

God Incognito

by John Whittle

“Let me ask, do you believe in the Incarnation? And if you do, let me ask further, was Jesus ever less divine than God? I answer for you, Never. God is man, and infinitely more. Our Lord became flesh, but did not become man. He took on Him the form of man; He was man already” (George MacDonald).

God is spirit. Though spirit is essence, it manifests itself in form. It is depicted in Scripture in symbols such as fire, water, and wind. God delights in form, in bewildering and overwhelming variety. But what of His masterpiece called the Incarnation?

God enters this scene *“for us men, and for our salvation”* (to quote the Apostles’ Creed) in the familiar form of man. The nature was not unfamiliar to Him, but the form was new. One can almost sense the divine anticipation as the destined moment arrived for heaven to disclose itself in this loved form, for Scripture says, *“his delights were with the sons of men”* (Prov. 8:31).

This was not a mere demonstration of God’s nature in order to confront man with his lostness. This was to be a marriage that in the heart of God had always been a reality, and was now declared to be the purpose of the eternal existence. Man must recognize that he loves God, for only in that loving can man truly love himself.

The vibrations of the holy excitement shook the world then, and shake it now in a myriad of historic nuances and personal human reactions. It is felt either as a strange uneasiness of mind or conscience, or as an inner harmony and joy, depending on the “eye of the beholder,” and his perspective of the God-man.

No, the Incarnation is not primarily a demonstration of what God is like, but a gentle and inexorable wooing of the “many sons” that He is to bring to glory. It is a declaration of the profound and all-consuming purpose of an all-conquering love that must at all costs free man from the false concepts of power and glory. How was this to be done?

“The form of a servant” is the answer in part. For the first time in history, there merges a new and *absolute* direction for life. It is love’s way of pain and glory. What is God really like? Who cares, except those who long to know His purpose? Who cares, except those who are looking for meaning (rather than a miracle), for purpose and for a transfiguration of life? Only these will behold in wonder and awe. They will find nothing static, or final, or even conclusive in the Incarnation. To them it is more than an event. It is a profound movement in the universe that impinges on all lives, with a greater or lesser intensity of awareness. But it moves all on, carrying all to an unguessed, an unimagined end. The end can only be a new beginning, for we are all the sons of the uncreated God.

Christmas and Easter on our calendars testify to the strange and unshakeable effect that His timely appearance has made, though few will admit the extent of the resultant impact on humanity. Again, one feels right in saying, “who cares?” But love is moving undauntedly to its goal. Even those who are careless of life’s meaning are not untouched by the hand of the God-man. In the drastic dealings of life (life being, as someone has said, “the greatest evangelizer”); in the making and breaking of fortunes; in the futilities and the frustrations; the breath of the “hound of heaven” is upon the necks of all, without exception. It is a painful wooing, but all must be brought to Love by love in order that they might love. Yes, God is “on the job” with all the sons of men (as well as all of creation).

So love is the disclosure, the new direction in which the universe is moving to its ultimate fulfillment. *“The form of a servant”* — this is the final lesson that must be learned by us

all, however long it takes. God, a servant! Man's illusory outlook gives him severe problems with this whole idea. Let me state, tongue-in-cheek, as it were, what troubles man about the Incarnation. "God is so *unmanageable*, so inconsiderate of the normal standards of procedure and operation for the handling of such universal problems as He and we are faced with. He becomes a *babe*, when He should be an archangel heralding a God-like program. He becomes a *lamb*, when it is obvious that only a lion will give true performance. He becomes a *malefactor* dying helplessly upon a cross, when He should be sweeping our enemies and His into oblivion by a majestic show of power that would convince men of His divine origin.

"Then when resurrection is claimed for Him, He only shows Himself to a comparative handful of people, suddenly disappears completely, and has never been heard from since. This is not a very impressive God. He obviously does not understand the meaning of power, as man sees it and hungers for its use. In fact, one of His chief apostles admits that He is foolish and weak, adding something rather mysterious about God's foolishness being 'wiser than men' and God's weakness being 'stronger than men'-but who can understand all that double talk?"

Yes, we admit the appearance of confusion here. Bethlehem looks like weakness, and Calvary looks like foolishness, for One who claims to be all-powerful, all-wise and all-knowing. But something new is afoot in this power-riddled world, for this God-man says that *to win all, He must become the servant of all*. This is the matchless message of the Incarnation. God comes not as a king upon His throne, but as a servant upon His knees, washing His friend's feet. On the throne is a "*lamb as it had been slain*" (Rev. 5:6). The manifestation of power is found to be quite different than we would have imagined.

He now takes us up into His incarnation in what might be called "the extension of incarnation" - "*I in them and Thou in me,*" as His prayer says it in John 17. And upon the whole world is a new light shed - the light of love. In secular circles, loving, caring, and acceptancing are elements recognized as an absolute necessity for harmonious living and working. In such circles, these elements may only be a by-product of that eternal love which came into the world, but they should be seen as something that is preparing the way for "*the manifestation of the sons of God*" (Rom. 8:19). The incarnation is a continuing movement, and the universe is touched by it.

Yes, the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea, as Isaiah said it. And the glory of God? What is that? It's not a mystical luminosity, but a world full of God-men, who, like Berdyaev in his book on Dostoevsky, have discarded the man-God for The God-man. And "of the increase of His kingdom there shall be no end." What a "kingdom" — a kingdom of servants and sons for love of Him who "took the form of a servant."