

What does it mean to say that, "though [the Incarnation] came later than the fall, [it] was in God's purpose before it" (Maurice)?

To answer this question, one first has to ask what God's purpose is. God's purpose, in my understanding, is to create and to consummate all things in order thereby to realize as fully as possible God's own literally infinite potentiality for self-creation. In all its *essential* aspects, this purpose cannot possibly be defeated, or even frustrated, since its realization in these aspects depends solely on God's own unbegun and unending creation of Godself in and through the creation and self-creation of God's creatures. But God's purpose very definitely can be frustrated and even defeated in its *accidental* aspects, since in these aspects its realization also depends, in part, on the self-creations of God's creatures, all of which, precisely as creatures, have a beginning and an end. With this distinction in mind, one can appreciate the truth in Maurice's claim that "the fall did not in the least frustrate the scheme of God," even while precluding the error to which this claim, left unqualified, is exposed—the error, namely, of making the fall and its consequences appear to be of no significance for God.

But if God's purpose is thus ever to create Godself in and through the creation and consummation of others, themselves also self-created and consummative of others, this purpose acquires different accidental aspects contingently upon the others that God creates and consummates. Insofar as these others are understanding, and therefore morally free, creatures who can and must create themselves in and through their own understanding and moral freedom, God's purpose acquires the accidental aspect of creating and consummating creatures who are faced with the fundamental option of either obediently acknowledging the divine purpose and bearing witness to it for the sake of others or failing thus to acknowledge and bear witness to it. But, then, God's purpose must also acquire the accidental aspect of willing its decisive representation, whereby this fundamental option ceases to be merely implicit, or explicated only partially and inadequately, and becomes fully explicit.

Assuming, then, that the decisive re-presentation, or making fully explicit, of the divine purpose is just what is properly meant by "the Incarnation," one may say that the Incarnation was indeed in God's purpose before the fall, since God's purpose could not acquire the accidental aspect of creating and consummating understanding and morally free creatures without also acquiring the accidental aspect of willing its own decisive re-presentation, however such creatures may have exercised their fundamental option: whether so as to realize original righteousness or so as to realize original sin, and thereby to fall.

It lies in the nature of the case, however, that there cannot be a decisive re-presentation of God's purpose unless there is some individual or community that takes it to be such. Could this be the truth, perhaps, so badly expressed by all the christologies that focus on Jesus' own personal relation to God instead of keeping their attention focused on the decisive significance of Jesus for *our* personal relation to God?

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