

Transformed Into Christ

I. Images

- A. Once again we encounter these timeless passages for Christmas, not so much hearing the words, \ as seeing the images, \ the great and timeless images of this most lovely and powerful season. -- -- --
1. Every year waxes and wanes, \ the good and the bad happens to us and our world, and then fades into memory. --
 - a. We are tempted to wonder, is life simply a circular cycle that comes and goes, \ lives and dies, \ our hopes slipping away?
 2. But then Christmas comes again and we are called to the deepest, subconscious level, below our critical thinking to a new birth.
 - a. We are called to begin once more, \ to live again.
 3. Joan Chittister writes,
 - a. *“There is a child in each of us waiting to be born again. It is to those looking for life that the figure of the Christ child beckons.”* --- --
- B. The psychologist Carl Jung said that deep transformation happens primarily in the presence of images.
1. They alone can touch the unconscious—in one invasive and healing reconfiguration of the soul.
 2. Images may take various forms:
 - a. a biography of a life well lived,
 - b. a song or musical creation (like Handel's *Messiah* so popular this time of year).
 - c. It could be a powerful drama produced by the theater, \ or a beautiful movie.
 - d. It could be an image from a dream, \ a powerful piece of sculpture or art.
 - e. It could be an inner vision of our imagination.
 3. But after the encounter, you see things differently. ---
 - a. Logical ideas and philosophical or theological concepts don't change people.
 - (1. They tend to keep us inside our chosen cultural frames.

- b. We judge, back and forth. Do I agree with the idea, \ the wording, \ who said it, \ or how he/she said it?
- a. The Franciscan, Richard Rohr comments that the reason we have 30,000 Christian denominations in the world now, is that they made it all depend on words.
 - (1. They should have known that “*the Word became flesh.*”

II. Christmas Images

- A. When we are dealing with images we have to beware our tendency to reduce things to “*fact*” or “*not fact.*”
 - 1. It is one thing to use our screen of scientific, historical, analysis, taking this **as** a story of long ago, \ a legend from a distant and simpler world, -- beautiful and extraordinary as it may be.
 - 2. It is another, altogether, \ to recognize the ingredients here of our own time:
 - a. power struggle, \ injustice, \ exploitation, \ danger, \ suffering and the lot!
 - b. And then the question: can we hear the extraordinary message of Good News, \ about my life and yours, \ and everyone else who is prepared to hear it ? --
 - (1.-- that God is not just somewhere out there, \ just beyond the reach of our biggest telescopes, \ God is with us and among us; \
 - (2.-- that God wants us to understand that we have in our lives one who can be grace and strength to us;
 - (3.-- because ‘*God with us and among us*’ has lived all our human experience, \ and \ understands us and knows us through and through.
- B. In the Gospel of John we have this wonderful and memorable prologue that broaden the images of Incarnation to a cosmic dimension.
 - 1. The Incarnation is – as it were - at the beginning of creation.
 - a. This eternal “*Christ mystery*” has been going on a long time and not something suddenly just imposed by God 2000 years ago.
 - b. It is called creation, or “*The Body of Christ.*” (Richard Rohr, Near Occasions of Grace, p. 6) -- -- --
 - 2. Throughout his Gospel, John uses the image of light.

- a. At the outset we hear today: *“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”*
 - b. In Hebrew/Christian scriptures light has been a metaphor for life and truth.
3. Today, we could say it is even more than a metaphor. It is literally the case that everything on Earth is born of the light.
- a. Our coming to be has been through the stars.
 - b. The bountiful energy that pours forth from our home star is the source of biological life.
 - c. Rabbi *Michael Strassfeld* describes it well: *“Light gives of itself freely, filling all available space.-- It does not seek anything in return; it asks not whether you are friend or foe. It gives of itself and is not thereby diminished.”*
 - d. What a fitting image for Christ, the light of our lives, who calls us to be *“children of light.”* -----
- C. If you are at least 50 years old you may remember one of the most vivid images of the past generation, maybe much longer than that.
1. It was Christmas Eve 1968, the day Apollo 8, the first manned mission to the moon, entered lunar orbit.
 - a. The astronauts were Commander Frank Borman, Command Module pilot Jim Lovell, and Lunar Module pilot William Anders.
 - b. That night the astronauts did a live television broadcast, incredibly for that time, from lunar orbit.
 - c. From Apollo 8, for the first time, all the world was seeing pictures of Earth, a beautiful, fully illuminated, single orb, in blue, green, brown and white, above the gray lunar landscape, against the blackness of space.
 - (1. *“The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring,”* Lovell said, *“and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth.”*
 2. To close the broadcast, Bill Anders said, *“For all the people on Earth the crew of Apollo 8 has a message we would like to send you:”*
 - a. Then, reading from the book of Genesis, ch. 1, he began,
 - (1. *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth.”*
 - b. The crew took turns reading through the first 10 vss. ---

3. Perhaps unconsciously or intuitively, the connection was made in a startling, almost accidental way between what we celebrate at Christmas, and the beginning of creation.
 - a. It was a powerful and unforgettable reading from outer space that Christmas Eve.

III. The Scandal of the Particular

- A. The Christmas scriptures, indeed all of scripture, confront us with a bigger picture than what we are used to.
 1. In the scriptures it is called, “*God’s Kingdom.*”
 - a. It is a picture that has the potential to “*deconstruct*” our false world views.
 2. These images have the power to convert us to an alternative worldview by their proclamation, their grace, and their sheer attraction to the good, the true, and the beautiful.
 - a. These are not moral or political statements that seek to motivate us by shame, guilt, or fear.
 - b. They operate at a much different and higher level.
 3. The images speak to our souls and are deeply consoling, bringing deep healing as they “*reconstruct*” us with a new mind and a new heart. --
- B. So we are introduced again to what Christians call revelation. -
 1. For Christians, this is always pointed, concrete and specific.
 - a. Our word for this is “Incarnational,” or “enfleshed.” ----
 - b. Walter Brueggemann calls it, “*the scandal of the particular.*”
 - c. The Biblical pattern of Incarnation always has God disguised and hiding inside what is little, particular, ordinary, and seemingly insignificant.
 2. Another way of saying this is that Christianity is not about a Platonic world of ideas and theories far beyond us,
 - a. something about which you can be right or wrong, or observe from a distance.
 3. Richard Rohr writes in his book, *Things Hidden*, Incarnation is not something you measure, or critique, or analyze, ---
 - a. but Someone you meet.
 - b. Christians say that this pattern of Incarnation reaches its fullness in one ordinary looking man named Jesus, so we could fall in love with the divine in a real person.
 4. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says,

- a. *“One day you will know that I am in the Father, you are in me, and I am in you.”* – John 14:20
 - b. If Jesus were to use contemporary language he might have said,
 - (1. we are programmed and wired for union, even divine union.
 - c. But we cannot imagine the actual union between the human and divine unless we see it in one concrete place.
 - d. The word we have used for this is that Jesus *“saves”* us.
 - (1. His coming to us as a God-Human tells us it is not only possible for him, but real for us too.
 - (2. So it is, and only because of this, that Jesus can say, *“Follow me!”*
 - (3. So it is that Jesus says, that what he has done, we also can and must do. (Jn. 3:35, 5:20, 13:15, 14:12)
 - e. The mystery is transmitted from person to person, like a wonderful contagion of Spirit.
- C. When the image of Christ transforms us, which it will if we take it into ourselves,
- 1. then we will recognize the divine within our own souls.
 - a. We will daringly affirm the Divine Presence in the body of Jesus,
 - b. **and also**, in the whole universe.
 - 2. When we get it once, in ourselves, we find it true all the time.
 - a. It is all one and the same pattern, and we call it the Christ Mystery.
 - 3. Seeing the images, we celebrate not an end to the challenges,
 - a. but more, a celebration that the conditions for newness of life are upon us, or among us.
 - b. The images tell us what we need to see for a new world,
 - (1. what we need to see to come out of darkness into life.
 - 4. To close I have one more quote from R. Rohr, as he follows the lead of Simone Weil,
 - a. *“The beauty of Christmas is enough healthy shock for a lifetime, and it leaves the shocked ones dumbly struggling for utterance.-- Once the Eternal Word has become human flesh it is very hard to put it back into words—only music, poetry, and art can begin to suffice.”* (A Christmas Meditation, Richard Rohr)