

Exegesis And Pathei-Mathos

In my recent (2023) essay *A Sacramental Link?* I mentioned that my interpretation of the Gospel of John inclined me to suggest that Johannine Christianity was "the way of humility, of forgiveness, of love, of a personal appreciation of the divine, of the numinous; and a spiritual, interior, way somewhat different from past moralistic interpretations." [1]

My interpenetration of that text is however just one of thousands over centuries with many of those other interpretations, of that and the other Gospels and the Scriptures in general, causing schisms, conflicts, and accusations of heresy as in the case of the Alexandrian priest Arius (born c.250, died 336 AD) who voiced an interpretation of the difference between the denotatum θεός and the denotatum ὁ θεός in, for instance the Gospel of John, leading to that interpretation being denounced as heretical.

Which returns us to the problems of exegesis and denotata, and the axioms of my weltanschauung of pathei-mathos which are:

- (i) that it is empathy and pathei-mathos which can wordlessly reveal the ontological reality both of our own physis and of how we, as sentient beings, relate to other living beings and to Being itself;
- (ii) that it is denotata - and thus the abstractions deriving therefrom - which, in respect of human beings, can and often do obscure our physis and our relation to other living beings and to Being;
- (iii) that denotata and abstractions imply a dialectic of contradictory opposites and thus for we human beings a separation-of-otherness; and
- (iv) that this dialectic of opposites is, has been, and can be a cause of suffering for both ourselves, as sentient beings, and - as a causal human presenced effect - for the other life with which we share our planet.

What is important about empathy and pathei-mathos is that they are directly personal perceivations and experiences, and therefore have what I termed a 'personal horizon' meaning that they

"cannot be extrapolated from such a personal knowing into some-thing supra-personal be this some-thing denotata, including an ἰδέα/εἶδος, or an axiom (ἀρχή) or a source (αἴτιος) for some 'revelation' or ideology or similar manifestations constructed by and dependent on appellation." [2]

The knowing so revealed is only and always our personal fallible answer or answers, and which knowing is invariably a wordless empathic knowing that cannot be adequately expressed by words and terms (by denotata) without in some manner distorting it because words and terms depend on exegesis, which exegesis can and often does vary from century to century.

In practical terms this knowing implies a certain humility since empathy and pathei-mathos inform us that we are fallible beings, arising as this personal knowledge does from the intimations of the numinous that empathy and pathei-mathos almost invariably provide: of our connexion to other beings, human and otherwise; of our minute place in the Cosmos as one mortal, short-lived, being on one planet orbiting one star in one Galaxy in a Cosmos of billions of Galaxies; and of the suffering of so many human beings, century after century, often caused by wars and conflicts often based on some certitude of belief in some cause, or on some passion, or on some interpretation of some religion, or some ideology or notion or 'destiny' with such wars and conflicts generationally replaced by others based on other certitudes of belief or on the same old passions.

A forgetting of this humility, will-fully or otherwise, has however frequently occurred and still occurs with the individual seeking to make their pathei-mathos the basis for some -ism or -ology or more often some interpretation of some existing -ism or -ology. However, a remembering of such humility can often lead to the life of the reclusive mystic or to a life of compassionately seeking to alleviate in some non-confrontational and practical way at least some of the suffering of other life, human and otherwise.

As I noted in *Soli Deo Gloria*,

"all the diverse manifestations of the Numen, all the diverse answers, of the various numinous Ways and religions, have or may have their place, and all perhaps may serve the same ultimate purpose - that of bringing us closer to the ineffable beauty, the ineffable goodness, of life; that of transforming us, reminding us; that of giving us as individuals the chance to cease to cause suffering, to presence the good, to be part of the Numen itself. For what distinguishes a valuable, a good, a numinous Way or religion, is firstly this commitment, however expressed, to the cessation of suffering through means which do not cause more suffering; secondly, having some practical means whereby individuals can transform themselves for the better, and thirdly, possessing some way of presenting, manifesting, presencing what is sacred, what is numinous, thus reconnecting the individual to the source of their being, to their humanity.

In my fallible view, any Way or religion which manifests, which expresses, which guides individuals toward, the numinous humility we human beings need is good, and should not be stridently condemned. For such personal humility - that which prevents us from committing hubris, whatever the raison d'être, the theology, the philosophy - is a presencing of the numinous. Indeed, one might write and say that it is a personal humility - whatever the source - that expresses our true developed (that is, rational and empathic) human nature and which nature such Ways or religions or mythological allegories remind us of. Hence the formulae, the expression, *Soli Deo Gloria* being one Western cultural manifestation of a necessary truth, manifesting as it does one particular numinous allegory among many such historical and cultural and mythological

allegories. Just as, for example, the sight of King Louis IX walking barefoot to Sainte Chapelle was a symbol of the humility which the Christian faith, correctly understood, sought to cultivate in individuals. " [3]

A Personal View

While I appreciate how various Ways of living and codified religions can presence and often have presented the numinous and thus have been and are for many a conduit toward a personal humility and compassion, my personal perceivration has been for over a decade and remains my weltanschauung of pathei-mathos, which is just some recollections of my experiences and contemplations regarding the loss of loved ones, of working and living on farms in England, and of solitary walks along a sea-shore and in the hills and deciduous woods of rural English Shires.

Given the 'personal horizon' of these recollections and contemplations they cannot not, without removing from them their essence of a personal wordless experiencing of the numinous, form the basis for anything supra-personal be it a philosophy or a Way to guide others, just as the recollections and contemplations of others ancient and modern, and the authors themselves, should not be or become or be seen as a guide or even as a meritorious example.

As it says in Ayat 63 of Surah 25 of the Quran:

وَعِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْنًا وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ
الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

"The 'Ibaad of Ar-Rahmaan are those who walk on earth in humility and, when the arrogant speak to them, they reply Salaam." [4]

As the poetess Sappho wrote:

ἔγω δὲ φίλημ' ἀβροσύναν [...] τοῦτο καί μοι
τὸ λάμπρον ἔρωσ ἀελίω καὶ τὸ κάλον λέλογχε [5]

I love delicate softness:
For me, love has brought the brightness
And the beauty of the Sun

As it says in the Beatitudes:

Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.
μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν.
μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.
μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.
μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται.
μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται.
μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Fortunate, those humble with spiritus, for theirs is the Kingdom of Empyrean.
Fortunate, those who grieve, for they shall have solace.
Fortunate, the gentle, for they shall acquire the Earth.
Fortunate, those who hunger and thirst for fairness, for they shall be replete.
Fortunate, the compassionate, for they shall receive compassion.
Fortunate, the refined of heart, for they shall perceive Theos.
Fortunate, the peaceable, for they shall be called children of Theos.
Fortunate, those harassed due to their fairness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Empyrean. [6]

Which interpretations of mine illustrate the problems of exegesis, and why my preference, now and for over a decade, is and has been for the wordless perceivations of empathy and of a personal pathei-mathos.

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[1] The essay is included in www.davidmyatt.info/dwm-compilation-religion.pdf

[2] *Numinosity, Denotata, Empathy, And The Hermetic Tradition*, 2022. www.davidmyatt.info/dwm-denotata-empathy-v1b.pdf

[3] *Soli Deo Gloria*, 2011. Included in www.davidmyatt.info/dwm-compilation-religion.pdf

[4] Ar-Rahmaan is one of the names of Allah, signifying The Most Merciful. The 'Ibaad of Ar-Rahmaan are the Believers who follow the Word of Allah in the Quran and as manifest in the example of the Prophet Muhammad.

[5] P. Oxyrhynchus. XV (1922) nr. 1787 fr. 1 et 2

[6] The Gospel According To Matthew 5: 3-10. My translation and commentary of The Beatitudes is included in www.davidmyatt.info/dwm-compilation-religion.pdf

Since I have used unusual words - for example, the spiritus instead of the conventional 'the spirit', and Empyrean instead of 'heaven' - I append here extracts from my commentary.

μακάριος. A difficult word to translate since "blessed" has acquired particular (sometimes moralistic) meanings as a result of nearly two thousand years of exegesis, while "happy" is rather prosaic. The context - as in ὅτι αὐτῶν ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν - suggests "fortunate" [...]

πτωχός. Usually translated as "poor" which however has too many exegetical and modern connotations, and does not express the metaphorical sense here which implies being "humble" in respect of τὸ πνεῦμα.

τῷ πνεύματι [...] τῶν οὐρανῶν. In respect of τὸ πνεῦμα as the spiritus (rather than as the Spirit) and οὐρανός as Empyrean (rather than Heaven), cf. my commentary on John 1:32 from which this an extract:

οὐρανός here is always translated as 'heaven' although the term 'heaven' - used in the context of the Gospels - now has rather different connotations than the Greek οὐρανός, with the word 'heaven' now often implying something explained by almost two thousand years of exegesis and as depicted, for example, in medieval and Renaissance Christian art. However, those hearing or reading this particular Greek gospel for the first time in the formative years of Christianity would most probably have assumed the usual Greek usage of "the heavens" in the sense of the "the star-filled firmament above" or in the sense of "the sky" or as the abode of theos and/or of the gods, ἐν οὐρανῷ θεοί [...]

It therefore seems apposite to suggest a more neutral word than 'heaven' as a translation of οὐρανός and one which might not only be understood in various 'classical' ways by an audience of Greek speakers (such as the ways described above) but also be open to a new, and Christian, interpretation consistent with the milieu that existed when the Gospel of John was written and first heard. That is, before the exegesis of later centuries and long before post-Roman Christian iconography. Hence my suggestion of the post-classical Latin term Empyrean, which can bear the interpretation of the abode of theos and/or of the gods, of "the sky", of the "the star-filled firmament above"; and a Christian one suggested by Genesis 2.8 - παράδεισον ἐν Ἐδεμ (the Paradise of Eden) - and also by shamayim.