

vice versa. What distinguishes also communicates the divine nature which unites. This is the perfect ideal, the difference-in-unity.

### *The Trinity and Marriage*

The closest of all human relationships is marriage. It will be useful here to draw attention to an oft-quoted text the interpretation of which is often inadequate. Christ spoke of married partners as being 'two in one flesh'. It has to be remembered that he said *two* in one flesh, not *one* in one flesh. There are conflicting desires of union and separateness, not only in the romantic and erotic aspects of marriage, but also, and perhaps more acutely, in the everyday domestic life. A mature approach to marriage means that the two remain *two* in one. 'Vive la différence' assumes a more fundamental distinction than that of sex, namely, the distinction of individuals. Married people can only contribute to a marriage when they are themselves. Love must unite without devouring, burn without consuming. You cannot, if one will pardon the expression, eat your wife and have her.

It is not far-fetched to invoke here comparison with the Trinity in order to point out a middle course between selfish individualism and possessiveness. For the ideal of marriage is that the union respect the sacred individuality of the person and at the same time symbolize the union between Christ and the Church, and, ultimately, the union between the individual and God in heaven, where there is no marrying or giving in marriage. Nor need we fear here the danger pointed out by Father Mackay, of turning the Trinity into a 'second Holy Family'. It is precisely because the Persons of the Trinity are united in a closer way than human persons that we can point to them as the ideal of oneness-in-difference.

## **Looking for Transcendence** by Michael Sharkey

One morning, I rose from my bed and walked out to explore the world. There was much that was familiar to me and after a short time I felt the need to break new ground. I set off towards unknown regions, while my gaze left the familiar things and settled on the distant horizon. Far and fast as I walked, I could not reach that horizon, for, as I advanced, it receded, yet my journey seemed far from fruitless; it was full of discovery.

I began to question the existence of the horizon, though, and I met one who had travelled much more than I, and I held him in conversation for a while. He laughed, and said that the horizon is

always there, always receding as man advances. 'Then why advance?' I inquired, seeking a reason for my own behaviour. 'Because there must be an end', he said. 'It is of the very nature of the cosmos that there must be an end to time and to space.' This perplexed me because I could not imagine an end to time and space, but he drew on the ground and waved his hands in the air until his words settled on my understanding. Although I was annoyed to think that I was captive to time and space, I could not help but think that an infinity of time and space would be a bit of a bore.

'But what is there beyond time and space?' I called, as he parted from me. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Not-time and not-space in which all-that-is is cradled.'

I began to think and reflect, and realized that I was existing. So, I began to explore my thoughts, knowing that I was exploring my own existence, and the belief came upon me that perhaps I had now found a world without limit, an existence without end. An intruder burst upon me, invading my thoughts, but I kept my temper and politely asked him to go away. He was reluctant to do so, and I had to explain to him that I was exploring the world of my thinking. 'That won't take *you* long', he laughed. I was annoyed and told him quite bluntly that there was no end to my world. He proudly contradicted me, explaining how there are rules and patterns to thought which, when analysed and drawn to conclusion, indicate that the realm of thought, too, is limited, bounded; but by what? what is there beyond thought? I thought. Besides, unlimited thought would get boring.

My quest for an infinite world turned to the study of those who believe in a subjective-objectivity and an objective-subjectivity, which quickly brought me to realize that there is a limit to the language world. Secretly, I was relieved, because a life of endless words would be a bore. 'Then what is beyond language?' I said, expecting them to say, 'Nothing', so that I could finish the conversation politely and get away from them, but to my astonishment they declared that they did not know, but that they had had 'intimations'. I asked for further explanation and they said that there are certain literary and linguistic skills which stretch language so that it becomes transparent and light shines through and the beyond is intimated.

That night, a fit of depression came upon me and I was overcome with a sense of the futility of life. What is the use, I thought, of moving from one place to another, if there is an end to space; or of rising to thought and conquering one idea after another, if there is a limit to thought; or of speaking, or of listening if the world of language is bounded? At least, even though I could have no certainty in where or how I was to move, I could console myself with the security of the place where I lay, and the point from which my thoughts and words emanated.

I began to browse through the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and discovered that my theory of security was wrong. I had no security beneath me for the very matter of the bed and of the floor was in a state of flux, and, according to the encyclopaedia, on analysis, matter wasn't matter but energy; not hard little balls of stuff, but particular presentations of force. I read on and learned that there is no still point in the universe from which one can view the movement of everything else; that everything, including myself, is moving. A few pages later, I read that a strange man had argued that there is no objective position from which one may judge history, and I realized that no mind, not even mine, was free from bias in any matter at all.

The knowledge that I could not get outside the world, and that I had no secure foundation within it, filled me with despair, for, until that time, I realized that I had been assuming that *I* was the centre of the universe.

Whatever the importance of my insights about the universe, they were as nothing compared with the significance of my realization that I had been living as though I were the centre of the universe, the focus of life; for whereas I might have been wrong about space, thought and language, about my own importance I had been *immoral*.

And if I was not the centre, who or what or where was it?

In the face of all this, I did not know where to turn; I did not know how to unself myself, nor how to find the true centre, nor even the way towards it. I then considered the annihilation of myself altogether as the only alternative; and while I was contemplating oblivion, my eye fixed on the corner of a Sunday newspaper. Unable to sell those few column inches to an advertiser, the editor had filled the space with a poem. Reading it, I discovered that someone else had already tried oblivion:

It was a human face in my oblivion  
 A human being and a human voice  
 That cried to me, Come back, come back, come back.  
 But I would not, I said I would not come back.

It was so sweet in my oblivion  
 There was a sweet mist wrapped me round about  
 And I trod in a sweet and milky sea, knee deep,  
 That was so pretty and so beautiful.

But still the voice cried out, Come back, come back,  
 Come back to me from sweet oblivion!  
 It was a human and related voice  
 That cried to me in pain. So I turned back.

I cannot help but like oblivion better  
Than being a human heart and human creature,  
But I can wait for her, her gentle mist  
And those sweet seas that deepen are my destiny  
And must come even if not soon.

Within myself, despair gave way to sadness. I thought that here at least I could do something, I could help someone. I would make another person the centre of my world, and even if that person were not the absolute centre of the world, I knew in my heart that he would be nearer it than I. It would be less selfish, more moral; but these reasons would be secondary: another is in need, and I can help him. I can move, move towards another, connect in relationship.

My priority was clear. The solution to my intellectual puzzles would have to wait a while, take second place. I must stop treating myself as the centre of the universe; of assuming, without realizing it, that everyone else's thoughts and actions focused on me; of believing that life itself revolved around me. I saw the way I culled the favour of others, the way I manipulated them and made them dependent upon me in a multitude of small but effective ways, the way I presented myself in everyday life as an actor, a person more pretentious than authentic, the way I picked up opinions and purveyed them at parties without regard for honesty, but only for kudos, the way deceit of self and others had led me into the depths of falsification. I knew that above all I had to be true to my moral awareness, I had to follow my conscience wherever it might lead.

In the weeks and months which followed, I began to catch up with my conscience. In *what* I thought, *how* I thought it, and *why* I thought it, in *what* I said, *how* I said it and *why* I said it, in *what* I did, *how* I did it and *why* I did it, I referred everything to a moral examination. And as the tension between what I was and what I ought to be was reduced, I felt liberated, unshackled, set free, made whole; and I decided that at all costs I would never falsify myself again.

I saw a man who needed to be needed, and another who was the same. Together, without words, they made a pact to need each other. The first needed to be protector, befriender, lavish of love. He had never found, nor been allowed to find his own personality; consequently he was scrupulously attached to that of his parents, and their personality became for him a psychological survival kit and although it was second-hand it was better than none.

The first man transferred his unresolved childhood's needs towards the second, and the latter countered with his own. The second person became dependent on the first, because the first was dependent on having someone dependent on him; and together they increased their dependence, intensified their falsification, sold their freedom and sold their birthright. It was a warning to me, a

caution against building on a foundation of deception, a signal of the need for the courage to wait, wait for an opportunity of the real, not to abandon a sense of integrity.

The very next day, I was walking in the park, and in the distance I saw a very strange sight. There was a man behaving oddly, trying to attract attention and friendship by asserting his existence. Unfortunately, his method was self-defeating. He stood on his head, then rocked back and forth on his haunches, jabbered nonsense, grunted, writhed, and waved his arms at those who were in sight. 'I am mad, therefore I exist, I think', he cried. They all passed him by.

It was so sweet in my oblivion, but I reached out and touched him, and he took the security of my hand, and, if the truth were known, I was pretty pleased with myself, I felt good. I knew deep down that I valued this man for what he had enabled me to do for myself; that I was still selfish, only more subtly so. But time went on, and still the man was in my company, and I knew I must be doing him *some* good, for his own sake. My satisfaction dwindled. The relationship no longer had anything to offer me, no rewards, no good feelings; but still the mad man held my hand, got on my nerves, seemed at times to deserve his madness, provoked my anger. But I did not matter any more, so I gave him security.

A long time later, when his mind had healed and he had passed on, I realized that the whole experience had changed me, matured me, humanized me, calmed me.

My values were changing, being made more perfect, more authentically human. It was as though the more I exercised my conscience, the more it purified itself. I was moving towards the centre. I saw that things I had done in the recent past had been for imperfect motives, but it was only in retrospect that I could realize this. Thus it was that my conscientious self cautioned me and insisted that I pursue wisdom.

Whenever I found myself in the company of good men, I felt reduced to my true self, and as the majority of these good men were Christians I considered belief in God. At the back of my mind, though, was the example of the two who had the pact. I thought that it might be possible for me to project an idea of God from my mind, and to pray to that idea to make me a better person, to help me to get up in the mornings, to cope with my thoughts, etc. But it seemed to me that this might be a very practical way of conditioning myself, but would it bring me into contact with the reality of God, or only with the ingenuity of my mind?

It was when I had established my attitude of mind as openly and honestly as possible that the conviction of God began both to emerge in me and to come to me. The whole balance of everything I knew pointed to God, and I believed in him and sought a relationship with him. I knew, too, that he had become incarnate in Jesus Christ. The whole weight of the evidence pointed to this, perhaps because

of the accident of my birth in the Western World; and my conscience told me that my judgment that the Church was authentically the community established and vitalized by Christ was to be believed. God, Christ and the Church, then, I believed.

One day, in conversation, a friend told me that much of modern life and culture is a manifestation of the quest for death and rebirth. We discussed novels about getting away from it all, the desire for a desert island where one could make a fresh start, a yearning for paradise, a cutting away of the old imperfect life, and the quest for peace, as it expressed itself in art, literature, music, religion. I was interested. He then spoke about dreams describing how the same yearning for death and rebirth was manifested in dreams of falling, flying and drowning. Then he revealed that all this indicated a desire to return to the womb, a desire for possession of my mother. I could understand how my first experiences of the womb, of birth and of my mother were somehow reflected in every consequent experience, but to argue that the inner dynamism of my present life was directed back towards my beginning seemed a *non sequitur* to me. By the end of the evening he was trying to persuade me that even changing my clothes, or buying something new, was a manifestation of a secret incest wish.

The following day, I related the conversation to another friend, and he, an ardent politician, argued the very opposite, claiming that all these manifestations were of hopes for the future. He talked about projecting hope in order to fulfil it, but I had my own reservations about projecting one's needs, lest the fulfilment of them be an illusion. Still, the idea of yearning, reaching out, etc., appealed to me, and before long, I came across some studies of primitive religion and saw how there, too, the need for death and rebirth was expressed in their myths and rites. But it seemed to me that their ways were futile. Their ideal of resurrection life seemed to me to be a projection of their fallen minds. It was as though their hope had degenerated into wish-fulfilment.

Secretly, my mind had begun to make some startling connexions. Within this world, bounded by time and space, God had become incarnate. Jesus Christ, then, was and is the centre of the universe. But how could I reach the centre, secure my being to his? Through the process and by the instrument which he had ordained. He had been reborn, resurrected; not wish-fulfilment, the creation of a fantasy, but the realization of hope, an event beginning in space and time, the opening of history into the trans-historical, as real now as it was then, not escapism, but deliverance.

I was baptized the very next day. I knew that I had found the centre, that my being rested on a secure foundation, that all my hopes, wishes, dreams, all my yearning and reaching forth had been accepted by Christ, and anchored in him. My being was grounded, and, having taken root, knew which way to grow.

Among the Christians whom I knew, there were some who seemed to be completely natural, spontaneously good, open, integrated, mature. I was perplexed for an instant when, in describing them to an acquaintance as perfectly natural, I was advised that these qualities were more supernatural than natural; I understood instantly. The more and more truly human a man becomes, the more God-like he is. He lives in this world, transforming it by his goodness, grappling with the hardships, allowing evil to burn itself out on his being rather than add to that evil by a bitter or venomous response.

In the company of such men and such women I felt good. Here was my heaven. I could not bear the thought of parting from them. I wanted to acquire as much of their virtue as I could, but my conscience began to trouble me, demanding that I give up these consoling luxuries and take my place at the front, as it were, to fight against all those things which thwart man, and to face the loneliness and frustration and failure that this might involve. I knew that I had not reached heaven, and could not recline in the comforts of this world as though this were the heaven which God has prepared.

‘ . . . but first the period of human *isolation* will have to come to an end . . . the sort of isolation which exists everywhere now, and especially in our age, but which hasn’t reached its final development. Its end is not yet in sight. For today everyone is striving to keep his individuality as far apart as possible, everyone still wishes to experience the fullness of life in himself alone, and yet instead of achieving the fullness of life, all his efforts merely lead to the fullness of self-destruction, for instead of full self-realization they relapse into complete isolation. For in our age all men are separated into self-contained units, everyone crawls into his own hole, everyone separates himself from his neighbour, hides himself away and hides away everything he possesses, and ends up by keeping himself at a distance from people and keeping other people at a distance from him.’

When does the effort end? I asked myself. At death? But that seemed too easy. I thought again about being contained in this world of time and space, and of thought and language, and about having found the centre, which is Christ. Then I knew that everything of time and space, of thought and language, was being transformed from the centre, and that in the community I was an instrument in this task—I heard the cry of creation, ‘It is not we who made us, seek beyond us’—that when I die, I shall encounter what is beyond and totally independent of this world: the transcendent God; and because I am born in his Son, rooted in the Son’s Being, I shall realize that the transcendence of God is presented to me in the face of the Father, our Father, his Father, my Father. Therefore, pure in heart, I went forth to my work and to my labour, confident

in my hope that beyond the gate of death, perhaps in the apotheosis-like blossoming of time and space, of thought and language, when men's humanity is divine, I shall see God.

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The poem is 'Oblivion' by Stevie Smith; the long quotation about isolation is from Dostoievsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*; and the cry of creation is from St Augustine.