

## Form of God?

This article follows on the heels of **Never Having Been Born?** It too is in the form of a question which suggests that putting together the two words “form” and “God” essentially creates a contradiction, big time. So why? <sup>1</sup> Behind it lies our innate tendency to foist some kind of shape...form...onto what we’ve never seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted. It’s a natural way we make sense of the world, of coping with that which is beyond our ken and trying to bring it under our control. The article at hand takes this tendency into consideration, hoping to offer one alternative, in many ways difficult to articulate, about how we approach the incomprehensible. It isn’t something snatched willy-nilly from the clear blue but has direct bearing upon our lives.

Religious traditions as a whole have a collection of key insights with regard to transcendent reality which have been built up, refined and then handed down from one generation to the next. Another way of putting it is that each generation has put its mark on what essentially can’t be marked. Unfortunately, though, a number of auxiliary insights (for lack of better phrasing, something like offshoots) have been tacked on which had a way of obfuscating the original, even primitive insight of unknowability. They may be summed up as trying to squeeze what cannot be grasped into something we can lay hold of. Then we can expound on it to our hearts content without realizing that what we’ve grasped has vanished. Talk about being duped.

Giambattista Vico, a contemporary of Descartes and vigorous critic of his *cogito ergo sum*, said the starting point of all civilization is thunder. That is, primitives heard thunder as the very voice of the gods. Once they recognized that (Who couldn’t but sympathize with them even today?), they knew they were in touch with something lacking form but endowed with a voice coming from “up there.” Obviously it must be personal, different but not unlike themselves. Of course they didn’t think in these terms nor did they have to do so. Thunder from above came to them spontaneously and was something everyone heard. In other words, it was inescapable. We can throw in lightning for dramatic effect though Vico doesn’t expound on that as key.

One way we can consider this thunder is through the Hebrew word *davar*, (same spelling for both noun and verb) meaning utterance not unlike the Greek *logos* but more concrete. As for a verb, it suggests giving voice, of communicating something, not everything, of the speaker to those being addressed. *Davar* is found frequently in scripture and differs from the more common ‘*amar*, also to speak. More specifically, *davar* is associated with the Lord speaking or better, communicating something important as when dealing with the prophets. So when the Lord *davar* through these prophets, he is doing so not unlike that

---

<sup>1</sup>There comes to mind, of course, Philippians 2.6: “although he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” Obviously that will be looked at later in this article.

thunder. The major difference is that the prophet is fully cognizant that the divine power speaking is personal, not a force of nature. And so *davar* is as close to the unapproachable divinity you can get <sup>2</sup>.

From thunder comes the next step, the task of constructing a coherent world view on which society and hence civilization is to be founded. To their great relief, those who've heard it haven't been wiped out but continue to survive. Following thunder comes rain which is beneficial to crops and hence to the survival of these early societies. So while the communication may be frightening, what follows is beneficial. As for *davar*, the idea behind it encapsulates a similar life-giving reality. People first hear thunder, "translated" it into *davar* and upon this laid the foundations of the first civilizations. This, of course, is a religious gesture and integral to the stability of any society. Insight upon insight was built upon that foundation, we here below and the gods<sup>3</sup> up there.

When people lost faith in this most basic of all divisions as Vico intimates—and this seems to be a recurring theme over the long haul—in a fairly short time civil life unraveled and then collapsed. At the same time there is hope. Once again people are reduced to their primitive condition and find themselves in a position to start all over again. Initially this seems to be an endless cyclic process with no exit and fact, is quite tiresome. In the Hebrew tradition what saves this from being as such is the bursting forth of the divine *davar*, the source of civilization, which sets humankind on an irreversible course forward <sup>4</sup>. So the main point is, how can we keep this image of thunder (or the transcendent *davar*) always before our eyes? Or are we doomed to do otherwise by some inexorable force which many voices claim to be the case?

A good biblical example of this is the famous tower of Shinar story <sup>5</sup> which takes place fairly early on in Genesis after the flood which famously is associated with Noah. From there it moves on to Chapter Eleven where humanity is about to enter a whole new phase though for now is unaware of it. As for the whole string of descendants from Noah's children, memory of that catastrophic flood recedes gradually into the background until

2 The opening words of John's Gospel is indicative of this closeness when speaking of *logos* (we can imply it as equivalent to *davar*): "In the beginning was the *Logos* and the *Logos* was *pros* God." Note the preposition *pros*, indicative of direction towards-which and can be taken as continuous movement or better, a presence which is immediate and always present.

3 It seems that the first insight into the wonder above manifesting itself was one by nature, thunder or *davar*. From there it moved quickly into a multitude of divinities.

4 This idea of continuous progress has been coming under attack and in many ways, rightly so. However, the divine character of *davar* isn't aligned with progress as perhaps some today think it might be. Rather, it has in mind the summoning up from earth the people dwelling upon it and bringing them into it's native sphere, the realm above...shades of the heavenly Jerusalem.

5 Shinar instead of the familiar tower of Babel. Reason? Those who erected it never gave the tower a name, let alone the city they built before turning attention to the tower. As for Shinar, it's the general location of Babylon.

it's almost forgotten. Between then and the tower of Shinar the people seem to be milling about here and there, doing their thing; i.e., nothing special except engaged in indeterminate movement.

Chances are this dissatisfaction gave rise not so much to building a city and tower but to a growing awareness that the unity of their language has to be expanded. How this would come about, nobody knew at the time but come it did in a way they hadn't planned. Until the tower incident all enjoyed a certain unity summed up in the chapter just before the flood as "These are the families of the sons of Noah." In other words, people lived in a relatively primitive state with the thunder still echoing in their ears...and thunder here can be associated with aftermaths of the flood <sup>6</sup>. That time it didn't produce a beneficial rain but a seemingly endless torrent that destroyed the earth. So thunder is to be respected. One never knows if it produces a deluge or gentle showers. Nevertheless, the dissatisfaction just noted gave birth to rumblings coming from within the people themselves.

So with time the people grew restless, wanting to expand their horizons. Such restlessness may be attributed in part to a lack of recalling...a lack of *anamnesis*...of the flood. To date it had informed these various peoples which despite their primitiveness, unified them. Nobody wanted it to happen again. Then we come to the tower, but before people start constructing it, vs. 1 notes that "the whole earth had one language and few words." The two nouns are *saphah* and the now familiar *davar*, the former also as lip. Thus the generations closer to the flood had less need to communicate with each other because memory of the flood and what had existed on earth before it remained relatively fresh in their minds. As that catastrophe faded, people unconsciously felt the need to break out of this collective memory and develop a more complex society.

What contributed to the rise of the tower was a growing sense of inadequacy with regard to the few *davar* the people had been using from the flood. Plenty of nations are mentioned between the flood and the tower. So lack of *anamnesis* concerning that event was the first step towards breaking up this unity which now with hindsight, was inevitable. But before that could happen, the descendants of Noah needed their *davar* to be multiplied. This is both favorable and unfavorable. As for the former, they were in need of skill...technique...to accommodate their growing population. As for the latter, moving beyond few *davar* means introducing complexity.

Here's where the tower comes in. The complexity required to reach on high only increases until it gets top-heavy and can't go further. Thus the tower is standing there on the plain pretty stable, for the text mentions nothing about it collapsing. In the meanwhile the Lord had been keeping a keen eye on its construction and came down at the moment he was

---

<sup>6</sup> As Gn 7.11 notes, the waters came from above as well as below: "all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened."

waiting for. He did this while the people still were one with one language (*saphah*, source of *davar*). While erecting the tower, they realized their one language was too limited in order to communicate with each other. More complex words were necessary to go forward. At this juncture the Lord simply had to intervene and put a stop to their work, otherwise the builders threatened to intrude his personal realm, heaven. Instead of wrecking the tower—surely something he was tempted to do—the Lord decided on a long term way of handling this, by confusing their one language so they couldn't understand each other.

This decision to confuse the people's one language showed that their presumption really had gotten under the Lord's skin. What motivated them was a fear of being scattered throughout the earth which seems understandable. However, it demonstrated a distrust of the Lord which had been growing since the flood. In fact, nothing of him is mentioned since the Lord had made a covenant with Noah and future generations with a rainbow. Although the Lord would never admit it, his real fear was that erection of the tower would reach into the heavens which was a direct intrusion into the divine realm. And so their words "Let us make a name for ourselves" [Gn 11.4] was indicative of both self-confidence and fear minus any reference to the Lord.

The people were infringing on the Lord's own territory which from time immemorial had been forbidden. By no means would he be against them if they had put their efforts in on the horizontal plane, as it were, instead of the vertical one. If they choose the former, there'd be no need for the Lord to introduce confusion. Still, he would descend from heaven but would assist directly in the building up of a civilization instead of the confusion he had been forced to bring upon the people. The one *saphah* and few *davar* would remain as sufficient for all their needs. The Lord would take care of the rest. However, the people lost faith because divine assistance didn't cater to their now supposed sophisticated life style as manifested through the technical expertise needed for building a city and erecting the tower. And so the tower of Shinar remains partly built as a monument to both what had been and what was introduced into the world for the first time, a confusion of the people's language. The tower of Shinar now became recognized as the tower of Babel, Babel being derived from the verbal root meaning to confuse.

So this tower of Babel story can be taken as a response to one of Giambattista Vico's basic insights, namely, thunder. People on earth heard it, showed reverence while at the same time were envious of it. They wished to build something that would reach up to its source and bring the thunder down—bottle it up, if you will—a kind of inversion of the Prometheus story. Such is one way of looking at how primitive people responded to the mysterious realm located "up there." Over the years it became a way to explain deviant behavior they knew existed but couldn't put a finger upon. Not acknowledging a regard for transcendent reality, people took pride in their accomplishments as a substitute for it. Such was the birth of the various gods and goddesses that populated the earth.

The intent might have started out well enough with regard to building the city, but it was something else when it came to the tower. The people's efforts devolved quickly—more so than anticipated—tracing their roots all the way back to the flood and from there to the Garden of Eden. While history is filled with humankind's encounters with the transcendent which persist down to the present, the deviations made along the way can make us depressed easily. An outright rejection of the transcendent doesn't seem to be the issue even those there are examples of it. It seems to derive more from a desire for something ersatz within human reach where sound of that divine thunder has ceased to echo upon the earth.

This didn't happen overnight but over an extended period of time. At the same time more or less formal recognition of God remained until it got increasingly hollowed out. Reversing this is, of course, is far from an easy task. Perhaps the only remedy is for the heavens to open up yet again and issue another clap of divine thunder. This might be the only way to restore humankind's first contact with transcendent reality which can be traced directly to forgetfulness or the loss of *anamnesis*. A symptom of this loss can be traced not so much to disregard for the transcendence but complete or near complete ignorance of it. With this in mind, perhaps even a divine thunder clap might not suffice to get attention, that's how far afield we've strayed. At such a time as this it's best to be wary of certain guardians of the transcendent operating today. Despite the best of intentions, they can be distinguished by having a set of prepackaged answers, a sure sign of encrustation. Anyone with the briefest of training can fulfill the role of "teacher."

With Giambattista Vico's insight of Jove = thunder before our eyes, let's reduce the situation at hand to its most simple components: on one hand, everything that exists and on the other, everything that falls outside our ken. Early on in human history humankind heard that divine thunder clap and was astounded. At the same time people were preoccupied with the basics: obtaining food, warding off wild beasts and raising the next generation. These were no small tasks by the primitive standards of the time. Jove realized this which is why he tolerated humans drifting from him but up to a certain point when he had to wipe the slate clean. We're reminded of this each time we experience a T storm. As part of the world up there trickles down to us mortals, we gather what we can just as the Israelites had gathered manna. However, almost always we like they gather what's beyond our needs, and it rots away within our very hands. That sets in motion a downward spiral of greed leading to eventual corruption. Yet if we acknowledge our greed, a long term benefit comes our way. It teaches us not to transgress a realm wholly other than our own. We may know this instinctively yet in our frustration deny its existence thereby going ahead and trespassing anyway.

It seems that from time immemorial when societies sought to explain why stuff out there (including ourselves) exists, invariably the answer came not on their own volition but from a source independent of human intervention. That's an almost inviolable presupposition, and still holds true today. We express the manner by which all the stuff around us has come into existence by the word creation or more precisely, that it has been created. We continue using this English noun and verb a lot even though it's somewhat dated or un-modern and doesn't fit in with the way science presents reality nowadays.

Nowadays the verb to create is used somewhat unreflectively in that it no longer presupposes a Creator responsible for his actions. However, a closer look at the Hebrew word for creation offers a refreshing look. The original insight into the Hebrew verb *bara'* or to create means to fashion, especially by cutting much as a sculptor cuts away stone to bring forth what he has in mind. That means we have a gradual transition from an image already present in the sculptor's mind to the material before him. It, of course, doesn't emerge all at once. Furthermore, it isn't a gentle process but a painful one done in slow motion. Two essentials are involved: 1) something existed from which an object or objects had been hewed 2) and someone was present to do the hewing.

Thus we're dealing with two opposites radically different from each another while at the same time they are linked inexplicably. The non-material one manifests itself as a personalized creator (again as manifested through thunder). Then people acknowledge it as a type of form which grabbed their attention. At the same time this form is isn't quite one at all because it isn't tangible; that is, it consists of immaterial sound. Usually we don't think of sound as a form but more as a signal that something is out there waiting to be discovered. We experience this on a daily basis through the picking up of sounds which signal a reality close by.

Once people tune in on the divine *bara'* as a chiseling away, they use its echos to hew out a world in imitation of it. After all, just now they had heard the divine *bara'*, so it was easy to copy it. That primal *bara'* had been in existence from time immemorial whereas the human *bara'* is new on the scene, hence a temporal gap exists between the two. The primal one always has precedence over the latter as we've seen with the tower of Shinar incident. It should be noted that *bara'* is used at the very beginning of Genesis: "In the beginning God *bara'* the heavens and the earth."<sup>7</sup> In other words, God started chiseling away to produce what ultimately has become "up" and "down," heaven and earth. Although vs. 2 says that the earth was *tohu* and *bohu* (without form and void), it doesn't seem to apply to that from which God had done the chiseling.

---

7. A side note, if you will. In between *bara'* and "the heavens and the earth" is the particle '*eth* which consists of the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, '*aleph* and *tau*. It doesn't seem to have a reason for being there. One suggestion is that '*aleph* represents the beginning of the divine *bara'* whereas *tau* it's completion. So right at the beginning of Genesis we have both compressed into one, something akin to the *alpha* and *omega* of Revelation.

When it comes to man, *bara'* holds a special place of honor compared with the rest of creation. The verse (there are several others) that stands out is, of course, 1.27: "In the image of God he created him, male and female." As for the rest of creation, God said "let there be"...i.e., no *bara'*. So among all the things that God had brought into existence, only man could reflect upon how he got to where he is, as having been chiseled out. Not only that, he was able to do this reflection without going outside his very nature meaning he didn't have to seek elsewhere. Such *bara'* isn't to be aligned with an emanation from God, a temptation which some may find attractive. The reason? By its very nature an emanation has nothing to do with being hewed; it flows or perhaps better, oozes out, not an especially flattering image.

If we acknowledge that we are hewed...*bara'*...is it possible to be aware of that stuff from which we've come as well as the one responsible for the hewing? That's the million dollar question. In addition to the life in which we find ourselves and are destined to exit (two absolute certainties) we may throw in a state which may...just may...come before both. Another way of putting it: is there some kind of reality...existence...before the one we're in right now? Admittedly putting it this way is a bit awkward. Yet we do find quite a few references in scripture pointing in that direction. Two come to mind, Jeremiah 1.5 and Romans 8.29 quoted respectively: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." The keywords (there are quite a few, of course) are related to knowing: to know and to have foreknowledge, *yadah* and *progignosko*, Hebrew and Greek respectively. The former pertains to intimate knowledge even of the sexual kind and the latter, to have an understanding beforehand. Combine the two, and you have something potent.

Should we focus on these two types of knowing which are representative of how the Bible addresses such matters, perhaps they can apply to a state we had before coming to birth. One thing is for certain. *Yadah* and *progignosko* don't imply that we existed out there for all eternity as some amorphous individuals in a heavenly laboratory and at birth leave it to assume a human body. That's a trick with a number of variations into which we can fall easily. There's no bullet-proof way to validate that we existed prior to our birth which precedes our existence in the here-and-now and as we know will be in the grave. It has nothing to do with reincarnation, a popular temptation to which we can succumb. The place to begin is with this notion of biblical-based knowledge, of deciphering what it's about. A handicap is that the Bible, let alone Christianity never speaks in terms of consciousness or awareness. Words for it simply don't exist. If they did, it just might be easier to discuss such matters, for they would bring a lot to the table. Nevertheless, it's a

restriction but not necessarily a hindrance. A lot can be said about this but here isn't the place.

What was just outlined has a certain circular character about it. We start out with awareness pure and simple as represented by *yadah* and *progignosko*, and that falls back on being which is the object of our knowing. Actually always we've had an indelible impression that this awareness, exists as independent from coming into physical birth. As for the being involved, it isn't separate from awareness conventionally speaking but part and parcel of it. Sounds abstract but in practice it's a different story. In fact, we couldn't even say "in practice" because we have it already...are it. Hence, no practice. The problem is its immediacy which is hard to comprehend. Almost always we posit a distance, however tiny, between ourselves and what we perceive. One way of circumventing this is to allow our innate awareness to hang out there without interjecting personal ideas and the like. We step back and see what happens all on its own.

"Allow" is the key word which first of all means not to propose any thought which acts as a blocking technique. This has to be done quickly...in a nanosecond...or else we lose the opportunity. Even if it is lost (and most likely will be), there's no reason to be discouraged but to retain faith in the constancy of awareness. That means never do we depart it nor is it possible to do so. Often it takes a bunch of mini-crises to bring this home, otherwise never would we grasp it. After all, we-are-it, take it or leave it. And so allowing this to sink in turns out to be the most delightful project we can undertake.

Perhaps "gesture" is a better way to describe the way we access this awareness because it implies that we are taking the initiative of becoming aware of being acted upon. On the other hand, such words as "project" or "exercise" involve some type of exertion. These terms naturally enter our minds because we've been conditioned to take the initiative. On the other hand, a gesture expresses an idea manifested through a movement or position of, for example, a hand or even facial expression. Thus it involves what's inside as well as what's outside, awareness and being acting together, if you will.

The next step? The constancy of awareness associated with a gesture doesn't exist in a vacuum. It takes delight in expressing itself through being-ness, wanting to be adorned with it as with some kind of decoration. Putting it somewhat loosely, we run across this when awareness bumps up some kind of object as it's bound to do. Then—and this takes only a nanosecond—awareness identifies with all things through contact with the particular. That is to say, the first or universal perception is reality as a whole—all the stuff that's out there—not so much a particular object. After that or after another nanosecond, this universal perception moves into individual things all on its own, not of our own accord. It's quite miraculous, really, and easy to see how people can misconstrue



this shift out of a desire to make miracles happen. It's no wonder that people latch on to this insight as the ultimate goal whereas it's simply a sideshow.

As for allowing awareness to come to the fore, we need to learn how to stand back and be passive which is integral to making that gesture noted above. Any interference with this process leads automatically to a dead end. The gesture abhors any attempt at technique. Thus a prerequisite is learning to cultivate a lowly...humble...spirit in order to access this awareness which is our very heart and soul. All in all this is paradoxical. In effect we're learning how to access what already we are.

Being humble isn't a debasement but a preparation for cultivating gratitude. By working hand-in-hand the two give shape to that spontaneous gesture which alone has the ability of giving form to the formless. Like nothing else, it can overcome the difficulty of maintaining this gesture throughout a given day. Although it'd be burdensome to include here, reference to the twelve steps of humility in the **Rule of St. Benedict** are recommended. Instead of prayer or spiritual practice commonly understood, we have an outline of how a monk is to comport himself day and night. This focus upon his unworthiness seems out of place nowadays, but reading the steps (preferably in the original Latin) reveals deeper levels and truths. So if a person complains about the well-known dryness or abandonment in prayer, no problem. We need not worry about getting out of it because we're in that awareness already, so might as well forget about it. This is tougher than merely said but works.

With regard to gratitude through the cultivation of humility, it comes from time to time...isn't continuous...and leaves a definite mark on our faculty of memory. As noted above, this faculty is better identified as *anamnesis* and has broader significance than the remembrance of things. It's more a calling to mind not a past existence but the source from which we've come and for that matter, never have left. This ties in nicely with awareness and being as discussed here. If this is so and if everyone "has it," what's the best way to dispose oneself for it? Be on the lookout for occasions of gratitude. Stop everything and soak it up. Indeed, one may stop, but the problem consists in not allowing oneself to enjoy the soaking up part. This seems to be the chief obstacle in our inability to access our *anamnesis*. Interestingly there are no thoughts about gratitude. The presence of gratitude subsumes all thoughts, so there's no need for them.

As for perceiving gratitude, you don't do it mentally. That's putting it a bit awkwardly because we tend to pile on to gratitude thoughts about it whereas it doesn't work that way. Perceiving gratitude is done all at once, at a single glance, this being the gesture noted already. While making the gesture essentially is effortless, it takes a lot out of you because it's so different from our normal mode of perceiving things which is governed by thoughts. Don't forget. Thoughts, while obviously necessary, are held in a kind of abeyance; not fully

but just enough so we're able to function should something come up and demand our attention.

Now the source of gratitude grounded in our faculty of *anamnesis* sits there un-manifested but very much real which makes us have the appearance of being more or less dumb. Such is our state even when engaged in the familiar world of thoughts. However, a change has occurred. Thoughts do continue to arise but their intensity has been reduced considerably. So when we're either talking, engaged in activity, we have to accept this strange but welcomed diminishment. How long does this go on? No time limit, really, but generally a few minutes. The problem nowadays is that the pervasive presence of technology makes these interludes longer and more difficult to recover. Will this get worse? Most likely yes as the complexity of society increases. It may or may not signal that some kind of reboot is on the horizon, so read *Vico* to prepare yourself.

It's important to have faith that even if gratitude may not be in the forefront of our awareness, it's operative, say on the unconscious level. A monkey wrench is thrown into this enterprise when we attempt to impose thoughts upon gratitude, to funnel them this way or that. It's easy to tell this don't work because the thoughts we're having about it are tiresome whereas true gratitude is far from such a state. And so the discernment process is quite straight forward. The long term upside of gratitude is that we're less immune to dark thoughts as well as the general useless ones that bug everyone. This sentiment sets us automatically in a moral way of behaving and keeps us there as long as we cultivate it. We can tell this is working because when we're alone our thoughts don't condemn us. Should someone walk in on the spur of the moment and gaze upon our thoughts, we would be indifferent. Please be welcomed and take a seat. We've hit a state beyond worrying about being moral vs. being immoral. Failure to do this is exemplified by the man and the woman who "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden" [Gn 3.8].

This essay would be remiss without a look at one of the most familiar biblical references to form and God, *Philippians 2.5-8*: "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." So let's break it down and see the results, this outline obviously subject to modification or the like.

St. Paul's command is *phroneo*, to have understanding, to have a certain mind or attitude towards someone or something. It's more comprehensive than saying something like "understand this." *Touto* is the object of *phroneo* and in the case at hand, has two

particular locations indicated by the preposition *en* (in): “you” (plural) followed by *en* Christ Jesus.

Next we come to the form or *morphe*, also as shape and appearance. Christ Jesus is *en* this *morphe* which belongs to God (*Theos*), the third occurrence of this preposition. The RSV translates *huparcho* as the verb to be but implies far more. Literally it means to make a beginning-from-under (*hupo-*), *archo* from which the noun *arche* derives and is suggestive of being the first principle of something. So Christ, as it were, begins-under with regard to the *morphe* of God almost as its foundation. It’s as though at all times he was beginning (from under or from the source) to grasp this *morphe* which belongs to God, and that means he was of the same essence as God.

This helps us grasp better the very crux of the matter as it pertains to this essay, *morphe* and God. At face value, what could be more opposite? How can you attribute a form to that which is formless? This is where we have to retrace our steps a bit, where our *phroneo* is put to the test, allowing us to approach an apparent conundrum. As for *phroneo*, it isn’t posited directly either to *morphe* or to *Theos* but primarily *touto* “in you” followed by “that which” (*ho* again) is in Christ Jesus...that is to say, the two examples of *en* (in). So the first step toward Paul’s *phroneo* is this “*en* you” followed by the conjunctive *kai* (usually as and) and then “*en* Christ Jesus.” There’s no wiggle room here from one *en* to another *en* with the priority first to us and then to Christ.

Because Christ is *en* the *morphe* of God, it follows that there’s no need to consider it as *harpagmos* or something akin to booty and thus desirable by reason of it having belonged to someone else. You can’t desire what you are already or have been for all eternity. It’s a contradiction. *Hegeomai* is the verb which means also to go before, to lead the way and here translates as “count” in the sense of to estimate. Such estimation puts *harpagmos* as being *isos* or on the same level as God. And so there came a point when Christ estimated that there was no personal need for this, that already he was *isos* with God. That occasion—and it shouldn’t be considered necessarily as a temptation—was when he emptied himself, *kenoo* or to make empty by leaving something behind. Simultaneous with this *kenoo* is *lambano*, to take or to receive the *morphe* of a slave, this the second use of the term, one diametrically opposite the *morphe* of God. So we could say there’s a time lapse between *kenoo* and *lambano* as Christ went from the former into the latter, this being known only to the Father.

This verse closes with Christ being *en* the likeness of men, *homoioma* also as image but leaning more to the former. *Homoioma* doesn’t mean that he and humanity share the same essence; rather, Christ as *morphe Theou* is *en* humanity where *homoioma* serves to hide his divinity. If it weren’t for this hiding, humanity wouldn’t exist. It’d simply be blotted out by the presence of the divine since the two can’t co-exist apart from such *homoioma*. In

other words, this gets back to the initial conundrum, *morphe* as pertaining to God and Christ as a human being cannot be conceived if it weren't for his *kenoo* followed by his *lambano*.

The *homoiomati* just discussed goes one step further. It's unfathomable enough that Christ was *en homoiomati anthropon*, in the likeness of men. We have the added fact that he is in the *schema* of a man (*anthropos* being singular), this noun having a number of meanings such as form, shape, figure and refers here more to an outward appearance. Linked with this *schema* is the verb *heurisko*, "was found." It doesn't mean that someone was out for a walk and one day hit upon Christ-as-man. Rather, *heurisko* is used in the passive sense to show how Christ comported himself as man. That is to say, he emptied himself, *tapeinoo* being the stage following *kenoo* as the next step after assuming the *morphe* of a slave. Finally this *kenoo* → *tapeinoo* reaches its furthest point from *morphe Theou* being *hupekoos* or as it reads literally, giving ear unto death.

An outline of all this may be helpful in light of the preposition *en* or in of which there are five. Being aware of it is part and parcel of grasping this text:

- en humin*: in you
- en Christo Iesou*: in Christ Jesus
- en morphe Theou*: in the form of God
- en homoiomati anthropon*: in the likeness of men
- en schemati anthropos*:<sup>8</sup> in the form as man

When you pick it apart, the Philippians text ends up as a fine, rather complex summary of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, second Person of the Blessed Trinity. But does this have any bearing on how we fit in? That's the second million dollar question. We have to allow St. Paul's *phroneo* to echo not just in our ears but in our hearts. *Phroneo* acts as a break with what he's about to say and everything else. Then he has *touto* or "this." *Touto* is fleshed out accordingly but situated first "*en you*" which is equivalent to "*en Christ Jesus*." Note the sequence: first you followed by Jesus. We could take this as our *phroneo* to be realized *en* ourselves. Once we do it, there flows naturally enough that *en* to the *en* of Jesus.

So once we orient ourselves with regard to the simplicity of the preposition *en*, it's easier to see what the *touto* contains as spelled out. It's as though we had *touto* in our company, going all the way before we had been born. Once so realized, we discover there's no place to go nor anything to do. How can it be otherwise once we're *en*, the double sense of the preposition being presupposed?

---

<sup>8</sup>The preposition *en* isn't found here, the dative case being used. However, this phrase suffices to be qualified as among the "*en* list."

As for the verb *huparcho*, it's a natural follow-through to the *en* just discussed. That is to say, we share in Christ's beginning-from-under. It means going nowhere, let alone coming from somewhere to another place. Existing-under as such simply doesn't involve such movement. It's already where it's supposed to be ('Wherever you go, there you are'). From here we discover that there's no need for *harpagmos* or for something to be grasped. Grasping belongs solely to someone who's lacking something. i.e., *harpagmos* is another way of saying yes, by reason of that *touto* being *en* us as well as *en* Christ, it's plainly absurd to entertain such an idea.

The exact opposite of the possessive *harpagmos* as it pertains to being *isos* or on the same plane of God is *kenoo*. *Kenoo* doesn't have to be taken negatively as in the sense of self-denial. It's that but much, much more. *Kenoo* is a process held out to us at all times which is gone after eagerly because it has everything else as just delineated. I.e., *kenoo* is secondary, a joyful getting rid of what we don't need or better, getting rid of what we might try to substitute for what we are already.

Finally we end up with *lambano* being exchanged for *kenoo*, a receiving for our emptying. *Doulos* or slave is a way of saying we're at the far-end of what it means to be human, more an object to be treated any which-way by the person who owns us. It's a newly found freedom, a willingness to share in being born (*gignomai*) not so much as a man (*anthropos*) but in the *homoioima* of one...not unlike this as being a disguise. That's why the passive *heurisko* is used with regard to *anthropos*. We're found as such but are not as such, a big difference which remains invisible and is not out there for all to behold.

All in all we start out as regular human beings and end up as regular human beings. Between them, however, a huge transformation has taken place. We realize that in a sense we haven't been born, have existed always, and are destined to do so after physical death. Linking all three or to see them as one is what this imperfect article is about. Between physical birth and an equally physical death we realize that something other than our usual selves exists, plain and simple. Now the question posed in this article's title **Form of God?** has been answered. It's all simple stuff but in another way involved in a manner we're not accustomed to follow.

+