

#### IV. Religious

Need: To make Religion integral to life

One of the consequences of living in our modern age – with a non-participating consciousness – is that God and Religion seem to have been pushed to the periphery of life. The ancient rituals of Religion, which used to reflect and continually restore religious belief, are now left behind when worshipers leave their places of worship. Some still attend a church or synagogue or mosque, say prayers, even sing praises to "God", but then they go out into the world and live their lives mostly unaffected by their professed beliefs, and they leave their "God" begging on some far shore. At best they are left with what one modern poet calls "a living fossil of God's image". A few can even hope to find 'liminality', so-called "thin places", where they may catch a glimpse of that shipwrecked "God"; but then the world closes over them and they are left to fend for themselves.

Barfield addresses this problem at its core. At the beginning of his chapter, 'Religion', in *Saving the Appearances: a Study in Idolatry*, he states that "Religion is essentially an I–Thou relation between man on the one hand and the Creator of man and of his phenomena on the other". "A man who cannot think of his Creator as a Being other than himself", he says, "cannot be said to have a religion". Most of us would probably agree with this. The problem comes when we try to interpret or imagine such a Creator.

Barfield contends that with our modern, non-participating, consciousness, we imagine man's Creator (God) in one of two ways: either as "a Being exclusively objective, remote, inaccessible, infinitely superior to, yet existentially parallel with, man"; or, as an "idea". Neither of these ways is acceptable to Barfield and he is bluntly dismissive of them. An "idea" of itself has no spiritual substance; it is "merely an idea", he says. As for imagining God as a "Being, infinitely superior to man", this is to place Him in the same basic category as we place the phenomenal world – separate and apart from us with no extra-sensory link between Him and us. No participation. It is to place God in what Barfield calls 'the phenomenal mode', leading him to conclude: "...if I think of Him [God] as other *in the same mode* [O.B.'s italics] as the phenomena, then I substitute an idol for Him; and if I proceed to worship Him so thought of... in the secret recesses of my soul, I am worshipping – perhaps some guardian angel, certainly not my Creator".

Try this test: ask yourself, 'Do I believe in God?' If your answer is 'No', you have failed Barfield's religious test. But if you answered 'Yes', you have also failed it. You failed because you accepted the

question as posed, with its preposition "in" (between 'believe' and 'God'). That preposition is a fair indication that you conceive of God in 'the phenomenal mode', i.e. as a Being apart from you that you can connect with as you would connect with phenomena. As one being "to" another.

To solve this dilemma Barfield proposes two things: 1) a different concept of God; and 2) a different consciousness. The one is not workable without the other. I have mentioned the nature of that "different consciousness" elsewhere in this course, and also of the ways and means to achieve it. (See 'Language' component.) I wish here to focus on Barfield's concept of God and the ways and means of understanding it, and possibly adopting it. And I will start with that assertion of his – that God, to truly be a religious God, must be "other" than man. The question then becomes: in what way is the "otherness" of God to be understood?

Barfield says that God is not "other" as the phenomena are other, even when He is conceived of as an "infinitely superior" or "Supreme" Being. "No", Barfield says. Rather He is "more other", i.e. "God is more other from us than are the phenomena". One might even say that God is 'radically other', in that He is the Source or 'root' of all Being. That would save Him from being an idol, but it would also create a gulf – an unfathomable gulf – between Him and His creation. Barfield addresses this with his contention, his radical contention, that God is not just "more other" from us, He is also more "same", i.e. God is more "same" – radically "same" – as us, than are the phenomena. God is both radically "other" from us, and also radically "same" as us. Simultaneously. Both at once.

This is a contradiction, of course. But only to a non-participatory, "idolatrous", consciousness. That is why I said that Barfield's concept of God requires a corresponding "different consciousness". With a different – participating – consciousness, we are involved in the phenomenal world in a creative way. And since God is the admitted Creator of all things, this is where He meets us – within the creative process. We then find ourselves in what Barfield calls "a directionally creator relation to the phenomena". This is an amazing phrase. Note the adverbial term "directionally creator", signifying the continual coming into being of the world. With this view, this 'way', we are essentially 'co-creators' – with God – of the world.

The truth of this, astonishing as it may seem to some, has been hailed by others who are respected in this field, both ancient and modern. A modern homilist has said: "Spiritual journeys that unite us to God, inevitably unite us to what God has made". A 15th Cent. Renaissance philosopher has written: "Whereas God contains in Him all things because He is their Source, Man contains in him all things because he is

their centre".\* And then Barfield himself: "In the long run, we shall not be able to save souls without saving the appearances" (phenomena).

To experience this in our daily lives will of course take some effort. First, we must abandon a consciousness that views "all things" – creation, people, God – in 'the phenomenal mode'. Then we must accept that the material world is an 'image' of the immaterial. And finally we must, consciously, deliberately, 're-image' (i.e. re-imagine) the immaterial in a 'participatory' way.

There is something traditionally "religious" in this process, did you notice? It involves a kind of repentance... then an acceptance... and finally, a kind of communion. Repentance, a turning away from what we know to be false (viewing the world in 'the phenomenal mode')... acceptance of a new truth (viewing the world as 'image')... and finally 'Communion' (experiencing the world as 'participated').

God and Religion, viewed and experienced this 'way', can hardly be pushed to the periphery of life. They are central to it... integral to it. They are at the heart of everything we do because they are at the center of everything we are! God is rescued from the "otherness" of the far shore and placed where He has always been, not in any particular "place" but in the "sameness" of our previously unrealized true Selves. God isn't a Being you believe "in", He is already "within", mutually indwelling within you in a unitive way. Someone for whom this has become a living reality may respond, as Barfield himself once did, with the exclamation: "Here is the antecedent Unity of unities, here is the interior Transforming Agent of evolution, here is the positive meaning of life on earth, the Meaning of meaning itself staring me in the face!"

\*Giovanni Pico della Mirandola