



THE GOSPEL FOR THE POSTMODERN WORLD III:

The “Other Side” of God

THROUGHOUT HIS EXISTENCE God has been the ultimate paradigm or model of self-emptying (*kenotic*) love for others. However, God’s initial problem was that, before Creation, there were no others with whom he could lovingly relate. God was alone — without a universe, without any others, without any relationality beside himself.

Faced with this distressing predicament, God determined to resolve the problem by creating a relational universe filled with “others” whom he could unceasingly love. However, this purpose spawned a further predicament. How could a God of self-emptying love bring forth a universe that he could love and that would willingly, freely and eternally love him in return?¹

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Confronted with this ultimate challenge, God inevitably had to embrace other attributes:

Command

First, God adopted the attribute of “command” to bring forth the universe out of nothingness (*creatio ex nihilo*):

For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. — Psalm 33:9.

However, emerging relationality required a free rather than a dictated response. Thus, in the interest of future relationality, God modified his command by granting Creation the right of “free process” to order its own existence in accordance with “natural” laws. Of course, free process led to such deviations as natural disasters, disease, death and extinction. Yet God has permitted these aberrations in order to teach the universe the consequences of negative actions.²

Possession

Then, for thousands of years, God spoke within the minds of mankind with an internal “god-consciousness” in which human will and authority were represented by the *symbolic* appearance and voice of “god.”³ This possessive god-consciousness instructed mankind through commands and instructions, directing a host of innovative actions such as how and when to conduct essential matters. God resorted to this unique possession of human minds in order to protect mankind from “free process” and to advance mankind’s progress.

However, possession did not constitute free and mutual relationality. In fact, possession led to human antagonism and competition that bred violence to, bloodshed against, and death of “others.” When God began to withdraw his possession of human minds and actions, this dispossession also led to human problems. In the Tower of Babel story, for example, mankind sought to repossess God:

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And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name [*Ha-Shem* = God], lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth. . . . So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. — Genesis 11:4-8.

Power

In the aftermath of this problem, God resorted to power structures — political, religious, etc. — that would rule over and domesticate mankind. God then introduced human self-consciousness and free will in order to counter unrestrained power. For the first time, mankind could address itself as “I.” King David was among the first to exercise this gift when he said: “. . . *I* shall not want. . . . [T]hough *I* walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *I* will fear no evil . . . and *I* will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalm 23, emphases supplied).⁴ Nevertheless, self-conscious free will often led to rebellion against existing power structures and to the creation of opposing powers.

Therefore, as we look back over history, we find that the God of self-emptying love relied on command, possession and power. This was the “other side” of God. This was God’s own “alter ego” — his other self. God identified his other self with such angelic attributes as Azazel (the scapegoat: *Azaz* = stubborn; *el* = god), seraph/seraphim (fiery serpent[s]), *Samel/Sammael* (angel of death), and serpent (*nachash* = divine enchanter). Then, beginning with the book of Job, God identified his alter ego as Satan (opposing spirit) (Job 1:6ff).⁵

From the very beginning God recognized that some of his actions would have negative consequences. For example, when tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden, the serpent declared, “. . . [Y]e shall be as gods [*Elohim*], knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5).

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The Hebrew term for “knowing” is *yada* (“to know”), which has covenantal implications. While the use of command, possession and power was the necessary manifestation of God as the “old” covenant, this inevitably led to evil. This was further explained by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote of God, “I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isaiah 45:6, 7).^{6, 7}

For many generations the Hebrews recognized God and his alter ego on Yom Kippur when the high priest brought two goats to “the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (Leviticus 16:7). One goat was chosen to be a sin offering. The other, called the scapegoat (*Azazel* = stubborn god), was sent away into the wilderness.

When God became human as Jesus Christ, he exemplified his self-emptying love in healing, forgiving, reviving and assuring mankind of God’s salvific intentions. However, immediately after his baptism at the Jordan River and prior to his ministry, Jesus went into the wilderness — just as, long before, the scapegoat also had been sent into the wilderness. Arriving in the desert, Jesus encountered his alter ego, Satan, and was tempted three times — over (1) command, (2) possession and (3) power. Jesus emphatically rebutted each of the three temptations and thus conquered his own alter ego:

1. Command. First, the alter ego, Satan, said, “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). Jesus responded to this order by saying, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

2. Possession. Next, Satan took Jesus to a pinnacle of the Temple and said, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Matthew 4:6) Here the alter ego tempted Jesus to accept possession, but he replied, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matthew 4:7).

3. Power. Finally, Satan took Jesus to the top of a high mountain and showed “him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” The alter ego thus was tempting Jesus with the concept of power, but he responded by saying, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 7:8-10).

“The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” confronted his own alter ego that had been involved in the command of, possession of, and power over the created order.

In this remarkable episode “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8) confronted his own alter ego that had been involved in the command of, possession of, and power over the created order. Jesus recognized and understood his role as the human manifestation of the loving God, for he said,

“ . . . [A]s Moses lifted up the serpent [alter ego] in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up . . . ” (John 3:14).

The subsequent ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus were committed to overcoming and superseding his own alter ego, which was necessarily involved in the first or proleptic (anticipatory) Creation. Ultimately — and soon — this alter ego and all its vestiges will be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Revelation 20:10).

. . . [T]hen shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death [*Samel* = angel of death] is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law [command, possession, power]. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. — 1 Corinthians 15:54-57.

Endnotes

1. See “The Divine Predicament,” *Outlook* (January/February 2005).
2. See John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship between Science and Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), p. 84.
3. See Julian Jaynes Society, “Summary of Evidence,” at www.julianjaynes.org/evidence_summary.php. See also Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990); “Origins,” *Outlook* (September 2001); “The Dawn of Self-Consciousness,” *Outlook* (October 2001); “Life Is Bound Up,” *Outlook* (April/June 2002); “Atonement I: Prehistoric,” *Outlook* (March 2006).
4. See Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1998).
5. See “YHWH (Yahweh) and Satan (the Adversary), or . . . YHWH (Yahweh) (as) Satan (an Adversary),” at assemblyoftrueisrael.com/Documents/YahwehandSatan.html.
6. See *ibid.* for 38 additional biblical citations that “the Creator, YHWH (Yahweh), is the author of both good and *evil*.”
7. A notable parallel to God and his alter ego is found in two disparate biblical accounts:
 - a. “. . . [T]he sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:4, 5).
 - b. The angel Gabriel appeared to the virgin Mary “and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).