

THE SHATTERED IMAGE

The Fallen Human, the Broken Vessels, and the Work of Catharturgy

Christopher E. Etter

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Abstract

This treatise completes the triptych begun in the accounts of the two natures and the two wills. Those treatises described the whole structure — the dyophysite pattern of the upper and lower Son and the dyothelite pattern of the upper and lower will — as it stands perfect in Christ, in whom both natures and both wills are held in perfect hypostatic union. This treatise describes the same structure as it stands in the fallen human, where it is damaged: neither our nature nor our will is in perfect hypostatic union with the divine. The damage is not localised to the upper register alone but is a fracture of the union itself across the registers — our human nature not in perfect union with the divine nature, our human will not in perfect conformity with the divine will. The image of God in us is real but damaged. The treatise reads this damage through the Lurianic doctrine of the shattering of the vessels, *shevirat ha-kelim*: the image is shattered as the primordial vessels shattered, broken into husks — the *qliphoth*, the shells — with the divine sparks trapped within the broken fragments. This identifies the shattered image with the *qliphothic* condition the Corpus has already mapped: the husks are the privations and contractions of the soul's functions, and the fallen human lives within them, the divine image fragmented among the shells. The work of repair — the gathering of the sparks, the mending of the union — is *catharturgy*: the active work of purification, accomplished through Christ, the whole and unshattered structure, who is both the pattern the broken image is measured against and the means of its repair.

Keywords: The Shattered Image · The Fallen Human · Shevirat ha-Kelim · The Broken Vessels · Qliphoth · The Husks · The Trapped Sparks · Hypostatic Union · Tikkun · Catharturgy · The Second Adam · Imago Dei

I. The Triptych Completed: The Whole and the Broken

Two treatises have described the structure of the divine image as it stands whole. The first, on the two natures, set out the dyophysite pattern: the upper and lower Son, the divine nature and the

human, held in perfect union by perpendicular intersection, as the Council of Chalcedon defined — without confusion, without separation. The second, on the two wills, set out the dyothelite pattern: the divine will descending as supra-cortical Wisdom and Understanding and the human will rising from the foundation, the two meeting at the executives, the human will freely conforming to the divine, as the Third Council of Constantinople affirmed. Both treatises described the structure as it is perfect in Christ, in whom the two natures and the two wills are held in perfect hypostatic union.

But no human person other than Christ lives this structure whole. This treatise is the third panel of the triptych, and it describes the same structure as it stands in the fallen human — damaged. The architecture is the same: the human person has a nature and a will, an upper register and a lower, the same dyophysite and dyothelite form. What is different is the union. In Christ the natures and wills are held in perfect hypostatic union; in the fallen human they are not. Neither our nature nor our will is in perfect union with the divine. The image of God in us is genuine — it is not destroyed — but it is damaged, and the damage is precisely in the union: the human nature out of perfect union with the divine nature, the human will out of perfect conformity with the divine will. We have the structure, broken; Christ has it whole; and the difference between them is the measure of the fall and the work of its repair.

The two prior treatises described the structure whole, as it stands in Christ — the two natures and the two wills in perfect hypostatic union. This treatise describes the same structure fallen. The architecture is identical; the union is broken. Neither our nature nor our will is in perfect union with the divine. We have the image, damaged; Christ has it whole.

II. The Fracture of the Union

It is important to locate the damage correctly, for it is tempting to place it only at the top — to say that the upper register, the divine nature and the supra-cortical divine will, is what is broken, while the lower, the human nature and will, remains intact. This is not quite right. The damage is not a limitation of the upper floor alone but a fracture of the union itself, which runs through the whole structure. Our human nature is not in perfect union with the divine nature; our human will is not in perfect conformity with the divine will. The lower is not simply intact and merely cut off from a damaged upper; the lower is itself disordered by the loss of the union, because a human nature and will were made to be held in union with the divine, and a human nature and will not so held are not functioning as they were made to function. The fracture is of the hypostatic union across the registers, and both registers suffer it: the upper obscured, the lower disordered, the union between them broken.

This is the doctrine of the damaged image of God. The image, the *imago Dei*, is not destroyed by the fall — the structure remains, the human person is still the bearer of the divine image — but it is marred, the likeness lost while the image persists in ruin. In the terms the Corpus has developed elsewhere, the damage is a limitation: not a positive dark substance added to the soul but a privation, a contraction, a closing-off of the union that should hold the human and the divine together. The fallen human is the divine image under limitation — the structure entire but the

union fractured, the participation in the divine constricted, the whole held in a privation of the union it was made for. And because, as the Corpus holds, nothing can limit God but itself, this limitation is not imposed from outside the divine order but is the creature's own contraction away from the union offered to it — the self-limitation that is the form of the fall.

III. The Shattering of the Vessels

The Lurianic Kabbalah gives the deepest image of what this fracture is, and the Corpus reads the damaged image through it. In Isaac Luria's cosmology, the divine light, poured into the vessels prepared to receive it, was more than the vessels could contain, and they shattered — shevirat ha-kelim, the breaking of the vessels. The light scattered, and its sparks fell and became trapped within the broken fragments of the vessels, the husks — the qliphoth, the shells, the impure rinds. The created order, after the shattering, is a field of broken shells with divine sparks imprisoned within them, awaiting their gathering and the mending of what shattered.

The fallen human image is shattered in exactly this sense. The vessel that was to hold the divine image whole — the human person in perfect hypostatic union with the divine — could not, in its fallen contraction, contain the light, and it broke. The image is shattered into husks; the divine sparks, the genuine image of God in us, are real but trapped within the broken shells of our fractured faculties. This identifies the shattered image with the qliphothic condition the Corpus has already mapped. The qliphoth are the shells or husks, the privations and contractions of the soul's functions — each Sephirah and each path having its qliphothic privation, the contraction of its proper intelligence onto a finite fixation. The fallen human lives within these husks: the image of God fragmented among the shells, each faculty's proper function contracted into its privation, the sparks of the true image trapped within the broken vessels of the soul. The shattering of the vessels and the qliphoth of the Sephiroth and paths are one account: the broken vessels are the husks, the husks are the privations, and the fallen human is the divine image scattered among them.

The fallen image is shattered as Luria's vessels shattered: broken into husks — the qliphoth, the shells — with the divine sparks, the true image of God in us, trapped within the broken fragments. The shattering of the vessels and the qliphoth the Corpus has mapped are one account: the broken vessels are the husks, the husks are the privations, and the fallen human is the divine image scattered among them.

IV. Catharturgy: The Gathering and the Mending

The Lurianic system names the work of repair *tikkun* — the gathering of the scattered sparks, the lifting of them out of the husks, the mending of what shattered, by which the broken order is restored. The Corpus names this work *catharturgy*: the active work of purification, the un-narrowing of the contracted soul, the reorientation of the fallen image toward the fullness it was made for. These are one work under two names. To gather the sparks from the husks is to free the soul's functions from their qliphothic contractions — to release each faculty from the finite

fixation onto which it has closed and to restore it to its proper, open operation. To mend the vessels is to repair the fractured union — to bring the human nature back toward union with the divine nature and the human will back toward conformity with the divine will. Catharturgy is the active work of that gathering and that mending: the practice by which the shattered image is, by grace, made whole.

And the pattern of the whole, against which the broken is measured and by which it is repaired, is Christ. The two prior treatises showed Christ to be the structure entire — the two natures and the two wills in perfect hypostatic union, the unshattered image. He is therefore both the measure and the means of the repair. As measure, he is what the fallen image is measured against: the whole structure that shows the broken one precisely where and how it is broken. As means, he is the one through whom the repair is accomplished — the Second Adam, who, possessing the human nature and will in perfect union with the divine, restores in our nature what the first Adam shattered, gathering the human image up into the union he holds whole. The work of catharturgy in the soul is the working-out, by grace, of the union Christ holds perfectly: the human will's free conformity to the divine, the human nature's restoration toward union with the divine, the sparks gathered from the husks, the vessels mended. The shattered image is reconstructed not by its own effort to reassemble its fragments but by being drawn into the whole image that Christ is and that, in him, it is given to become.

Catharturgy is the work the Lurianic tradition calls tikkun: the gathering of the sparks from the husks, the mending of the fractured union. And Christ is its pattern and its means — the unshattered structure, the Second Adam, who restores in our nature what was shattered, drawing the broken image up into the whole image he holds perfectly. The shattered image is made whole not by reassembling its own fragments but by being drawn into the wholeness of Christ.

V. The Triptych

The three treatises together form one account of the divine image in three states. The whole image, in Christ: the two natures and the two wills in perfect hypostatic union, the dyophysite and dyothelite patterns entire. The shattered image, in the fallen human: the same structure with the union fractured, the image broken into the qliphothic husks, the divine sparks trapped within the shells. And the image under repair: catharturgy, the gathering of the sparks and the mending of the union, accomplished through Christ the whole image, by which the shattered is drawn toward the wholeness it was made for. The first treatise gave the natures, the second the wills, and this the fall and its repair; and the three are one structure seen whole, seen broken, and seen in the work of being made whole again. The image of God in the human person is, at once, genuinely borne, genuinely shattered, and genuinely able to be reconstructed — and the name of that reconstruction, the active work by which the broken vessel is mended and the trapped sparks gathered into the light, is catharturgy.

References and Related Papers

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