

## CHERRY BLOSSOMS

Spontaneous flowering of ideas

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As we enter the Easter Season leading to Pentecost Sunday over a 50-day period, let me share with you some of the fruits of my sustained meditation, prayer, and reflection.

Middle-Way Consequentialism, regarded as the “highest” view of Buddhist philosophy, posits all persons and phenomena on a relative level as dependent-arisings contingent on causes and conditions, parts and wholes, and mental designation on valid bases. On an ultimate level, the same ontology posits them as empty of inherent existence, lacking any existence by way of their own being independent of anything else such as causes and conditions, component parts, and mental designation by means of language and conception on valid bases of designation. Put simply, all persons and things are dependently arisen relatively and empty of inherency ultimately.

### *Appearance and Reality*

In this essay, I extend my inquiry beyond previous ontological commitments, to arrive at a view of God that stretches beyond my self-declared Middle-Way Consequentialist tenets. Relatively speaking, God is empty of inherent existence and does not exist by way of his own being, as far as God articulated in biblical terms is posited by way of imputation of idea and language. Conventionally, God can be described as an empty dependent arising whose emptiness is the same emptiness as that of all persons and phenomena. God and all things are equally empty in exactly the same manner.

Ultimately speaking, God is beyond emptiness and non-emptiness, ineffably real and present yet not captured by idea and language. In other words, to say that God is a mere construct is to go too far in one’s use of language. So is saying that God is inherently real in his own right, by way of his own being without need for imputation of idea and language. Both positions are ontological extremes that miss the mark of God’s ineffable mode of being beyond words and concepts.

### *Beyond the Middle Way*

Hence, what is ultimate for all persons and phenomena—emptiness of inherent being—is relative for God. Ultimate reality with respect to all things is relative truth with respect to

God. Thus, God is empty of inherent being on a relative level of reality. But on the ultimate level of reality, God is ineffable and real in a way that transcends both emptiness and non-emptiness. God cannot be said to be inherently real nor non-inherently real, but is said to be ineffably, unspeakably, ungraspable, transconceptually, and translinguistically real.

The best ontological option is to say that God's existence is ineffably real beyond emptiness and non-emptiness, which is consistent with Dzogchen's view of pristine awareness said to be ineffably real as well. Could this observation indicate that there is something about pristine awareness that comes from a divine source, God? I think so. In the book of Genesis, God is said to breathe life into a clump of dust from the ground, creating Adam the first Man. This sliver of divine breath—Spirit—can be seen as the spirit of Man, the very consciousness that is primordial and immaculate. Buddhists came to call this spiritual element pristine awareness. This pristine awareness is primordial consciousness that is a sheer reflection of God's divine consciousness on the finite human mind. This finite mind thus serves as mirror that reflects infinite divine consciousness in its pristine purity.

### *Mirroring the Divine*

Hence, there is something in human nature that immaculately mirrors divine nature. We are made in the image of God and this reflection that is pristine awareness is none other than our *imago dei* (divine image) in the most fundamental sense of the word. Our spirit, which is pristine awareness, is our divine image: a reflection of divine consciousness itself albeit in a limited sense. What original sin does is to rupture our spirit's natural connection with God's Spirit, erecting an ontological barrier between humanity and divinity. This barrier is created by sin, quite apart from and subsequent to the pre-existing ontological difference between Creator God and created humanity that was there in the first place.

Even so, God does not give up his relations with created humanity and the created world. God continually seeks to draw us back to himself in love out of his sheer grace. In God's immanent and economic relations with humanity and creation, he shares in common with us a mode of existence that is empty of inherency, absent of existing by way of his own being and yet still functionally and efficaciously God in his nominal contingent nature. In God's transcendent and essential nature, as divinity resting in his own aseity and absolute interiority, he is ineffably real beyond all verbal and conceptual ways of designation. This transcendent and absolute divinity cannot be said to be inherently or non-inherently existing for he is ultimately ineffable, untouched by words and ideas.

This is the Mystery of God. This is God's holy emptiness: an emptiness unlike any other, an emptiness beyond all description. Here, words must fail. So must ideas. *Selah*.

*Ad majorem dei gloriam*

✠ **Chris**