

Mani-festation and Difference

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Essence is never manifested purely or without modulating emphasis. Human being is never shown without the specification of male or female. To manifest human being as a distinct human being is to manifest it in this way rather than that, to emphasise certain possibilities in the essence of humanity over others. Here, manifestation (of human being/essence) necessarily involves modulation. In the language of Maximus the Confessor, the one *logos* (essence, nature, *physis*, *ousia*) of human being only ever occurs in distinct *tropoi* (*hypostases*, modes of being/manifestation).

To admit that *tropos* or mode opens up the manifestation of *logos* or essence just by *limiting* that manifestation – not so much by *excluding* or *denying* moments of that essence as by emphasising and de-emphasising, bringing some aspects to the foreground, simultaneously keeping their complements as background – is already to hit upon the truth of substance, essence or *logos*. *Ousia* is a unity of being, but not one that is defined without reference to difference, without relation to its modal/tropic/hypostatic manifestation. Essential unity is an active relation between differences, the dynamic harmonisation of diversely emphasised manifestations of that essence.

Human being, taken as a repeatable nature (not by excluding the note of individual personhood but by signifying individuality indefinitely rather than definitely, by including the notion of *a* single human being, but not of *this* single human being) does not have its unity as an essence standing above sexual (and other) difference(s), but is nothing but the truth of the harmonisation of man and woman. Human being as such has its integrity as a repeatable essence just because it is the power to unite man and woman in their co-revelation of the one essence of humanness. The essential unity of human substance is born to presence in the beautiful difference between man and woman. Man and woman are two tropes of the one *logos*, such that in the differential space of their encounter there radiates the truth of their common but different manifestation of human being.

It takes plural and different signification to signify clearly. If man only ever appeared, one would get the impression that his maleness were the deepest, most substantial or universal level of his existence. Masculinity would not be a mode of manifesting a common human being, but a nature in its own right. But with the (redeemed and redeeming) co-appearance of man and woman it becomes clear that male and female are not merely natures in their own right, but modes or tropes or ways of manifesting a (differently) shared being. There in the phenomenal inter-ferece of masculinity and femininity we are shown a truth that unites them both.

Not that we are called to “transcend” the level of sexual difference to contemplate a non-sexual human essence. No: we are called to contemplate the fact that human being as such is the wondrous meeting of man and woman. Human being: the fertile encounter between differences, rather than a unified substance that stands above differences. Humanness-as-*perichoresis* (differential unity, or harmony, of man-and-woman) is brought to light only with the co-manifestation of man and woman.

Human *perichoresis* can only be signified by *triangulation*. It takes the inter-presence of the different to release each trope/mode into its truth *as sign of a greater truth*. In the absence of its complement one trope tends to present only itself as if it spoke only for itself. This suggests that signs need their co-signs to signify, or else they collapse into non-signs presenting only themselves. Only with the presence of its co-sign does a sign enter into the openness and relationality that makes for the reception of a deeper mystery. The site of this event of truth is not a single sign, which cannot fulfil its role on its own, but the unity of sign and co-sign. This would not surprise us if we remembered that the mystery that eventuates is dynamism, harmony, beautiful movement between differences, the gifting of difference to difference.

A single “sign” could not bear such a movement into the open, for the open in which this beauty lives is opened between differences, as their very between. An isolated sign, if it can signify at all, tends to bespeak *stasis*, the (false) unity of being-here-complete-in-one-spot. But true form is

just the power to unify different manifestations of that form, thereby giving birth to those differences, at once moving them together and apart. Original unity has an essential relation to difference and manifestation (plural, differential manifestation). Original unity is nothing more than that relation.