new questions or, like the Magi, take a comprehensive journey to find new information that would reveal a better or more complete understanding of ourselves and God. The Scriptures themselves give us clues of helpful ways to expand inquisition and knowledge. One of the Psalms is rather clear, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."* [Psalm 19:1-3] How grateful we can be for all of today's science like Astronomy, Math, Physics, Chemistry, and many more. Religion, especially in the past, has often been very slow and resistant to accept these modern stories, learned from research, as accepted truth.

It is essential to realize that we may never know nor fully understand God. Most are familiar with the second commandment of the notorious ten, *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them."* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Commandments] Having been told this we still think of God as an older person with grey hair and a beard sitting high above the heavens on a very impressive throne. Humans have a habit of focusing on the outward and physical with little or no attention to the invisible realities. We judge people mostly by their appearance and, if we do not like what we see, make no effort to establish what they might really be like. Maybe this is why we were given such a commandment when it comes to forming any valid impression or understanding of God?

What do the stories tell us about God? Let us start from the beginning, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* [Genesis 1:1] *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* [Geneses 1:27-28] In chapter two God places the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden to live and enjoy. This chapter ends by saying, *"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."* [Genesis 2:1-25] It wasn't long however before we read, *"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"* [Geneses 3:8-11] So what really happened here?

The opening book of our Scriptures tells us about the breach between God and humanity. God clearly intended to enjoy their company in a beautiful setting that was prepared for them. This seemed to have happened daily at the cool of each day. I believe that two words may summarize what happened, Adam and Eve lost their balance in life and their intimate relationship to God. They, who were unclothed and exposed, are now uncomfortable and embarrassed. This is how people live their lives when they are out of balance and have lost their relationship to God. This is the defining moment for most Christians in support of the doctrine of Original Sin, but not all Christians and basically none of the other religions adhere to this doctrine – see footnote. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Original_sin] It does, however, seem to indicate a basic presupposition in the human character for fault or sin (In Biblical Hebrew, the generic word for sin is het. It means to err, to miss the mark. It does not mean to do evil. The Greek word hamartia (ἁμαρτία) is usually translated as sin in the New Testament. In Classical Greek, it means "to miss the mark" or "to miss the target" which was also used in Old English archery.) [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sin>] To me this does not proclaim that we are "sinners" but points out that we, as humans, have a tendency to "miss the mark" or even miss the point.

I would hope that no doctrinal idea – what many often suggest as being "man made" - would diminish our ability to see that God did not end an ongoing relationship with humankind as they moved out of the garden into a larger world. The stories in all our religious history should only reinforce God's presence with us even to this day. In fact it may be that this loving presence among us in so many of the stories is the true basis for what it means to be created in God's image. Perhaps we should lessen our attention to the outward and visible and focus on the inward and invisible that is the heart of our being human.

Since this is a blog and not a research paper I do not have the space to cite the scores of stories that describe and assure us of God's unfathomable love. There are two that are special to me, one in the Hebrew Scripture and one in the Gospels – The story of Joseph [Genesis 45:1-28] (which became a play and a movie) and the parable of the Extravagant Father [Luke 15:11-22] (more popularly known as the Prodigal Son). I hope you will take time to read the sections cited in the footnotes to see the heart of God, a love for all people, everywhere, in all times and conditions.

For all Christians Jesus is the epitome of the expression of God's love to all. His words and the actions of his life-giving ministry pointed to the extremes of God's love and grace. John's Gospel amplifies this spirit of God's intention toward humanity in Jesus the Christ. Throughout this Gospel

Jesus speaks through a reiterating phrase, "I am", to signify the purpose of his ministry – here are a few examples: "I am the living bread...", "I am the light of the world...", "I am the good shepherd...", "I am the resurrection...", "I am the way, the truth, and the life". Going forward in John's Gospel we hear Jesus saying, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." "...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Then, near the closing of John's Gospel Jesus says, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

As in the opening of the book of Genesis, "In the beginning....", so it is in John's Gospel, "In the beginning...". Few people are familiar with the Spanish translation of these verses in "La Sagrada Biblia" with the Imprimatur: ANGEL, Obispo Aux. y Vic. Gen. Madrid, 4 de Julio de 1968. In this translation we have "En el principio era y el Verbo", while in our more familiar translations we see these words, "In the beginning was the Word". Here is the English translations of each version for comparison:

- English:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. [John 1:1-2]

- Spanish:

"En el principio era ya el Verbo, y el Verbo estaba con Dios, y el Verbo era Dios. El estaba en el principio con Dios."

[San Juan 1:1-2 La Sagrada Biblia, Catholic Publishers (editorial catolica) Nashville, TN, USA 37202 1978]

- (Spanish translation):

"In the principle it was already the Verb, and the Verb was with God. It was in the principle with God."

When I first read the Spanish version of the opening of John's Gospel I was struck by an interesting correlation to another biblical passage when Moses spoke with God in the story of the burning bush. When Moses asked God whom he should say sent him, God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" [Exodus 3:14] It is simple and yet so profound that the "principle" of this Universe is the I AM! The Creator is the VERB that brought it all about.

So then what do we do with these opening portions of the Gospel of St. John wherein Jesus is referred to as "the Word" or "the Verb"? Just how may this fit into our beginning questions of our being created in the image of God? When St. Ambros speaks about the verb in John's Gospel he says, "But when it was vivified by Christ it heard the voice in Juan and it recognized the word in Christ. For that reason full of the Spirit Santo, Juan knew that the principle does not enter the time, but is on the time: he left the centuries and raising with the spirit beyond all principle, he said: In the principle [...] was the Verb. And the Verb was next to God."

[http://babelfish.yahoo.com/translate_url?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.vatican.va%2Fspirit%2Fdocuments%2Fspirit_20001215_ambrogio_sp.html&lp=es_en&intl=us&fr=att-portal]

The well known scholar of today, Raymond E. Brown, writes volumes on this but has this in his summary comments, *“The description of the Word with God in heaven before creation is remarkably brief; there is not the slightest indication of interest in metaphysical speculations about relationships within God or in what later theology would call Trinitarian processions. The Prologue is a description of the history of salvation in hymnic form, much as Ps lxxxviii is a poetic description of the history of Israel. Therefore, the emphasis is primarily on God’s relation to men, rather than on God in Himself.”*

[The Gospel according to John (i-xii), The Anchor Bible, Introduction, translation, and notes by Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, pgs. 23-24.]

It is important to realize that Scripture was written on our behalf as the people of God and, as Dr. Brown says, *“the emphasis is primarily on God’s relation to men”*. How might we be included in these seemingly difficult theological words? Do not the words that we are told that Jesus spoke at the end of John’s Gospel, *“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”* *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.”* *“...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* Then, near the closing of John’s Gospel Jesus says, *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”* speak directly to and about us?

The image of relationships, especially three together, like the image above, the suggestion of the triad in the doctrine of the Trinity, are not uncommon in science, engineering, and other areas of life as we know it. There is a trinity of sorts in the mathematical formula given to us by Einstein that equates to life itself, $E=mc^2$. This is what came to me: The M = Mass; the E = Energy; the c = the speed of light in a vacuum (celeritas – Latin for “swiftness”). In the verse of Scripture that came to my mind I noticed a unique relationship: Not by might (Mass or Matter) nor by power (Energy or Force) but by my spirit (the swift light of God’s presence). It happens not by any one of these facets of our universe alone, but by the relationship of all of them together. From the beginning of what we call time it is this magnificent relationship of $E = mc^2$ that makes it all happen. (This is what I wrote in a former article – see this link:) [<http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/ArtRelativityofGodandPeople.pdf>] The Geodesic Dome is another example of a multiple arrangement of triangles forming a sphere that is perhaps the strongest structure we know for its weight. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geodesic_dome]

Balance, equilibrium and stability, are important as we relate to everything we are a part of in life. We may speak of aspects of life in segments of two or three or more, but the important thing is to bring it all together in a unity of being. Too many of us think either/or and never bring it all together in a balanced way of being. “With dualistic minds it is always one or the other - - it can never be both. The result is that we still think of ourselves as mere humans trying desperately to become “spiritual,” when the Christian revelation was precisely that you are already spiritual (“in God”), and your difficult but necessary task is to learn how to become human. Jesus came to model the full integration for us (see 1 Corinthians 15:47-49) and, in effect, told us that Divinity looked just like him - - while he looked ordinarily human to everybody!” [The Naked Now Learning to See as the Mystics See, by Richard Rohr, pg. 69, Crossroad Publishing Co., NY]

I hope you begin to see that we were created to be one with God and to be in unity with all Creation. Living in this manner we remain in Relationships in a life of balance. To be whole and wholesome we need to know and understand this every area of our lives. Created in the image of God we are spiritual beings placed on this Earth in the dignity of our humanity. May you acknowledge this in every relationship in life and seek the balance we need to enjoy it all.