A God in Love

Fr. Alberto Maggi OSM

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1.1). The Bible begins with this solemn sentence. However, John's gospel disagrees and corrects the theological concept of Genesis, by showing the real beginning: *In the beginning, there* [already] *was the Word* (Jn 1.1). John uses the Greek term *Logos* and here it is translated as *Word*, which indicates the power of the creative Word: God says *Let there be light! And it was light* (Gen 1.3). This Word had to orient the work of God, guided by the divine Wisdom which existed prior to creation—*it was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth* (Prov 8.23).

The evangelist does not only dare to correct Scripture, but even the Tradition handed down by the Fathers, according to which 'the world was created in ten words' (Pirkei Avot 5.1). For the evangelist, the world was not created in the ten words of the Decalogue (Ex 34.28), which expresses the Law, but rather in only one Word that reveals the divine will. With claim to the uniqueness of the Word, the evangelist begins his Gospel with a series of substitutions of the pillars of the old covenant with the figure of Jesus and his message: *the Law was indeed given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (Jn 1.17). When you know the Word, all other words lose their power and the ten words of Moses—which were based upon a relationship with God founded in obedience to his Law—become substituted by one new relationship with the Father based upon receiving the warm welcome of his Love. Through Jesus, the Father shows humanity a love that is not born out of human need, but one which precedes it; a love that will be formulated in one commandment: *I give you a better commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also should love one another* (Jn 13.34).

This unique Word surpassed every imaginable human possibility; He contained and formulated the project that God had with humanity before all of creation: *and the Word was God* (Jn 1.1). John says that the project of God consists in elevating humanity to his same level and giving it the divine place. The importance of this project is such that the whole of creation is oriented towards its outcome, everything is created through this Word and *without him not one thing came into being* (Jn 1.3). Creation then is not a rival that humanity must continually struggle against, dominate, and subjugate (Gen 1.28), but a precious ally that collaborates in the process which will bring humanity to its full achievement. For John, the creation story in Genesis (Gen 1-3) is not the description of a paradise lost, but the prophecy of the world that will be, the construction of which humanity is consigned to collaborate (Jn 5.17). There is no regret over an irremediably lost condition, but rather a charge to actively work to achieve the maximum which both humanity and creation is called because *creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... to obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God* (Rom 8.19-21).

Fulfilment of God's project with humanity will be Jesus: *the Word became flesh* (Jn 1.14). Christ's divine condition will not be his exclusive privilege (Phil 2.6), but by welcoming Jesus as the model of authentic existence, everyone will be able to be born of God by the gift

of the Spirit and become his child: *to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God* (Jn 1.12). With this important affirmation, placed by John at the centre of his gospel's Prologue (Jn 1.1-18), the evangelist says that God is not disgusted with humanity, but in love with it: *for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life* (Jn 3.16). The Prologue is the anthem of the love of God for humanity, the song about the optimism with which the Creator looks upon his creation and calls it to collaborate with him through works that infuse life in ever increasing measures (Jn 14.12). In this encounter with God, we do not feel flattened out by being made to feel incapable, but rather lifted up by the sublimity of the love that the Father shows us.

Sacred and Profane

Jesus, *the Son of God* (Heb. 4.14), inaugurates a new relationship between the Father and his children which is incompatible with that of Moses, *the servant of God* (Rev 15.3), who had imposed a relationship between servants and their Master. The human condition towards God is no longer like that of a slave towards its master (Jer 3.14), but rather as a child towards its Father (Eph 1.5). With Jesus, everyone is called with the dignity of divine status, as was well understood and formulated in the early Church by Fathers like Athanasius: the Word of God became man so that we might become God (The Incarnation of the Word 54.3) or Ignatius: The beginning is faith, and the end is love: when these become inseparably connected, God exists (Letter to the Ephesians 14.1).

With Jesus, God dwells with humanity: he placed his tent among us (Jn 1.14). The tent of God, the sanctuary where the Lord lived among men and manifested his glory (Ex 40.34-35) is now a human that we can hear, see, and touch (1 Jn 1.1). With this, the evangelist announces the elimination of the Temple and every other sacred place (Jn 4.20-24). Jesus will be the new sanctuary (Rev 21.22) and, just like the 'old tent' of the exodus, he will walk together with his people (Jn 14.6). With Jesus, the divine (Word) becomes human (flesh) and collapses the distinction between the sacred and the profane—the space reserved for God and which separated us from him. The fullness of the glory of God shines in Jesus, in a human. There is no need to go to a particular place in order to encounter and know God. It is enough to enter into the sphere of love. If not everyone can or is willing to give up 'the temple', then it is possible for everyone to welcome love and to love in return. The God of Jesus is profoundly human: the more human that humanity becomes, the more we encounter the divine that is in him.

This theology is a long ways from one which had drawn an insurmountable abyss between the absolute holiness of God and the misery of humanity—considered but *a worm* (Job 25.6) or *nothing but dust and ashes* (Sir 17.27). The Most High became presented as inaccessible and removed located in the 'seventh heaven'. According to rabbinical calculations, the distance between one heaven and another corresponded to a good five-hundred years of walking, for which they believed that God was 'the comparable distance of a journey of 3,500 years' from humanity (*Midrash Sal* 103.1; 217).

The impossibility for humanity to yield to a God that is always moving away becomes constantly fed by the image of a Master that is profoundly pessimistic towards humanity and his creation. A God that is disgusted with his creation does not hesitate to exterminate *every living thing that was on the face of the ground; human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air* (Gen 7.23). The Creator's distrust toward his creation is expressed in Psalm 14.2-4: *Yahweh looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise who seek after God. They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one*. The discouragement of God in reality is none other than a projection of human scepticism against their own kind: *Save me Lord! There is no faithful human; the faithful have disappeared from humankind* (Ps 12.1).

The project of God—the expression of his optimism for creation and his tendency to eliminate the abyss that separates him from humanity—becomes however considered as dangerous to the religious institution. It is considered blasphemy by those religious authorities that should make known the will of God to the masses. For the sacerdotal caste system—which stood as the only intermediary between God and man—it was absolute blasphemy to think that a man could reach the status of the divine: *to become like God* is the serpent's invitation to Eve that encouraged her to eat the fruit from the tree (Gen 3.4). All of the aversion and hostility towards Jesus, who proclaimed and oriented God's project, is due to the fact that the religious institution justified its indispensable presence by that very distance existing between God and man—who could not be yielded directly to divinity and needs mediation which permits this encounter in the first place. These mediations go identified in spaces, times, ways, and persons, that guarantee contact with divinity, according to a behavioural code that is rigorously fixed and immutable.

For the religious institution, it would be a wretched case if the divine should take the initiative and subvert all of their intermediations and start a relationship directly with human beings raising them up to his level, infusing them with himself (Jn 17.21-23). Humanity does not need brokerage. Rather than facilitating communication with God, this would only create more obstacles. Opposite of the irruption in history of a God no longer confined to temples (Acts 17.24)—who instead of being vainly sought takes the initiative of searching humanity out (Jn 4.23)—stands the religious institution who will not rest until he disappears, unless you dispose of his God and replace him. Letting Jesus act freely means that the religious institution is bankrupt. If the crowds believe in Jesus they will stop believing in their authority: *If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him!* (Jn 11.48). The High Priests and Pharisees are alarmed and go to the Sanhedrin and, while keeping their power intact, do not hesitate to betray their God: *We have no king but Caesar!* (Jn 19.15). They choose to be dominated in order to continue to dominate. For now, all the religious world, from the religious leaders to the Pharisees, from the priests to the Levites, are all on the alert, ready to seize the first signs of the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. To eliminate him.

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(translated by Joshua Furnal)