

## From After to With

The title is unusual in that it's comprised of four prepositions. While "to" is a preposition, it isn't a main actor. Nevertheless, it plays an important transitional role, of shifting attention from both "from" and "after" over to "with." Obviously this begs for clarification, but I'll hold off for now. Some other stuff has to be presented before we get into that.

If I could pinpoint a source of inspiration which kicked off this article, I attribute it in part to a conversation I had during a recent visit with my nephrologist. He's a young, recently married fellow who of all things, enjoys reading Ovid and Virgil. Nice, but what puts him over the top is that he reads both authors in the original Latin. Talk about a rare bird. I asked him a very general question about the state of today's society. Instead of coming off with something predictable, he said we're in a state of disarray because of a lack of *otium*. Again, I was taken aback. A generation ago a lot of people would grasp his response. But today? You'd be hard pressed to find someone making such an observation, oblique at first but upon closer consideration, right to the point. In brief, *otium* means leisure put at the service of helping to better society. This help isn't applied directly, to be sure, but is intended to work in the background chiefly by a careful study of a culture's key texts. Yes, Ovid and Virgil are prime candidates.

Although *otium* is most often done on an individual basis no conflict exists between this and the larger society. To be sure, its impact is on a level we barely comprehend, virus-like. And that's how it should be, minus any personal interference. As the good doctor told me from personal experience, despite his busy life and a new-born added to two other children (adopted, nonetheless), come hell or high water he sets aside one hour of *otium* in the evening to read Ovid and or Virgil in Latin. That's the Real Stuff. Towards the end of my visit, we had a good laugh, envisioning ourselves walking down the hall while striking up a conversation about the need for *otium*. Needless to say, people would give us a blank, zombie-like stare.

I venture to say that *otium* prefers a story-like format. If that were updated, automatically it would appeal to a wider audience and capture their attention at once. Perhaps that task is for someone down the line like the nephrologist. The problem is that such people are too caught up in their professional lives. Even though they engage in what objectively is a minuscule amount of *otium*, the impact is substantial. When presented in terms of a myth, it's even more appealing. In fact, such is the tone of this article, especially applicable towards the end which deals with the image of God comprised of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That fundamental tenet of Christian faith is a story...a myth in the best sense of the word...rooted in a people's past and designed to

explain their origins. The same can apply to dealing with natural phenomena.

This approach has nothing to do with make-believe but can be misjudged as such. Rather, to speak in mythic terms means dealing with a subject indirectly, not head-on. It's helpful as a first step in narrowing down what we want to deal with. The elements at hand aren't before us directly but are slightly off to the side though not terribly far off. We see that they have the potential to form an association which makes us want to lasso them in, if you will. Once so lassoed, they form a protective barrier within which we can enjoy our *otium* in a more relaxed manner, having freed us up from threats coming from the outside. That in and by itself is nice image which has significant appeal.

Such is the case at hand. I had a general idea where to bring the article as soon as I had formulated the title **From After to With**. Actually I haven't the slightest idea of where this came from but once it popped out, why not run with it? What I can say for certainty is that the prepositions comprising the title had been out there as individual "things" but somehow needed to be connected. I wasn't the agent responsible, merely the observer. However, being an observer has a way of shepherding things alone. The next step was needing to lay out the prepositions as a blueprint representing something larger than themselves. Obviously it starts with "from." Once that became established it was easy to move to "after" and play around with what that might mean. "After" can be viewed in either one or two ways, backwards to "from" and forward to "with." Thus it enjoys a kind of middle ground.

So let's begin by considering the following three elements. First comes a consideration of the unfathomably vast stretch of time. This is where God had spent most of his energy, busy...very much so...creating things like a mad scientist. He broke all records by having come up with the weirdest things imaginable. I thought of this when viewing an online reconstruction of a therizinosaurus, one among many examples. Then we fast-forward eons head to the second part, so incredibly different. This is where God deals with Israel, yes, the same God who had been running rampant for the previous millions of years. Stage two is presented in three essential sub-divisions where a less than desirable picture of God emerges. That, of course, needs explaining. Finally in part three we have the appearance of John the Baptist who preaches a change of heart represented by the well-know Greek word *metanoia*, literally placing the mind after. Tied in with this part we at last come upon Christ's Ascension and descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. I see both as pretty much working as one and serving to bring all this full circle. After all, what I had just outlined is found in the Bible.

**Step one: divine dimwittedness**

This first step represents the first word of the article's title, that is, "from" which we can take as the source from which everything flows. Included are the just concluded remarks about the mind-numbing magnitude of time and endless amount of created beings (of course, therizinosaurus). Very often we puzzle over how something so overwhelming ties in with the Judaeo-Christian perception of God. At the same time most of us have an inbuilt sense of the transcendent which can be distorted this way or that but never eliminated. In other words, it's part and parcel of our existence. Thus we're perpetually caught in between two extremes. Unfortunately we haven't developed properly spiritual insights to keep us up to speed in this regard as we've done with virtually all other endeavors. We've allowed this to hang out there and wither away instead of cultivating it. Among other things, perhaps that's why we can get flustered when confronted with atheistic arguments about the existence of God. However, it seems things along that line are starting to work out in a favorable manner minus all the rancor. A lot of the trouble rests on outdated images of God which are now being recognized as such.

Let's say for example that we accept the existence of a transcendent reality. When we do surrender to it there's a clear sense of peace, of knowing somehow that we're home. The nice part is that this can be experienced right now, not just talked about. From this vantage point we get a clearer perspective on the eons of time and all the stuff associated with it. In other words, what had previously threatened us now automatically falls into its proper place. Although our insight into this is growing continuously, our perception remains only partial. Never can we claim it in its fullness. However, that isn't quite accurate. When it comes to transcendence, there are no parts. We may speak of it as such or in other similar ways but transcendence-is-transcendence-is-transcendence. The dibs and drabs we perceive today won't be the same as tomorrow. To be sure, never do we grieve for a lack insight.

Now let's shift this over to the Hebrew scriptures which like most religious documents are concerned with how humans cope with God and one another. Apart from subscribing to traditional elements of a particular faith, sometimes it turns out that apparent infinitude of creation along with the violence in it is a kind of disguise on the part of God. Because he's bigger than that stuff, he likes to parade it before humans. Furthermore, he delights in extremes. In a word, we're being tricked by the grandeur of it all. Our being enthralled keeps us in our place as far as God is concerned. He has us right where he wants us which is why he spends (wastes?) so much time on creation as recounted by Genesis' opening chapter.

If this is so, what on earth is the nature of the one playing us along? Deceitful?

Malicious? At first that comes to mind but turns out to be false. Perhaps...just perhaps...God may be fearful which, in turn, prompts him to act jealously. This lays behind the perfect disguise of his almighty-ness where he has hidden throughout those countless eons. Now when a puny human being comes along, he lifts the veil on this slightly. Job was the first person to have done it, but more with regard to his unique gift will come later.

Yes, generations have called God the Almighty and other related titles which simply flattered him. While he of course remains as such, being discovered as using that as a ruse for such a long time is, to be sure, a rude awakening. Indeed, both we and the Lord are somewhat startled by this discovery and look at each other as if for the first time ever. This, if you will, is the first breach in the chink of the divine armor. As for the Lord's reaction, it comes early on or when the Lord spoke rhetorically to himself with regard to the man right after the so-called fall. "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" [Gn 3.22]. Two alpha males...God and a human...can't occupy the same place, so one must go and does go unceremoniously as with the first man banished from the garden.

We have to let these observations sink in because we'd be hard pressed to find accurate information elsewhere. However, as things turn out, it isn't that far off base. Consider, for example, the role a fool had played in various circumstances. He was simultaneously both inside and outside the society in which he resided. For now I'll leave that aside because it deserves treatment in and by itself. So what do we garner provided we stick with our original insight? Yes, we are finite. No contest there. However...and this is a momentous however...we have an inbuilt sense of something greater than ourselves yet not alien to us. We can't verify that it exists in the conventional way or proving things but not unlike having discovered something or someone behind the scenes pulling strings like the Wizard of Oz.

Discovering this part of God which he had managed to keep under wraps so long is a veritable eureka moment. It'd not intended to embarrass God provided we keep one condition, that we remain respectful. After all, the "agent" we discovered hiding being omnipotence remains all-powerful, all-mighty and what ever else we wish to attach to this "all." Indeed, such awe-inspiring adjectives are put out there as a ruse. They're not meant to deceive outrightly but sort of. By "sort of" I mean they're used to keep us from discovering a divine weakness hiding behind divine omnipotence. If in in the course of our lives we never discover anything other than this, we've hit the jackpot Big Time. After all, it's what lies behind the first preposition of the title, "from."

What, then, is God up to as he hides behind his almighty-ness? Indeed, we hear that god doesn't reveal himself directly because it would be too much for us humans to behold. That's one of his all time favorite ploys, as old as the hills. However, over the centuries it has worn thin. It's difficult to say why with any precision. Surely the revelation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit have something to do with it. More on that later. It seems if a person is hesitant about revealing himself, he hides chiefly out of shyness. We could also refine this evasiveness by the possibility that God is handicapped. We don't know precisely why, but chances are he has become puffed up about his almighty-ness. For proof, open any book in the Hebrew scriptures. There are pages upon pages of God describing how he throws it around heedless of anyone standing in the way. That's what happens when you're the only Big Gun in town. However, this is a sign that he's crying out to be recognized yet finds no one to do so.

Now this has the potential of getting more embarrassing. Most of us accept a handicapped person without batting an eye. If we have a problem, it's with us. So when it comes to God, we might be taken aback momentarily at having caught him in a vulnerable moment. However, we're quick to add it's okay. It's God being God. Now we're getting even closer to this mystery. God hides behind his almighty-ness to cover up the fact that he's something of a toddler. A big toddler indeed but nevertheless a toddler. If we look at this more closely, it has no problem jibing with his almighty-ness. He's a four year old who hasn't grown up from all eternity. When we bring eternity into the picture, we're getting into scary territory. That is to say, we're talking about his native land, the place where he lives and knows no other location. No wonder that he's prone to act imperiously and demands absolute loyalty (or else).

Where do we get this information which, well...is so private? It seems we've come across some potentially scandalous tidbits about God but surprise, surprise. It turns out to be well documented in the Hebrew scriptures. First he starts out in grand style creating this and then that, all within the span of six days. Let's take those days in the literal sense because it fits in the mythic approach of this document. Being God, he can do create the whole universe easily, even in a less amount of time if he so desired. Then on the sixth day he creates man followed by woman, that is, by taking a part of the man and fashioning her from it. This is very nice and tender, far more concern than all the other beings which he simply willed into existence. But don't forget. God is fickle, and in a flash he can change his mind.

So soon...so very soon...things go awry, the so called "fall." Although here is not the place to delve into the reason why, it's worth pointing out a few facts more or less recapping an earlier article where the first man and first woman hide and are discovered

by God. He's pissed off at them along with the serpent, lines them up and unloads on them. It's one thing to be angry, point out the reason why and dish out a punishment. But one that will last for generations to come? By any standards that's over the top. What hardens the situation and makes it irreparable is The Lecture. Here's where the Lord is just as guilty if not more so than the man and the woman. When all three are standing before him...the serpent, by the way, is standing after which he crawls away unceremoniously on his belly...the Lord delights in basically cursing them to the hilt. The curse is one thing; that can be repaired. The Lecture? No, because being lectured at is what we as adults despise the most. It leaves a lasting unpleasant taste in our mouths which can't be washed away.

So off go the serpent man and woman from the garden. We all know what happens next, the first murder, Cain and Abel. A series of genealogies followed by the flood which comes upon us surprisingly fast. And the flood, of course, means God starts all over from the beginning. He's just as dimwitted as he was with at the beginning of Genesis only this time without realizing it he reveals something else about his character. God is impulsive which is why this time he doesn't have to bother with days of creation. He leaves that up to Noah who gathers animals into the ark. See how quickly he delegates, leaving it up to someone who's more competent. After the earth gets back to normal which it does in surprisingly quick fashion, we have what many consider the real beginning of Genesis. Enter Abram whose name later changes to Abraham. He gives birth to three important patriarchs who become the foundation stones of the twelve tribes of Israel.

All sorts of interactions take place between the Lord and the patriarchs culminating in a way with Joseph and how the Israelites ended up in Egypt for four hundred years. Actually they always had a tentative foot in Canaan which had to be re-established. Now Moses comes on the scene, clearly second in importance to Abraham. He leads the people from Egypt in dramatic fashion followed by what on the surface are forty trying years but in essence is a budding romance between the Lord and his people. As with any such romance when two are starting to know each other, there are a whole series of ups and downs.

The Sinai wilderness experience reveals a sore spot as far as the Lord is concerned, one of the most painful in his dealing with humans. It's the golden calf. This is the first time the Israelites actually took action to make a substitute god in the absence of Moses. They lamely claimed that Moses had, and now they were with a shepherd as well as the Lord. While it seemed long, quickly it turned out to be to be an advantage. The people know right up front how dependent they were upon the intercession of some divine

power. If they don't have it, they'll be quick to manufacture it. You could almost hear them expressing pent-up tension that at last, they can fashion a god sympathetic to them. Unfortunately all along the Lord had been blind to it, and I mean Big Time. Don't forget. The Israelites weren't in a nice place but smack in the middle of a hostile desert. Again, the Lord could care less. He's addicted to being worshiped, and shows it here for the first time in all its primeval rawness. Like the first man and woman upon being lectured at, the Israelites never forgot nor forgave the Lord. Ditto for the Lord.

With regard to this incident which sticks out more compared with others thus far, the people have reached a turning point, and the Lord has taken notice. Today he had a monopoly on meting out rewards and punishment, and all the people could do was accept what came down the line. Up to this point they were confined within the parameters of The Lecture the Lord had given prior to the banishment of the first man and first woman. That primed them, cleverly planned by the Lord, to always be receptive to what he dishes out. And what he dished out from that time until now, at the base of Mount Horeb, was fully in accord with how he had behaved since day one. The people's response naturally enough was to blame themselves. What wrong could the Lord do? Just look at the countless things he had done even though here and there he may have dealt severely with us. Their only salvation was that The Lecture reminded them they were dealing with a divine bully. It would take considerable time for the people to realize this realization would become an ace up their sleeve.

The golden calf incident was when the Lord went way overboard and knew it. Worse, he knew the people knew. Instead of this acting as a restraint, he went at it with every bit of energy he could muster. He was completely blind...and tragically so...to his inherent dimwittedness and impulsiveness (see Noah above) which prevented him from seeing that the people were in need for attention. That's all, nothing complicated. They found it, albeit temporarily, in the golden calf. However...and this is a super-important however...the people woke up to the fact that they didn't have to give allegiance to a divine tyrant no matter how many times he dealt graciously with them. Instead of them beating their breasts, they simply dropped that. By reason of being mortal and therefore weak, the people remained tied to the Lord but now with a newly developed independence of him. This will reach culmination when they want a king which again sent the Lord into a tizzy. We may feel tempted to pity him, but after all, he is the Lord and above it. Supposedly.

Once Joshua deposits the people in Canaan, things go south yet again. This time the Israelites fall prey to local deities which offer a more direct and comforting presence chiefly through female adherents. There's a lot of back and forth here until the second

major incident that riles the Lord just as much as with the golden calf. If he wanted, the Lord could back off because Israel had a number of capable judges ruling them. They were close to the people as well as close to the Lord in a way people like the patriarchs, Joseph in Egypt, Moses and Joshua never were. In fact, such a relationship never entered the minds of these predecessors as noble as they were.

In the meantime the people had a keen eye on their neighbors and nations further afield. They saw that the most if not all were ruled was through a monarchy under which they prospered without a nagging divinity hanging over their heads. Finally they said enough. As one man the people approached Samuel to have a king. To boot, they brought up his blind spot or two sons who by no means model citizens. Even though Samuel was displeased (putting it mildly), he complied and asked the Lord what to do. Now we're at another turning point in Israel's history as it relates to the Lord. The people want a human ruler, not a divine one, which had been in place since, I guess, the Sinai wilderness. The actual quote is quite poignant, almost embarrassing to read: "For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" [1Sam 8.7]. The Hebrew verb *ma'as* intimates real disdain, something more than simply turning down the Lord.

Big problem! The Lord completely overlooks the outrageous behavior of Samuel's two sons which drove the people to make this choice. If the Lord is willing to put up with them while their noted father continues along blind to their behavior, it follows that in essence he's not interested in the welfare of the Israelites. Having been put on the spot, the Lord accedes. He disguises his hurt feelings by...let's say it, pouting...through a whole bunch of boring details as how he had delivered the people from Israel. Then he takes great relish in the details of what's demanded of a human king (hidden intention: far inferior to him in all his glory) until towards the end of Chapter Eight he says like a hurt child, "Hearken to their voice." Throughout it all Samuel was put on the spot just as much as the Lord. After all, what brought this about was the behavior of his two sons while he had done nothing about it. At least everyone gets true insight into the Lord's mind. Like we do when hurt or angered, he's drones on about how pissed off he is.

So this alteration between God getting violently angry one minute and in the next when he's full of love is something to behold. Obviously it doesn't reflect God-in-himself but our perceptions of him. Still, these perceptions are not illusory. They manifest something quite interesting about God. One might ask if this makes sense to people today. At first glance no, but when you ask yet again, they are intrigued because it speaks directly to their hearts. In other words, stories like these are myths from the past. People instinctively know they are true not in the literal sense but true once they have been put



out there and allowed to be part of their collective experience.

As we know, this institution of a king ended in disaster, a kind of I-told-you-so by the Lord. However, he was stuck with the people and immediately raised up David who, despite having committed grave sins, became an archetypal ruler for the rest of Israel's history. From David things level out for the duration. That is to say, awareness of the Lord's immediate presence takes more a back seat though the prophets come on strong when confronted with the misdeeds of various kings. Finally Israel succumbs in large part to Greek ideas and the like until Rome takes over. Throughout it all the Israelites held fast to their religion but not so much to the Lord in and by himself. Gone are the days when he'd shower love followed by curses to the umpteenth generation. Throughout it all, however, the people's abandonment of the Lord wavered by succumbing to local deities here and there. All this says something new is on the horizon, but no one could quite put their finger on it. Indeed, the stage is set for the second step.

### **Step two: from child-shness to *metanoia***

This part of the article deals with the second preposition "after" and ties in nicely with the *meta* of *metanoia* to be discussed shortly, that is, the preposition itself in a more direct fashion. We've come to a point in Israel's history where the people felt restless and find a deep void in their lives, this applicable to Jews and Gentiles alike throughout the Roman Empire and perhaps beyond. To put it in modern idiom, something had to give and give soon. Sticking with Israel, we've seen that not only her history but that of all mankind begins outside the Garden of Eden. As noted, that is marked by the first man and first woman (along with the serpent) having been subject to The Lecture that continues to echo down the centuries. Next we have God dealing with their descendants in a blatant parent-to-child manner, certainly not one which was adult which they craved. At least they started to realize that the Lord was incapable of such a relationship. He needed to grow up. This continued through out Israel's history with two more notable incidents pointed out, the golden calf and the people wanting a king instead of the Lord.

The restlessness pointed out in the last paragraph is what drove crowds into the Judean desert to a wild man who was preaching about a change of heart. The Greek word *metanoia* turned out to be intimately associated with this man known to history as John the Baptist. Later it became one of the most common words associated with Christianity, that is, repentance. One may argue rightly that *metanoia* is central to the teaching of

most prophets. Always they were harping on the need for people to reform their lives. However, much of that took place within the background of the original spirit of being lectured at. Obviously what the prophets said was true but, they were difficult if not impossible to cozy up to. John the Baptist, another one notoriously lacking in cozy-ness, had the same message of *metanoia* but with a different if not unique slant. He backs up *metanoia* with a straight-forward physical act, being baptized in the water. Welcome to a new age or better, to the threshold of a new age.

Another important feature. From what the text says, John was baptizing individual persons, not *en masse*. This shift from people-as-a-whole or the nation of Israel to individuals comprising this nation is a major development. There's nothing abstract about a man or a woman walking into the Jordan River and being submerged. Besides, there were plenty of witnesses around to make sure you stuck to John's message long after you've left. Society was tight-knit, and people kept an eye on you.

A rhetorical question, if you will. As just noted, *metanoia* intimates a substantial change which assumes something had been out of sync and needs to be rectified. Is human nature like this from the get-go, that its very nature requires a profound alteration? Or is it otherwise? The latter implies there's "no need" for *metanoia*. Parentheses are deliberate because simple observation reveals that there's something out of wack with every man, woman and child. But is it? That's what may be called the new Sixty-Four Thousand dollar question. New because the old one has accepted that human nature by itself demands a change. No dispute there. All you have to do is look around. The evidence is staring at you right in the face.

This assessment which is so contrary to the way we've been raised can be contrasted with the basic insight from the East, that is Buddhism, which says right out there as plain as all get-out that we're all made whole and entire. Nothing needs to be added not subtracted. Still, it's an insight as alien as you can get. The mere thought that such a possibility might exist causes an immediate thrill because it has a direct appeal that enlivens us like nothing else. For most people it rings so true that we know we've hit upon something really big. This doesn't happen on a superficial level but in effect is a life-altering one.

While that insight seems more or less confined to the East, perhaps it may dovetail with the notion of *metanoia*. In several earlier articles I had picked apart that word as a placing of our mind after, our *nous* as *meta*. *Nous* is one of those fuzzy words hard to nail down. It also means heart as well as soul including purpose and design. Personally I like the way one lexicon defines it as wit. An online dictionary fleshes this out as mental

sharpness and inventiveness, keen intelligence; a natural aptitude for using words and ideas in a quick and inventive way to create humor. That indeed is a handful, all of which are applicable.

Because *nous* is what we walk around with and have done so since we came from our mother's womb and possibly may continue after physical death, it goes along under its own power quite nicely. Nevertheless, we can and do tend to manipulate it which is unfortunate even when we know it's best to leave something whole and entire alone. But we have to take into consideration this reality which goes against nature. So humanity develops with various levels of *nous* being operative

Finally in the Judaeo-Christian tradition it culminates at a crucial separating point when John the Baptist meets his cousin at the Jordan River. John had been there for some time baptizing and calling for a change of heart. His opening words are "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" [Mt 3.2]. The verb is *metanoeo*, the root of *metanoia*. It's bound up with the kingdom of heaven which traditionally is located up there in the sky or on the other side of the blue dome. While it's always there and always the same, for the first time we have someone proclaiming it is near, *eggizo*. Yes, this kingdom known as *ouranos* just above the visible sky. Always it had been around, the sun, moon and stars just below it, but now *ouranos* is right here. It's almost as though we were face to face with *ouranos*.

Such are the words famously associated with John the Baptist. Now Jesus Christ appears on the scene and is baptized. Next he heads off into the wilderness and is tempted by the devil. That will be treated a bit later, but right now it's important to focus upon *metanoia*. Next Jesus begins his public ministry with the exact same words as his cousin, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" [Mt 4.17]. So what's the difference between the two? John did it with an inkling that someone would come on the scene and make this real. Jesus, of course, was his cousin. Though we have no record of the two interacting as they grew up...perhaps living some distance apart...the connection between them is unique among all human beings. The well-known source is John leaping in the womb of his mother Elizabeth, *skirtao* or bounding associated with a lamb (cf. Lk 1.41). With this in mind, we can say that the similar words by John and Jesus are interchangeable yet distinct. Both have a public quality: John to those being baptized and Jesus choosing his disciples.

The three synoptic Gospels have Jesus headed immediately for the wilderness where he's subject to temptation by the devil. With John, there's no devil. After his baptism by John, Jesus chooses his disciples. One way of looking at this difference? The three

belonged hook, line and sinker to the current religion and naturally saw Jesus through that lens. Wonderful indeed, each in his own way. At the same time their synoptic-ness prevented them from looking outside the box. I'm not fond of the analogy but using it anyway perhaps by default. They along with Jesus saw something new but still were inside the box of current Judaism. On the other hand, John is outside the box which is why his Gospel is so different. Obviously much could be said about this but here is not the place.

As far as the devil goes, he puts scant appearance in the Hebrew scriptures: Satan once in First Chronicles, three times in Zechariah and interestingly, a whole slew of references in Job. That means Job had an insight into the nature of God that is found nowhere else and paves the way for the advent of Jesus Christ. Why so, or why is the devil and/or Satan basically absent until Jesus comes on the scene? Also he continues to play a role in the epistles. A good question, really.

Anyway, it seems the original impetuous and even childish side of God characteristic of the first step reaches its culmination along with the appearance of Jesus Christ. It's as though he made it manifest. This is good because at last it's out there for all to see as a contest between the two. Who will win out? That's the drama of Jesus being in the wilderness immediately after his baptism by John. Although there's no record, you could say that he looks back at his predecessor Job who in a way is just as important if not more so than the famous suffering servant of Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet but Job was in a way closer to Jesus by reason of contending with Satan. This of course is worth deeper examination but to do so here would be going beyond the bounds of this essay.

### **Step 3: descent of the Holy Spirit...with an important prelude**

"With" as the final preposition in the title characterizes this third and final step. As far as the insertion of the so-called prelude, soon we'll see how that ties in with Pentecost. This, of course, is a major event because it introduces the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma*. Jesus, of course, had spoken often of this Spirit but now it has come into its own. An interesting sideline: no one is really sure how to call the Spirit...a he, she or it. Instead of being perplexing, it's really wonderfully confusing and mirrors what Jesus had said, namely, that we don't know where the Spirit comes from or to where the Spirit is going. In other words, the Spirit is something completely untamed but unleashed under the auspices of both Father and Son. That's why it's called *Pneuma* or wind.

Although Jesus makes reference to the *Pneuma* throughout his ministry, neither his

disciples who were closest to him nor others such as Martha, Mary and Lazarus have any idea what he means. The most we can garner is that the *Pneuma* represents some vague presence of God with his people but nothing more. On the other hand, Jesus is earnest about it. He goes on with his ministry, speaks at some length of the *Pneuma* at the Last Supper when his disciples were at last most attentive to him and then moves on to his death and subsequent resurrection. This time something did click with the disciples. Though they continued in their overall ignorance during the Passover, they were primed...and Jesus arranged it so...not to understand his speaking of the *Pneuma* at the time but to recall his words about it. Accessing their memories turned out to be more important, for then they were enabled to pass on the Gospel as we see in Acts of the Apostles.

Jesus in his resurrected body told all twelve disciples to gather and wait for the descent of this Holy Spirit he had mentioned so many times. They knew it had something to do with his words just a few days ago at the Last Supper and were as prepared as they ever could be for what will happen. Then the *Pneuma* descended and rested up the disciples. Then and there they knew that they had to deal with a divine entity other than Jesus but somehow related to him. This time the *Pneuma*-as-wind was unlike Jesus. The same applied to the Father who was up there somewhere telling Jesus what to do, etc. A bit later things began to make sense. Jesus had ascended to the Father. That means behind the scenes he really lambasted the Father as to how he had behaved so childishly and dimwittedly for countless centuries.

Actually this dialogue has two parts. The first is when Jesus was in a resurrected state while interacting with his disciples. We know those instances well. Nevertheless during this time he wasn't continuously with them. He was relating to the Father pretty much as an equal now though in a way that was uncomfortable for the Father. This isn't documented for a deliberate reason. The Father wanted to work off stage, as it were, away from the eyes of the apostles. He had to contend with the Son who now was endowed not just with human nature but a human nature that had been transformed. Indeed, that's something new and unfamiliar with both Son and Father. The Father was forced to pay attention even against his will to what Jesus was trying to communicate about how he had been acting as God. A lot of it wasn't...well...what the Father expected to hear and didn't take it lightly.

It was time for the Father to wake from his primal slumber. You have to credit him for acknowledging it but would not done so except for his Son's intervention. Like anyone else being told to wake up, he resisted but here it's on a super-human scale unimaginable to us mortals. So for fifty days the Father is getting a taste of his own

medicine. This consists in Jesus delivering Lecture Number Two which parallels but differs from the original Lecture to the first man and first man, serpent included. Just think. Jesus as God left the Father and assumed human nature. He was as such for some thirty-three years, infinitely long and painful for the Father. Narrow that down further. Jesus was active for a mere three years. The reason? While this was an incredibly short time, the Father had to submit to Jesus as he picked apart most of what the Father was in the habit of saying and doing since Genesis.

Jesus didn't contradict the Father, the two of course being divine. Like a faithful son, he was simply trying to help his beloved Father wake up. For the almighty Father to be subject to a learning process is unthinkable. While he's getting a dressing-down by Jesus, all his bombast about how great he is and how he can do this or that just by willing it is being called into question by his Son. Still, you have to give him credit. If so desired, he could have destroyed everything all at once. However, he was stuck with his Son by reason of him being divine. To get rid of him would be the equivalent of divine suicide.

A good part of this divine conversation centered around Job. It'd come as no surprise that when Jesus reminded the Father how he allowed Satan to mistreat this innocent man, he cringed. After all, the Father had done the same to his own Son, only worse. In light of this, it'd come as no surprise that Jesus had invited Job to be present at the Transfiguration with the one condition of remaining behind the scene as an observer. Jesus is determined to make sure his Father sets before his mind and then admits how he had cut a deal with Satan. Not only that, he did it publicly, in the presence of the divine assembly. Jesus could summon any or all of them as witness. There he allowed Satan to have full control over Job with the exception of killing him. This may sound as though he has care for Job. Instead, it's a way of prolonging Job's trials, to keep him alive as long as possible to suffer. He unwittingly got into this trap by bringing up Job's name in the first place. Of course, Satan relished the task suddenly before him while the Father realized that on his own initiative he got in cahoots with Satan but in a cowardly sort of way, withdrawing to watch the spectacle unfold before his eyes.

Now we're in a position to really pity the Father despite his almighty-ness. At long last he's being exposed for what he's worth. That is, he desperately needs the Son as both his equal and as having human nature to remind him of Job. If you think this twofold need isn't enough, Jesus reminds the Father of his childish boast to Job at how powerful he is. He cause earthquakes, plays with behemoth. On and on he goes, all very boring as documented towards the end of the Book of Job. Although Job says in conclusion that "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" [42.6], in actuality he does this tongue-in-cheek. He's kowtowing to the Lord not so much in a spiteful way but to imitate the same

subservience shown by the “sons of God” at the beginning of the book. The major difference? It isn’t going to work. Job doesn’t disparage the Lord...no, he can put him to good use...but really wants to shake him off so he can get on with his own business. This turns out to be the cleverest of all ploys. The Lord allies himself against Job’s friends by rebuking them and better, restores Job’s fortunes.

So in the end, Jesus presents Job as a kind of image of how the Father had treated his very Son. Now the Father has no choice but to extend this prosperity to those whom Jesus had chosen by sending the hitherto semi-revealed Holy Spirit. So while Jesus was dressing down the Father, the Spirit was listening in, taking an almost perverse pleasure in the argument. When it came time to leave Father and Son at Pentecost, he (again, she or it?) beat it out of there as quickly as possible. After all, Spirit is *Pneuma* or wind, so he used that to utmost advantage by blowing down from heaven to resting upon the twelve apostles. As the *Pneuma* did this, he looked back up at heaven, wishing well to both Father and Son but secretly glad to have gotten out of there. Now he’s free to experiment by blowing-as-*Pneuma* where he wishes, grateful to be of service to human beings. The problem the *Pneuma* will face a bit later on is that these humans will want to box him in and control him. Imagine trying to capture wind and seal it in a container. Unfortunately that’s what will happen. Nevertheless, because the *Pneuma*’s breath is uncontainable, it will find other places to makes its home. That seems to be what’s happening nowadays.

### **Summary or conclusion**

In one way this article has covered a lot of territory based upon the prepositions in the title. To recap: “from” leads to “after” to “to” and finally to “with.” Originally I was going to exclude the preposition “to” but decided against it. This preposition plays an important conjunctive-like role in connecting the first two which for a unit. That, in turn, leads to the last preposition which is very different from what the first two represent.

“From” gets the ball rolling. It’s a kind or archetype or ur-event which contains everything without which all the rest couldn’t survive. This is the natural realm of the Lord or perhaps better in light of the development of doctrine, God the Father. To him all kinds of adjectives pertinent to absolute reality are attributed. Such talk is very familiar to everyone, even with a cursory acquaintance of the Bible.

Next we have “after,” the immediate result of “from.” It seems obvious from the point of view, of an outline, but in the concrete not so much. Here we find someone like John the

Baptist thoroughly immersed in the religion of his day yet consciously or unconsciously proclaiming something brand new, *metanoia*. As noted, Jesus does the same independently of him employing the exact same words. In sum, both are harping upon this *meta*-ness...after-ness...which is tied up with repentance. Though the two don't say it outrightly and have no intent, we can intimate that part of this *meta* is to leave behind the former way of depicting God and moving on into new, uncharted territory. Only Jesus, not John, is capable of doing this because he is a person both divine and human in equal fashion. Who else, really, can follow suit?

Finally we have "with." However, it's preceded by "to," the semi-conjunctive so to speak. "To" takes the good stuff of "from" and "after" and shifts both onto a wholly new plane. Everyone is flat-out familiar with the world represented by "from." No question with regard to the West's three major religions. Once Jesus has subsumed this "from" into "with" as just noted, he brings both to the Father. The two hash things out, actually with vigorous argumentation, and come to a resolution which may be termed a reconciliation.

This reconciliation leads to something all four prepositions had conspired about, if it can be put as such. Here we're dealing with the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma*. Becoming comprised of wind...invisible and intangible...it can do what it wants, when it wants and go where it wants. Again, we'll stick with the neuter "it" because we're not sure if it may be designated as masculine or feminine. The verb words Son and Father bespeak gender, no problem there. Furthermore, the Son is limited to descending and ascending movement while the Father remains in heaven throughout. He's basically stuck there. No so with the *Pneuma*, free as a bird. So when this *Pneuma* leaves the argumentative Son and Father in heaven as noted earlier, it's a kind of escape. Now *Pneuma* rests on the apostles and takes it from there, free at last to blow where and when it desires.

To finally sum up, then. In many ways this article is an expression of *parresia*. That's a Greek word meaning the freedom to speak one's mind without fear of recrimination. It's origin is in the city state where a citizen could speak his own mind. Socrates is the one noted for it *par excellence*. As for the New Testament, we find it mostly in St John's Gospel and scattered throughout Paul's epistles. If we could sit up nice and close to God and ask him what he wants most from human beings, without missing a beat he'd say *parresia*. Actually he just saw it by our unfeigned approach to him. God has had countless centuries of petitions, prayers and praise, enough to last an eternal life time. All that must have worn him out and in some way influenced his autocratic behavior. To his disappointment occasions of *parresia* are few and far between. Automatically we may think of saints, and rightly so. However dear they were to God, it seems time to



take a step or two beyond them. They have and continue to play a role in society, all for the good, but let's face it, they're passé. Perhaps to step in is the far more ancient role of a philosopher.

Such a candidate in effect goes all the way back to those like Socrates who were philosophers in the original sense of the term, lovers of wisdom. Another way of putting this? *Philos* is an adjective meaning dear to someone, friendly. Thus it's up close and personal. As for *sophia*, obviously wisdom but we could tweak it a bit in order to hone in the original sense of skill which implies a certain shrewdness. Indeed, God's eyes would automatically rush to and then fix upon such a person. He'd be tossed off to the side as far as society goes...that's exactly as it should be...while at the same time being at its very center. Why so? That's a subject for another article, but now it's time to bring the current one to a close. A person who's *philosophos* wouldn't for a moment stomach The Lecture which God delighted in delivering to the world's first captive audience, the first man and first woman along with the serpent prior to their expulsion from the garden. And so one who is *philosophos* is endowed with *parresia*, that freedom of speech which captivates the very heart of God. Not just that, he holds God at bay so as not to be taken in by anything he may try to pull over on us without our knowledge.

+