

The Dilemma of Man

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There has been a restless itch in man for ages upon ages. We seem to be a bit insecure in the universe. We are haunted by the silence and stillness that surrounds us at night, or the emptiness, pain and loss when someone we love dies. The fundamental question shared by the whole human race is, '*Who am I?*'. When this question remains unanswered, or dangles half answered, it produces a lingering feeling of cosmic insecurity or metaphysical homelessness. We lack a sense of rootedness in the sure knowledge of who we are, with all the implications that flow from this understanding. It is as though we are swimming in deep waters and reaching for a toe hold in the cosmos. For we Christians, that rock is none other than the Rock of Israel, the Lord God Almighty, and the Creator of heaven and earth.

As much as our culture seems to be suspicious of authority, man longs for it on some deep level. The material world lacks the authority that man craves, because he instinctively "regards himself as superior to bodily things and as more than just a speck of nature or a

nameless unit in the city of man."¹ Man must find something greater than man to tell him who he is. The answer must exist beyond the confines of the visible world. The answer to the question cannot be satisfactorily answered by man himself without any reference to something of greater authority than man, as the proverbial saying goes, 'man cannot pull himself out of the bog by his own hair'.

The question of an authority, which must exist beyond the scope of the physical universe, drives man to the question of faith. Now we stand at the crux, where man reaches out beyond his limited vision to place his trust in something he cannot see with his eyes, but, "faith throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man."²

The modern world might counter in saying with Freud that this reaching out for an authority is nothing other than man's projection of the human categories of "Mommy and Daddy" into the heavens. This religious nonsense is primitive and childish, and belongs in the past when man could not see beyond the light of his campfire. It was a phase man thankfully passed through, and now we have grown up in the universe. Many would believe that man betrays

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 14.

² *Ibid.*, 11.

what is truly human by regressing to religion, and that he is forsaking his destiny.

The Church has a radical response to this challenge of the modern world, "the mission of the Church will show itself to be supremely human by the very fact of being religious."³ To be fully human is to be religious. To be fully religious is to be human. The root meaning of religion is helpful in understanding this truth. We are re-joined with the Author of our being, who has the answer to the question.

Unbelievers may offer a rejoinder in saying that this God is a product of human invention, speculation, and imagination. However, the Church holds to the claim that man can perceive the existence of God through the power of human reason alone, but that this knowledge has been reinforced and elevated by the initiative of a God who has revealed Himself to us directly. It is the Churches foundation in divine revelation that enables her to, "offer a solution to them by which the true state of man may be outlined, his weakness explained, in such a way that at the same time his dignity and his vocation may be perceived in their true light."⁴

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

Christians know who they are in a full and satisfying way ultimately through the superabundant fullness of revelation found in the person of the God-man, Jesus Christ. The truth we discover as we ponder the meaning of man in the light of Christ, answers the question that haunts us, "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear."⁵

⁵ Ibid., 22.