

Hermeneutics and The Archetypal Image

by
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For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:29).

The goal of our Christian life is to be conformed to the image of the Christ, the Son of God (1 Cor 15:49). The Apostle Paul tells us that the Gospel is foolishness to those who do not believe. Paul further tells us that a veil exists upon our heart, which veil is taken away when we turn to the Lord (2 Cor 3:14-16). Once the veil is taken away, we still persist in the image of the earthly (1 Cor 15:49). But as we persist in gazing on Christ in the scriptures, we are transformed into His image by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

The Gospel of Christ is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4). It is the Gospel that saves us, and it is the Gospel that changes us. The scriptures speak of us putting on Christ (), and putting on the new man (Col 3:10). This “putting on” is in the sense of putting on a garment. We have put on the righteousness of Christ, so that God, looking at us, no longer sees our sin, but sees only the alien righteousness of Christ. But the new man is not a static possession, but is renewed in knowledge after the image of Christ (Col 3:10).

St. John Chryostom is known for his wonderful homilies on the apostle Paul. Isodore of Pelusium’s famously remarked: “If the divine Paul has taken up the Attic tongue to interpret himself, he would not have done it differently than this renowned man has done.” According to Margaret Mitchell, “John interpreting Paul is as good as Paul interpreting himself.” How did St. John Chryostom achieve this remarkable affinity for the apostle Paul? In his own words, “I love all the saints, but especially the blessed Paul.”

This is the fundamental hermeneutical claim of St. John Chryostom, that love is the foundation of hermeneutics. Quoting Mitchell again, “He understands the writings of the apostle so well because he loves him so much. . . .Chryostom roots this hermeneutic claim in an epistemological principle, which is itself grounded in a friendship *topos* [or commonplace]: ‘For what belongs to those who are loved, they who love them know above all others.’ Thus for Chryostom the reader must embrace the sacred author for meaning to be conveyed and apprehended. . . .His hermeneutics of love lead even to a hermeneutics of conformity, as in the interpretive conversation the two were conjoined in an unbreakable bond that was both spiritual and intellectual.”

The hermeneutics of love is more than just having affection for the text, although that is important. It is more than the earnest bending of the will toward the text, although that is necessary. No, this is a passionate love, the love that will keep you gazing into the glass, darkly, long after the rational mind desires to turn to other things. And it is in this deep passion for the Word that we are transformed, becoming more and more like the one we love. And becoming

more and more like the one we love, we begin to understand Him, to think like Him, to speak like Him. The hermeneutics of love is not a technique, but is rather a process. Yet unless you can engage in the hermeneutics of love, no amount of wrestling with the text will help.