

" FROM I TO ME "

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1 If **you** were given only those four words, what would you make of them? I don't know what I made of them 2,604 Sundays ago (that's $\frac{1}{2}$ century ago, + 4 Sundays) when I held forth on them for an hour, my diary of August 5, 1945, says. (As the world today is moving 3x as fast as it was then, 1' then is now squashed down to 20".) In the church calendar, the next day was Transfiguration of Christ day, remembering the gospels' accounts (Mt.17, M.9) that our Lord's "face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them." On that same day, high above Hiroshima appeared a light as dazzling as the sun; & of it, my diary says "News of atom bomb, concerning which I have known for $1\frac{1}{2}$ years." (Distressed Manhattan Project scientists had told me in detail about the first subatomic chain reaction, which was on the U. of Chicago under-Stagg-Field tennis court I used in inclement weather. The science was done, the technology took that $1\frac{1}{2}$ years at the beginning of which the FBI waited upon me for what they considered a leak in a sermon in the near-the-university church of which I was assistant pastor.)

2 At that university, I was in the habit of taking atheist professors to lunch to try to convert them to Jesus. They found it highly stimulating. So did I: I learned a lot. One of them turned out to be a world authority on somebody I'd never heard of, Geo. Herbert Mead, famous for his evidencing of the social origin of the ego. What can be seen of you was born from your mother's womb, but what can't be seen of you--the invisible you--was born from the social womb: only after society addressed you as "you" could you feel/think/say "I." The prior question, I said to the professor, is how society came to say I, came to self-consciousness; & he was irritated when I preached to him that until God said "you," humanity--society & the individual--could not say "I." When later he got to thinking about that, he was converted, I hope.

3 The Bible, which ironically and sadly is banned from our public schools even though it is our society's foundational document, tells us where we, humanity, come from--as well as answering those other two questions of the reaching human spirit, why are we here? & where are we going? Mother's womb, yes; society's womb, yes; but where did those wombs come from? The Bible says, from the womb of God. Read the opening chapters, underlining as you go the words "I" & "you." You'll discover that God talks to himself as "I" (actually, in the plural of majesty: 1.26) in deciding to make Adam and (in 2.18) Eve: unlike us, God does not have to be moved from nothing to "I," for out of nothing he the Eternal makes all there is & sustains all that continues to be. A theoretically prior question is how did God get to say "I"? But the theory is false: God the Holy Trinity has always been a society in which Father, Son, & Spirit say "I" & "you" to one another (theologians call it the "immanent" [internal] Trinity to distinguish from the Trinity in [external] action, the "economic" Trinity creating, sustaining, & restoring).

4 Of course we, too, talk to ourselves--but only after we discover who is doing the talking & who the listening--the internal conversation without which we'd not have human consciousness. In the terms of this sermon's title, that internal conversation is between "I" & "me." But this could not be--I could not be to myself both subject & predicate--if "I" had not been called into being by my being addressed as "you." As the Bible begins, God does not say "you" to any other creatures than human beings. Derivatively, we human beings share in this divine creative power when we say "you" to another human being & hear "I" in response. At any age, education is an awesome responsibility. Right after WWI, a German Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, in a series of lectures to Berlin public-school teachers, tried to communicate this awe in the teacher's art, this educational spirituality. The lectures, a religious as well as educational classic, were published as ICH UND DU (I AND YOU, or I-THOU). I don't know whether he ever underlined all the Bible's opening chapters' instances of "I" and "you," but I'm sure he would have approved of the exercise.

5 If now you've underlined, in Gn.1-4, all the instances of "I" & "you," look

back and underline again every "you" that is God speaking the primary "you": our responding to God, in what we call prayer, is the secondary "you"; & our addressing one another is the tertiary "you." "Revelation" is the word we use for God's speech in the first or second person: "I am the Lord your God" or "You shall love...." In Gn.2.16-17: "You may...eat...not eat...." After the fall, which is pictured as not knowing when to stop eating, God addresses the miscreant man (3.9): Adam, "where are you?"

What "you"s you have left, with single underlining, are instances of the secondary "you," humanity addressing deity. Gen.3.10: "I heard...you"; v.12: "the woman whom you gave to be with me"; 4.13 (Cain): "You have driven me away from the soil."

6 A final step in this underlining Bible study: Underline, in Gn.1-4, all first-person ("I," "my," "me") instances. They refer back to this sermon's first sentence: how do these instances illumine the biblical passage "from I to me"? In Gn.2.23, Adam, having lost a rib & gained a wife, speaks of Eve as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." In 3.2, Eve says to the serpent, "We may eat...."; in v.10, Adam says "I" four times, & in v.12 refers to God's gift of Eve "to be with me." Next v., Eve says "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." In 4.13, Cain complains that "my punishment is greater than I can bear! Next v., "you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive..., and anyone who meets me may kill me."....Do you have any underlinings I didn't mention? If so, how do they fit into sections 4-6?

7 Our meditation topic, "From I to Me," denotes the second of three movements. In the first movement, creation, God, whose name is "I AM I" (Ex.3.14), brings into being the "I" who is able to say "I am." In the third movement, sanctification, God empowers me in the Spirit to serve him in love & joy as a *new* "I" humbly aware of being, under God, a redeemed "me" who has passed--this the middle movement, redemption--beyond the God-unrecognizing, self-assertive "I." If this all seems like pronoun stew, I invite you to pick up a copy of this homily as you leave the Tabernacle this morning, & work it through at your leisure. And if you think about Gal.2.19b-20, you will see how biblical all this is: Paul, describing his own Christian transformative salvation, says "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [mg, "Or 'by the faith of the Son of God'"], who loved me and gave himself for me." (In 1935, I calligraphed in the original Greek for my parents, who for the rest of their lives displayed it on their bedroom wall. They couldn't read it, but they could say it to one another from memory in English.) The phrase "From I to Me" describes the decision to submit, in repentance & faith, to God in Christ, a joyful submission we recapitulate daily in prayer & celebrate whenever we come to the Lord's Table, Holy Communion, where we in penitence recollect the Garden of Eden we were driven from & re-experience the Garden of Gethsemane where the suffering God reveals that he is suffering for us, suffering to deliver us from the powers of sin & death, that with him we may live with courage, serve him with joy in this suffering world, & in him die with dignity--for by the grace of his Cross our Lord Jesus Christ has changed the shape of death into life eternal. Here, too, we find peace as well as joy; for (in our second reading this morning, Heb.13[.8], has it) "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." "Listeners reported [to Jesus], 'Your family is outside there, looking for you.' Jesus responded, 'My family is inside here, looking for God' (Mt.12.46-50, Crossan, THE ESSENTIAL JESUS [HarperSF/94], 99).

8 In the U. of Hawaii, I asked a Buddhist student of mine to read the Bible's first three chapters & put in the margins all the sutra parallels she could come upon. A few days later, frustrated, she said "I couldn't find many sutras; the central character in those stories, God, is not in my religion." Who is the central character in the story of your life?

9 Here is a golden chalice, my mother's memorial to her mother; & here is a broken cup I picked off a monastery floor & glued together & used the next morning, instead of the golden chalice, for the concluding Eucharist of a retreat I was leading. Many years later.... "Love your crooked neighbor with you crooked heart" (W.H.Auden).