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God's Thought-Intention Concerning Manhood

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Ye must be born anew (from above)" (John 3:3).

"...till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

"Ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man... where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman, - but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:9-11).

"(He) emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross" (Phil. 2:7,8).

It is at least interesting, but more impressive, to recognize that the passages above - cited from Paul's letters are the full development of John's recorded word of Christ - "Ye must be born anew" or "from above". John's Gospel was one of the last of the New Testament writings to be written. When all the Apostles had gone to the Lord and the first apostolic century was nearing its end, John wrote his Gospel. He wrote because Christianity was fast changing its form. From being essentially characterized by life, it was fast declining into tradition. From being an inward thing of the spirit it was becoming an outward thing of formality. From being heavenly it was becoming earthly. From treating of the eternal Son of God it was becoming a matter of the Jesus of History. The universal Church of his Epistles, and the local churches of his Revelation had lost their spirituality and set aside or repudiated the great revelation given them through Paul. "All that are in Asia turned away

from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). John's Gospel was written as a corrective to all the above, and much more. Take those points one by one and see that corrective character.

Having introduced the Son in His eternal Godhead, and then indicated or stated the heavenly relationship of His manhood, he soon arrives at his contrasting of that heavenly Man with the best type of (religious) earthly man, and at that point, in that connection, introduces Christ's words "Ye must be born anew". We are thus brought at once into the light of the eternal thought-intention for manhood - albeit, Deity apart, so far as all but Christ are concerned.

One inclusive effect of a right apprehension of John's writings (as of Paul's and Peter's) would be to deliver Christianity from the smallness into which it has been brought, into the greatness, the immensity, of God's intentions. At the centre of these intentions stands - so far as creation is concerned - a Divine conception of manhood.

Men Representing Constituents Of Manhood According To God's Thought

"Let us make man" - that was a conception, that was a thought, and it proved to be an intention. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). God made man. He made him, and then he was marred; that man was spoiled by the works of the devil, permitted by man in himself. From that point you find a course of history in which there was a chain of men under God's hand in each of whom there is seen some feature of manhood according to God. That is why these men are mentioned, why we have what we have about them - Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and all the rest. They are men under God's hand and every one of them represents some feature of manhood according to God's thought-intention. There were many other things about those men, but one thing in every case was uppermost, and that is this Divine thought, this man-factor in accordance with God's mind. Not one of these men was complete as a man according to God. Perhaps in most things they were very imperfect and in most of them there were many contradictions; but there was one thing about them all. It was not the same thing in every one, but a different thing in nearly all of them. There was one thing which stood out, upon which God looked, to which God committed Himself, because of which God went on with that man; because that man was, in his heart-relationship with God, being made to reveal one of these marks of manhood as God intended it to be. But, as we have said, they were all imperfect. No one of them was complete as a man after God's Own heart. They failed and passed on, just leaving this outstanding characteristic to be noted for all time. We do not stay now to indicate what those characteristics were in each case - you know them. We simply intimate the fact. Each link in the chain of these men represented some feature, but the chain ended in imperfection, incompleteness, no one having in all respects satisfied God, but God having had a *testimony* in everyone.

The Incarnation

The next stage and step is the incarnation, the coming in flesh of the Word Who was God, the heavenly Man in the world, the Son of Man: and immediately He became the central object of universal contemplation. Heaven looked on and watched and was most interested. At the birth, angels were present looking on; they were tremendously interested in it. From time to time during His life on earth angels attended, visited, and ministered, succouring in the wilderness, in the garden. In His resurrection they were there at the tomb. It is the manhood that is the object of interest. Hell was very much interested. At the birth, Herod; in the wilderness, Satan; in the Cross, principalities and powers. To use the simile of the Psalmist - "They compassed me about like bees" (Psa. 118:12) - swarms of evil spirits investing Him. Hell was tremendously interested in this

manhood. And earth was interested, men were interested, watching, perplexed. He is the centre of universal interest.

The Purpose Of The Incarnation

(a) The Destruction Of The Works Of The Devil In Man

Then you ask, What is the meaning and the purpose of God coming in this form, in man-form? Well, the answer is that the purpose is twofold. One, to bring in a Man fully in accord with Divine thought-intention, and set Him forth as heaven's pattern: and the other to destroy the works of the devil in man. "The Son of God was manifested (in man-form) that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). I just want to intimate here - we will come back to it more fully - that the destroying of the works of the devil by the Son of Man was not just some objective thing, as I might take up a book and tear it to pieces. It was done inwardly, and it was not first of all done in man outside of Jesus Christ. It was done in the Son of Man Himself. That wants explaining. It would get me into trouble if I left it there. He was doing something by being something. He was destroying something by being the opposite of that something. "The prince of the world cometh" - to destroy Me, that is the meaning - "and he hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30), nothing to work upon; therefore he was utterly defeated, and he was defeated in a man because he had not got the ground. His works are destroyed because he has not got the required ground for success. The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil as Son of Man, and so supplant the first man, Adam, in whom the works of the devil had been wrought.

Oh, we do not know what took place in the soul of Jesus, both during His earthly life and on the Cross! What a terrific battle was being fought! How greatly the enemy strove to force Him down to the ground of the first Adam, and thus to destroy Him and His seed. His life must have been one continuous inward state of resistance, refusal. On the Cross, in weakness, emaciation, exhaustion, the full force of the whole power of Satan was brought to bear upon Him to try to get Him to provide some ground for the works of the devil, for the devil to repeat his works and destroy the last Adam. This conflict of His soul was universal, was on the ground of all that is found in man naturally. He met every temptation common to man, He was tempted in all points like as we are. We have to think and know as far as we can from our own hearts what that meant - all points as we are tempted. The enemy was on all points destroyed in his works, so that in this Representative One Who has now taken the place of a tempted man, of a tried man, of a weak man, "crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4), the enemy has found nothing; the Son of God as Son of Man destroyed the works of the devil and representatively supplanted that man in whom the works of the devil had been wrought. The first man is deposed, displaced.

(b) Perfect Manhood Developed And Brought To Fullness

But let us return to what we said earlier concerning the purpose of the incarnation - the bringing of another Man to perfect manhood according to God's mind. This was done in two ways. In Himself personally. A work was going on in Him; not making Him better, purer, more sinless. That is not the perfecting of the Son of Man, and yet it is definitely declared that a work of perfecting was going on in Him. He was sinless, He could not be made purer and better than He was at the beginning, but there can be virtues, characteristics and attributes which are without flaw in themselves, yet not developed to their full measure, and that development to full measure will only take place as they are put to the test, put through the fire. It cannot make them purer in essence, but it will make them greater in measure. He was made perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:10), made perfect, made

complete - if we take the real meaning of the original word - made complete, brought to maturity, brought to full growth, brought to all-roundness. In Himself, manhood brought to fullness.

So He started as a babe and grew up. Thirty years is the Levitical age of manhood, and He attained to that age and beyond it. It was manhood under God's eye being brought out in its fullness. He could say, "It is finished" - not only in the sense in which we use the word, that is, that He had got to the end, to a triumphant conclusion of a work; but really He was saying more than that. He was saying what the priest said over the offering which had been separated from the flock and put apart for so many days to be under severe scrutiny and examination if, peradventure, any flaw could be found in that sacrifice, before it was offered to God; and at last, when the scrutiny had gone as far as it could under the trained eye of the priest and no blemish could be discovered anywhere, the priest made a pronouncement over it, "It is perfect". Those were the words the Lord used on the Cross at the end as He presented Himself without spot to God. It is perfect, it is complete! This is manhood according to God's thought and mind.

But then the incarnation has a more far reaching object than that. This perfecting of manhood was to be fulfilled in His Body corporately. That is why we read the words of Ephesians 4:13 - "till we all attain unto the... measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," a full-grown man. And Colossians - where there cannot be all that belongs to this earthly man: national barriers, differences, divisions; social barriers; characteristic differences; religious differences - circumcision, uncircumcision: but one new man, where Christ is all, and in all, "and ye have put off the old man... and have put on the new man" (Col. 3:9,10). So that brings us to this point, that as believers, we are supposed to stand on this new ground which has been secured by the Cross of our Lord Jesus, the new ground of the new and heavenly Man. We are supposed to be on that ground. That is where our responsibility begins, and where the real work begins, for then, being on that ground, the only ground of a Christian according to God's mind, *our sole business is related to this heavenly Man*; our sole business is related to heavenly manhood, personally as to ourselves, and corporately as to the Body of Christ. That sole business may include many forms of operation. It will include evangelism, because the members have got to be gathered to the Head. It will include every other New Testament activity. It will involve many Divine endowments and heavenly gifts - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for this perfecting of the Body of Christ. "Diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... the same God... one body" (1 Cor. 12:4-13), one object. It is all this manhood, but the sole business is not evangelism as evangelism, not teaching ministry as teaching ministry, not this gift or that gift, your gift and my gift, as a gift, but all is focused upon one thing, and one thing only - the sole business of all - this heavenly Man.

It must begin with ourselves personally. So far as we personally are concerned, the sole concern of our hearts is and must be manhood according to God's thought. We must seek to be conformed to the image of God's Son. And then so far as others are concerned, it has to be just as it was with Him, the heavenly Man - He Himself seeing to it that He personally was the Man according to the Father's heart at all points, and then His great concern that others should come on to that same ground as He occupied, and be ministered to and helped and encouraged and instructed and in every way have provision made for their conforming to God's thought as to man.

I do want you to get the point. Do not think this is just so much being said. We do a lot of Christian work and very often the worker has become so taken up with the work *as the work* as to forget the very character of the worker himself, and Satan is always trying to destroy the work by getting into the worker, by spoiling the worker. He wanted to destroy the great work that Christ had come to do - to bring in this heavenly Man - by destroying the very Man Who had come to do it. He was always trying to find an entrance somewhere into this Man Himself with an object of destroying the work

that He had come to do. That is very clear, and we must be very careful that we are not so concerned about the work of the Lord as to neglect our own spiritual manhood; that is, neglect the necessity for being Christlike. Do remember then, ever and always, that it is the nature, the character, of that Manhood that matters.

The thing that matters is a kind of person. A kind of person is set before us in Christ. He is God's beginning and you can have nothing before a beginning. He is God's end, and you can have nothing after that. So there is nothing outside of Christ. He is God's Man. I emphasize again, we must ever remember that it is the nature, the character, of the manhood according to God that matters, and if that is true, then this means very deep formation.

Conformity To Christ

(a) Through Outward Separation

Deep formation firstly through outward separation. That is one thing that is said about the Lord Jesus, that He was separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26), and using that word 'separate', I am only using a more common and ordinary word for the great Bible word 'consecration' or 'sanctification', which are the same word in the original. Consecration or sanctification simply mean - set apart unto God. Outward separation to begin with. Separate - not going the way of others; not trying to stand well with them; no policy, no diplomacy, being perfectly willing to let a fundamental difference be recognized, and to take all the consequences of being in this world as something other than that which is here.

(b) By Inward Separation

And then deep formation by inward separation. Israel in the wilderness was outwardly separated, but inwardly not so. That is why, in recounting their history, the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews connects with the wilderness life of Israel those words - "For the Word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing, even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow" (Heb. 4:12). You notice the context is Israel in the wilderness, and the meaning therefore is this, that while they were outwardly separated from Egypt and from the nations, they were inwardly not separated: there was something to be done inside to divide asunder between soul and spirit, joints and marrow; a deep inward separation. This cannot be accomplished mechanically. This is some deep inward work of God, getting us circumcised in heart.

(c) By Considering Him

I only ask you to contemplate the Lord Jesus. If we are really going on with the Lord, sooner or later we shall be brought back to the main emphasis upon the Lord Jesus Himself. Many other aspects of Divine revelation may from time to time be the things which are holding our interest and our occupation and our concern, but sooner or later the Spirit of God is going to bring us from the circumference to the centre, and the final full object of the Spirit's concern will become ours - the Lord Jesus Himself. We shall come back, with all the values of every other part of revelation, we shall come back to the Gospels, and we shall be compelled to look again at Jesus of Nazareth from heaven's standpoint, and see this heavenly Man under fire, under test, what kind of a Man He is, how He behaves, how He reacts, His disposition, His temper, His everything. And I say here, Look at Him, read again, quietly, prayerfully, thoughtfully, read again the life of Jesus from the standpoint of inward separation. See how Satan is ever trying to close that gap of separation, bring things together, mix up things which belong to two realms. How fine the point was sometimes, and how

absolutely necessary it was for Him for His very destiny (natural reason argued) to adopt certain lines, certain courses. Everything seemed to depend at times upon His doing a certain thing, and He would not do it. Satan could not close that gap of inward separation; He kept things in the right place. 'This belongs to that realm, this to that; this is of heaven, this is of men.' Deep formation by inward separation. That is the work that God is seeking to do in you and in me.

(d) Through Suffering

And then, of course, it is suffering. He was made perfect through sufferings; there is no other way for us. We are not already perfect, but we do stand on the same ground of Divine method. Made perfect through suffering. This manhood, this heavenly manhood, is only going to be produced through suffering. You had better settle it. We do not like it. It does not seem to be the kind of Christianity that we had offered to us in the popular terms. We have been promised so much if we become Christians, it has all been made so rosy. No, He never did that. He said, 'You cannot be My disciple unless you deny yourself, you have to say No to yourself, and take up the Cross; you cannot be My disciple unless you hate your own soul and are prepared to lose it' (meaning, to lay it down unto death: Luke 14:26,27,33; Matt. 10:38,39; Matt. 16:24). It is suffering, deep inward formation according to Christ, God's heavenly Man, by outward separation, inward separation and suffering. That is the way that Christ went. He has offered no other way to His disciples and to His servants.

Of course, to leave it there seems rather gloomy, not very attractive; but we have not finished by a very long way. Oh, what this Man in Christ, this corporate Man, this Body of Christ, is destined for! 'What is man, that Thou puttest him in charge of all the inhabited earth to come, whereof we speak?' (Heb. 2:5,6). And, more than that, "know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:3). I am not going further with that. I simply indicate it, to set that as an offset to what might look like rather a gloomy situation over this suffering business. "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:17). "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12). You see, it is not just again putting somebody into an objective position as a reigning monarch. It is spiritual character. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

What the Lord is saying to us at this time is, 'Do you know what you are in this world for? Do you know why I have reached out and laid My hand on you, why you are a Christian, a child of God? Do you know the meaning of it all? It is to make you a man according to My original and abiding thought and intention, to bring you into that Man'. I suppose sisters think they are not in it, but remember, in the beginning He called them Man. "Male and female created He them... and called their name Adam (Man)" (Gen. 5:2). So you are in it. "There can be no male or female: for ye all are one (man) in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Yes, it applies to all of us. It is a man-hood, a kind of humanity, God has ever intended, and if you think this is theory, have you no experience that corroborates what I have said? Every one of us knows how true it is. What is God after? Why are you set on this scene as you are? Why is it that God does not give us such pleasant situations and circumstances as we crave for, and make it easy for us? Why does it seem rather that He makes it hard, puts us into hard places, and does not deliver us or prevent us from those very trying conditions? Why is the furnace heated seven times for saints, men who are walking with God? Well, what is it doing with us? Is not this the necessary background to formation according to Christ? Where will the characteristics of the heavenly Man have an opportunity, if not in adversity? Love has no meaning unless there is a background of hate. It is supine, it is weak, it is not real. When you read, "having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1), you say, 'that is a miracle'. When you read the prophecies of Hosea, and see God uncovering His heart about Israel, the unfaithful Israel, the unfaithful wife, the harlot wife, and then crying as with a broken heart, "How shall I give thee up?" (Hosea 11:8), you have to say, 'that is love'. You only see it in the light of the background. And

this heavenly manhood can only be developed over against a background which is so opposite. That is why He puts you among men who are so earthly, sensual, 'old-Adamic'. That is why he calls upon Christians to live together up against one another's old man. If only we could get with all those nice Christians, it would be easy! But you would not develop any heavenly character if the Lord took that line. God is practical. We do know that in no other way could God get us changed. He gives us a first-class opportunity just where we are of developing characteristics which are not of the old man at all, they are of the new man: that is the explanation.