



## Modesty

*"in my family, one never spoke of such things..."*

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Faced with the difficulties they encounter with respect to their sexuality, our patients sometime invoke **the weight of their ancient "Judaeo-Christian" heritage**.

One can hardly argue that sex or the body has had a favoured role in our culture, and the patients are not entirely wrong. But their comments obviously raise more questions than answers. How and why has a disqualification of such an important dimension of the personality been able to operate?

Are we not all heirs to the legacy of classic antiquity, of the Greco-Roman world in which the gods and goddesses distinguish themselves through their sexual prowess, erotic disappointments and lowers tribulations?

For centuries these cultural heroes have inspired us, and Hellenism was and remains through its arts, its heroes and its gods **the celebration of Eros, of man, and of his body.**

## **Nascent Christianity**

But at the root of our civilization, there was a dominant preoccupation on the part of the early Christian to break with these divinities. In political and ideological reaction, nascent Christianity thrust aside idolatry and **carefully excluded any carnal collusion between the gods and human beings.**

The new religion recognized a deity, timeless and disembodied. Despite the mystery of the des-incarnation, the glorification of visible man was quickly censored by the Christian faith.

With particular care, the early Christian writers separated from the divine any representation accessible to the senses. However, in introducing man into creation, the Scriptures suggest an anthropomorphic God: "*God created man in his own image and likeness*". But this likeness between the Creature and the Creator does not encompass the corporeal being: through sacred texts, occidental man acquires **his invisible inner configuration** from the divine image. And several centuries later, when the **angels** take their place in the celestial hierarchy, their disconcerting identity will fill a famous controversy...

## **According to Origene**

*"the physical body form does not contain the image of God... the image of God is our inner, invisible man, incorporeal, incorruptible and immortal"*. The image of God in whose likeness man was made ..."*could only be the (Christ)*" who, he tells us further..."*himself took the image of man and came to him*".

A very important point should be noted here: the Incarnation is the mystery by which Christ took human form, but it is the divine term that *"takes the image of man"* and not the reverse. This fact is a "determinant" of our culture; this means that **no model exists of a corporeal image in Christian theogony**. The model of the body is not a throwback to a superior term; it is only a throwback from man to himself, and no divine reference lends support to the human being in his physical person.

## Basile of Cesare

in his commentary on Creation suggests a distinction between image and likeness. *"We possess the former by Creation, and we acquire the latter by our will power"*. Otherwise stated:

- image as a **capacity given by God**, is acquired, once and for all, by Creation, which established us in being.
- Likeness is acquired **through the exercise of free will**.

To be sure, it is still a matter of inner man, but beyond the dichotomy of body and soul **Basile** addresses the duality of **being and acting**. He takes a more oriental stance and associates an image of God with "the parts of the soul that are not the spirit".

## Gregoire of Nysse

also differentiates from the divine **those "parts of the soul which are not spirit"**: they *"are not in the image of God"*. For him the *"nous"*, the active intellect endowed with reason, is the effective cause of the likeness. That leads us back to the platonic opposition between spirit and matter.

Two points are important at this level of the analysis:

- with the neo-Platonists, Christianity will take his run up from Hellenic thought, dominated by the **rupture from the world of sensitive qualities**;
- what is new, however, and what breaks with Hellenic tradition is the existence of **an incorporeal deity**.

The question here is what becomes of the body and, particularly of bodily acts in this new cultural context. The theogony of antiquity was rich in anthropomorphic and theriomorphic representations but now, no third term remains to provide humans for these necessary functions. This constitutes a *"lack of corporeal signifiers"*, which is a major characteristic of the occidental human being.

Recognizing the two different levels, **Basile's** concept of **"being"** and **"acting"** enables us to examine the problem in all its dimensions: it means that the place of identification is not univocal. These two registers, **do not simply oppose will power and competence** but they are distinct structures allowing for a metaphoric rapport with the **superior term**, be it divine or parental.

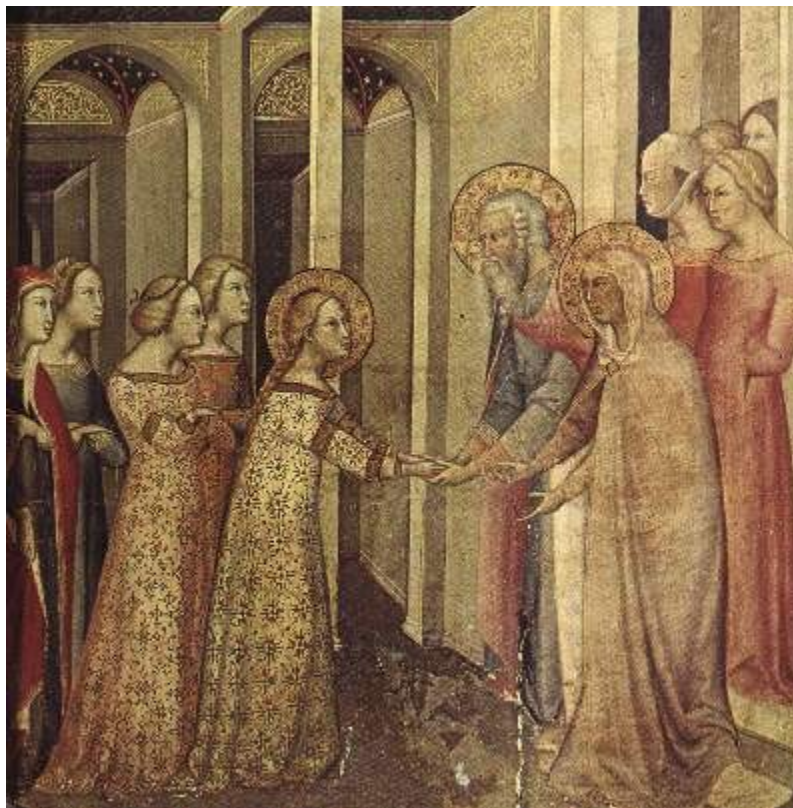
- The register of the **likeness** presents little difficulty: it depends not on being but on

the voluntary accomplishment on the part of the subject.

· On the other hand **Basile's** "image" should hold our attention, particularly in the discipline we practice. The author of sacred texts tells us that man receives the image as a dignity conferred by God. The image includes the capacity to acquire the likeness, but its presence at man's creation, though divine will power, gives the creature **a state of being similar to that of the Creator.**

We are not talking about the physical body in its materiality, and it is here that **Basile's** distinction is quite subtle. Clearly, pleasure in thought or deed, cannot be different from that of the father and **will make the child into the image of the father.** The child and the adolescent have in common with their parents a natural identity which they cannot avoid and which perfects itself with growing.

**Basile's** thesis indicates a similarity that supports the "acting of the physical person". This similarity is deeply anchored in the corporeal being, and sexuality calls it for. **Basile's** position, which rejects divine corporeality, evokes then an essential question as to the **appropriation by a subject of his own physical being.**



## **A cultural silence**

We know that the mental configuration takes its form from an identification with the **superior term.** Identification between parents and children is obviously

comprised of complex social and psychological factors. We know that identification also implies a continuation of the most elementary impulses, including sexual behaviours. This behaviour achieves itself through an imitation of the parental image. "To do like" father or mother committing these acts of nature is to recreate the "primeval scene" in all its totality.

It is precisely here that our **cultural silence creates an insurmountable problem**: if inner man is sufficiently provided with images and symbols, it is not the same for the body or sex. A person is then put in an impossible position; that is: he must imitate dad and mum. This way creates a total censure of coitus in general and of that of the parents in particular. This throwback to the parental image is a dead end and par excellence a generator of crisis. The human need of a mediating symbol to accept the parental model is irrefutable. **When this third-party symbol doesn't exist, no likeness in proximity is possible** and the "same to the same" contact leads, to separate himself from the image. This is the consequence with respect to bodily acts, of the celestial purge carried out by Christianity.

## **Access to metaphor**

In each culture the creation of self is contained in the access to metaphor. The condition of the created being is to acquire the Creator's knowledge and power and, like him, establish oneself through pleasure. **The role of a third party, be it a hero of civilization, a holy text, or a mythic discourse, is to produce, words coming from "elsewhere", symbols recognized by the collective community and parental discourse.**

In the absence of legitimacy conferred by the Scriptures, identification meets a lack or, at best, the suffering body of Christ and the Virgin birth, before becoming its total antithesis, the "diced up" body of modern science.



One aspect of the love act is the confusion between the gesture and pleasure. The person who evokes it, signifies it: the communicating "thing" and the communicated "thing" are indistinguishable. The confusion between the signified and the signifier excludes the production of meaning; language is suspended. **But appropriation of the world is accomplished only through the mediation of signs.** So it's through substituting silence, necessary to sexual function that Christian

occultation operates and becomes radical.

Language frees sex. A subject can only have a suitable sexuality if he possesses this inner language through which the "thing communicated" is separated from the "communicating" thing", thereby establishing meaning.

It is precisely this inner language that our culture does not transmit either discredited or impoverished, and it is at the heart of the family that these obstacles are at the same time the most present and the most insurmountable. **Thus, the family's silence reinforces the culture's silence**, and everything connected to sex is sent back to the notion of transgression. Eroticization becomes pornography and pleasure, if it doesn't become vice, is confined to the domain of secrecy, lies and dissimulation.

## Secrecy and lie

The familiar embarrassment felt in the face of children's questions comes from this cultural rupture. This should be a point of interrogation: the recourse to a third party is often desired and written recourse in a common practice. We are faced with a double paradox: on one hand, ignorance does not restrain parents from speaking of that which everyone knows; on the other hand, lacking any other reference, parents have only their own experience to transmit, and **this is impossible and must be impossible**.

The family's silence so often criticized by patients (*"in my family, one never spoke of such things...it was taboo"*), creates a new paradox: in such a context, negative attitudes become **a condition of coexistence and of personal development**.

The secret, which is a component of modesty, surrounds the activities of the members of the household. Secret and lie permit, in proximity, to function "according to the image" of the loved ones in denying the existence of the acts. It is a condition of the free exercise of parent's sex life: a couple will renounce making love for fear that the children will know; this is like wise true for children. And moreover, clinical practice shows the harmful consequences **of a nonexistent-discretion between parents and children**.

The secrecy is the most specific characteristic of the "primitive scene". But the parental "inner eye" is often so present that "to undo the image" an act of nature can cancel itself out or become an unnatural act. **Thus we can interpret certain impotencies, frigidities and the more radical homosexual inversions**. This refusal of the likeness diverts as from a suitable model in favour of another, possibly the opposite sex. The difficulty in resembling the father compels one to prefer his opposite: the mother, i.e. a woman.

## The ways of sex education

Since the sex act does not occur without the encounter of the "person" of another, no society accepts that such an act is devoid of meaning. Each culture resolves this problem in its own way. In the Orient, erotic arts are integrated into mysticism and religion, constituting an initiation. In our country, a certain "sex education" to which one must add commercialized eroticism, takes care of this "inner pre-linguistic verb" prior to the actual experience of the physical person.

We must not overlook the growing interest for the Orient where the corporeal being achieves restitution in its irreducible apparent reality.

The signs of this trend are multiple and varied: yoga, martial arts, do-in, meditation, etc... All of these facilitate the harmony of body and mind. The Occidental world has seen emerge a scientific bodybuilding purged of all emotional content. It culminates in a "physical and athletic education". Its predilection for the "star-player" is obvious. It is not surprising, therefore, **that this elitism of the body has become the elitism of sex**. Our society has recreated its "sex symbols" and... its "idols".

The erotic trades, such as pornography, must be considered essential to the legitimating of sex. Yet when, a therapeutic dimension is required, the benefits of pornography are unfortunately limited by the same causes: the lack of a linguistic accompaniment which can actually validate an erotic education.

It is without doubt a language about pleasure and about the act of communication of this pleasure that we hope to see emerging, concurrently with the emergence of the human being in better possession of his sexuality, called upon to experience it in a more responsible manner.



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*Site créé le 02 août-1997. - Dr J. Morenon, 8 rue des tanneurs, F-04500 [RIEZ](#)*

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