

Vision and Character

Come up hither, and I will shew thee things.—Revelation 4:1

TIS QUITE TRUE that God reveals Himself in many ways and in divers manners. It is equally true to say, with regard to those classic instances recorded in scripture, that such unveilings of the majesty and purpose of God were received from elevated points of vision, high states of mind. Let us consider three examples.

The prophet Ezekiel, in referring to the Angel of the Lord, writes, "In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain." (Ezekiel 40:2)

"And the devil, taking him [Jesus Christ] up into a high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." (Luke 4:5)

"And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." (Revelation 21:10)

To accept the above in a literal sense creates confusion in the mind and fails to grasp the underlying spiritual truth. The difficulty arises because the ego is encased in a physical body and maintains contact with a material world through the senses. Accordingly, on the basis of the three cited descriptions, the reader naturally forms a geographical concept.



Oil on canvas (after Raphael). Sir James Thornhill ,1675 - 1734. Royal Academy of Arts, London

St. Paul on the Areopagus Preaching the "Unknown God" to the Athenians

Paul, "a man in Christ," was caught up into the third heaven, where he heard "unspeakable words." Nevertheless, from that high mind so illumined in spirit, come words of power and wisdom to enlighten a humanity blinded by matter.

The ego's imprisonment in the dense body works counter to a belief in the reality of the spiritual realms. We can better appreciate this result when we study occult history and learn that man's ego has not always functioned in the envelope we now call a dense or physical body.

What actually transpired in the above-quoted passages, and what is taking place today with increasing frequency, was the recovery of a lost gift termed clairvoyance, or "clear-seeing." When man gained full sight of the material world in the last third of the Atlantean Epoch, he became correspondingly unseeing and unaware of the existence of the higher immaterial worlds.

Herein lies the relevance of the Apostle Paul's words addressed to the Corinthian Church: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can

he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

St. Paul, an initiate in the divine mysteries, was able to compare both the natural and spiritual aspects. Of course, the words of the Apostle are just a bare statement of fact, the reason behind it being that the evolution of the people of his day was not appreciably advanced. They could only accept spiritual truth in pictorial form. Much that Christ imparted to others could only be conveyed in word pictures, or parables. So limited was the spiritual understanding of His own disciples that perforce He had to say to them, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

We shall see the deeper implications if we carefully weigh a few significant words that are closely related with the three incidents we have introduced. Ezekiel the Prophet says, "The hand of the Lord was upon me," which is a mystical figure indicating entire captivity to the Lord, being in the Lord. St. John is carried by the Spirit, and Christ is led by the Spirit, each to their respective points of vision. Neither passage describes an ordinary climbing of a mountain, as when Christ ascended Mount Olivet and sat with His disciples. The latter permitted a view from an earthly summit, the former from metaphysical heights.

The explanation is that developed souls are able to function on higher planes inaccessible to the less spiritually evolved. In the language of occult science, these advanced souls have experienced the mystic baptism and are united with the primal source of Love, the eternal fire which is ultimately destined to quench all the evils of the world.

How closely the Quaker mystic George Fox was identified with the Eternal Fount may be gathered from an experience recorded in his journal: "I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness." Those who have explored the life and entered the mind of this remarkable lover of the Lord know that in this divine light he lived and moved and had his being. Only one incident need be culled from many that attest to this fact. When Cromwell desired to enlist his services as an officer in the Parliamentary Army, Fox's reply was, "I live by the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion for all wars."

The problem raised by these considerations in the mind of Bible students, especially if they be limited by a static outlook, or have not studied the works of the modern seer, Max Heindel, will probably be the extraordinary progress shown by certain pioneers of the spirit. Why this gap? How can there be such a high degree of perfection registered in a single life of, say, sixty, seventy, or eighty years? How can it be accounted for? With the same gospel and equivalent opportunities for most, even making allowances for heredity, training, environment, etc., still the query persists. All these considerations appear insufficient to bridge the gulf dividing these exalted



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Frederic Shields

The Prophet Ezekiel

Depicted with "hand of the Lord," the trance of spiritual vision upon him, Ezekiel holds a shophar which he sounds to warn the Israelites of enemies.

souls, who stand like Himalayan peaks in the spiritual firmament, from the humble pilgrim who is beginning consciously to tread the more excellent way.

A personal testimony may not be out of place from one who

has been a local preacher for forty years. I used to hold the belief that God had not only decreed a certain number of souls to salvation, He had also created a sort of Christian aristocracy of elect souls, carefully trained in some mysterious way and destined from the cradle to become the saviors of the race.

I am deeply wondering now how I made such a theory square with a God of love, but I feel I am not far from the truth in stating that there are many today who still subscribe to all or part of this theory. I leave it to the reader to imagine my intense consternation, then chagrin, and finally conviction when I learned from *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*, Max Heindel's monumental work, that the Almighty does not operate in such an arbitrary fashion; that in the remote past there was breathed into man that eternal spark of the Spirit which should enable him through many lives to become the arbiter of his own destiny. So whatever progress he may have made to date includes the good brought over from previous lives to this present one; that is, after debts have been liquidated by the law of consequence. Only in such a way can a right balance be maintained between a loving but just God and the beings He has created.

Man is in possession of inward powers which enable him to work out his own salvation. But to form an adequate view of human evolution we must identify an innate power of the Spirit which, while it works quite independently of the law of cause and effect, has a determining influence upon the progress of the aspirant. Max Heindel calls this soul power "epigenesis" (birth from above), or to use a modern term, "creative ability," which enables the candidate to strike out along new and original lines in respect of every facet of character and life.

Perhaps this fact will be grasped more firmly if we take a simple illustration from nature, something that occurred many years ago, and which has left its mark upon a certain branch of horticulture to this day. We will try to reconstruct the situation in our own way. Imagine an enthusiastic rose grower strolling down a country lane. He sees a common dog rose growing in the hedge. What a poor specimen of a rose, he involuntarily says to himself. Just four or five petals which fall to the

ground at a touch of the finger. Yet what a virile stem! A happy thought seizes him. Why not unite one of my best blooms to such a stem? He then puts his idea into practice. What happens? The sap rising in the vigorous stem commingles with the nature of the grafted flower and is transmuted into a finer essence, thus producing a finer bloom.

What I want to stress is that our rose grower, by following the intuitive gleam, reveals that innate quality of soul called "genius." He deliberately produced finer specimens by substituting purposive selection for the slower processes of natural selection. Let us, too, grow finer blooms of character by the same process of selecting the best among our potentialities and invigorating them with our husbanded creative life force.

There are some who try to banish from their minds the vision of what God intends for them, thus retarding their progress on the path. Our business, on the contrary, is deliberately to invoke the vision, to compare it with what we are, here and now, and to aim for what the vision embodies, assured that we may do so.

Further to the quest of life, it must be clearly understood that the candidate who aspires to the attainment of the vision must be prepared to meet with obstacles upon the path, from which none are exempt. The higher one rises in spiritual understanding, the more subtle and refined are the tests. Often temptation arises after a time of enlightenment and spiritual exaltation, as exemplified in the case before us, when Christ, the great Sun Spirit, entered into the dense body of Jesus of Nazareth by means of the mystical baptism on the banks of the Jordan. The highest initiate of the Sun Period, in thus taking up His abode in the pure body of Jesus, became the ideal type and gave the impulse for the saints, mystics, and seers who have also attained to the baptism of the Spirit while in the body. As one has truly said, "The Son of God became the Son of Man that the Sons of Men might become the Sons of God."

Hardly had the voice from the Majesty on high faded away in the infinite blue than was Christed Jesus led forth to be tempted of the devil. He was now to receive a test which would either set its seal upon John's great claim for Him as "the Lamb of

God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), or, if failed, would plunge Him into depths of spiritual chaos.

His great protagonist is Lucifer, the leader of a host of angelic stragglers, who had nevertheless progressed light years further than members of the human life wave. In order to further their own evolution these beings are compelled to gain experience that can only be obtained by participating in the life of human beings in their physical bodies. Thus was the stage set for an epic scene which was to have stupendous results for all humanity.

Keeping in mind what has gone before, the discerning reader will have divested himself of the literal picture of Christ being visibly borne aloft in the arms of a dark and powerful being to the top of a high mountain and there shown the kingdoms of earth in a moment of time. An esoteric reading of the "Temptation Scene" will make no reference to a material mountain. Not only so, but a little reflection should convince most people that the range of vision described in the gospel passage (encompassing "all the kingdoms of the world") is impossible to the physical organ of sight.

What must be clearly borne in mind is that previous to the Jordan event, Christ had never functioned in a vehicle lower than the desire body. Therefore, in taking to Himself the dense and vital bodies of Jesus, there was presented to Him a panoramic view of the whole of the evolutionary plan of this universe—the mineral, plant, animal, and human kingdoms. Or, expressed in occult language, Christ Jesus entered into a retrospective consciousness that recapitulated the origin and entire development of the human dense and vital bodies.

From the Baptism onwards He is identified with this planet and its life in the closest possible relationship. Yet out of this relationship there was to arise His first severe test. Excellent as His highly evolved body was, it was not immune to fundamental physical needs and urges. The pangs of hunger that had seized upon that healthy and well-balanced body during its protracted period of abstinence from physical nourishment were now asserting themselves with the utmost intensity.

Ye humble dwellers on earth, pause a moment, and bow down your hearts in reverence as you



Ink and watercolor 1816-18, William Blake, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University

Satan Tempts Christ with the Kingdom of the Earth

"There is no peace in the heart of a carnal man."—Thomas à Kempis. Man is in the physical world but not of it.

meditate upon the fact that this sublime spirit, in order to fulfill His divine mission of love, here endures a strange law working itself out in an entirely new vehicle to which the occupant was totally unaccustomed.

Should He use the Godlike powers that lay to His hand to appease this life-supporting craving? Why not? What could be more natural? Yet strange as it may appear to the ordinary mind, to have yielded would have had a debasing effect upon Him. There is a law of the spirit, binding on the initiate, which forbids him to use his special powers to satisfy personal needs, for the powers themselves are created out of totally impersonal love.

How could this lofty Spirit, "Who inhabiteth eternity," be one with those whose routine prospect in life is literally to starve day by day? Or how could He consistently be called the great High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities

and tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin? Nay, it was absolutely essential that He drink the cup to the bitter dregs. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save" was as true of Christ in temptation, as of Christ on the cross; the moral obligation to refuse to make stones into bread was as binding upon Him as to refuse to come down from the cross. Both actions lay within His power, but not within His purpose.

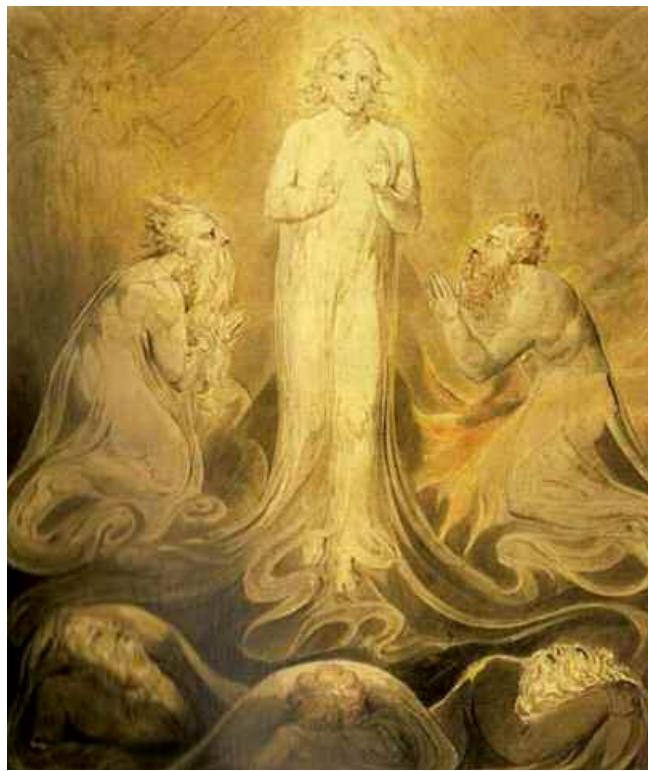
He was able to say in the Judean desert what He said in the Cenacle the night before Golgotha, "The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." No alloy, no weak link upon which to fasten, for that immaculate life was all of a piece; a wedding garment of unspeakable beauty.

The humble wayfarer on this earthly plane, struggling up the rugged steeps of life, yet with his face turned to the dawn, gazes with reverential awe upon these mighty figures that illumine the pages of history. Then, quite naturally, the personal aspect shapes itself in his mind. How and in what way do these profound truths affect me? Is there a message for me? Most solemnly, yes; for the true way of life is one and indivisible for all—whether we have just begun consciously to tread the path, or have journeyed far enough to join the spirits who can behold coming glories while yet in the body.

The more we excel in those things that are true, beautiful and lovely, the more the Lord will reveal to us His grand secrets and endue us with powers of the Spirit.

It is really a matter of high or low levels, of cramped or comprehensive vision. The revelations are commensurate with the spiritual altitude attained. God's revelation of Himself to me is determined by my character, not by God's character. "Tis because I am mean, Thy ways so oft look mean to me." An elevated mood can only arise from an elevated habit of personal character. If, in the externals of our life, we live to the highest we know, that is the height from which higher glory will break upon our souls. "Come up hither and I will shew thee things."

It is a good thing and tonic for the soul to seriously challenge ourselves and ask, What has been my spiritual history for the past twelve months?



Watercolor on paper, 14³/₄ x 12⁵/₈ in., William Blake, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The Transfiguration

Peter, James and John were chosen by Christ Jesus to witness His transfiguration, between Moses and Elijah, because they could ascend to the spiritual heights where this etheric event was manifest. Celestial beings attend this theophany.

Have I been brought to see things from a higher standpoint? As truth has unfolded itself before me, have I made it a high and holy adventure to live up to it; to work it out, to live in the light of it? Have I assiduously performed the daily exercises put forth by The Rosicrucian Fellowship: the evening moral review of the day's events in reverse order, and the morning exercise of concentration?

The moments spent on the Mount are not only meant to teach us something, but to *make* us something. If we would aspire to higher things we must faithfully follow Him who came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and worked out the vision in the valley below.

This troubled and chaotic world urgently needs those consecrated and sanctified souls who, by expressing purity, faith, and love in their daily lives, answer the call to ascend the Mount and then return with holy joy to tell the dwellers on the plain what they have seen. □

—Vernon C. Hill