

The Tyrant Within

It is variously referred to as “the ego,” “the false self,” “the pride form.” It is that less-than-genuine version of our self which vies for dominance with our true self. This false self is self-serving, puffed up with pride, living in a world of its own making, and its own god.

I realize that some are liable to dismiss this sort of talk as so much ‘psycho-babble’ but, even within the scriptures we can find evidence of the problem. I think that this is especially true in the reflections of St. Paul about himself and others:

*“Watch out for those who create dissensions and obstacles. . . Such people do not serve our Lord Christ **but their own appetites**, and by fair and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the innocent.”* (Romans 16:18)

“It has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are rivalries among you. I mean, each of you is saying ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos’ or ‘I belong to Kephas (Peter),’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided?”
(1 Corinthians 1:11-12)

“I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, so that. . . none of you will be inflated with pride in favor of one person over against another. Who confers distinction upon you? What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?”
(1 Corinthians 4:6-7)

And there are many other instances where Paul speaks against “boasting” and of the action of God’s Spirit to keep him humble.

So, even though some of the language we use includes loan words from modern psychology, we can find the same phenomenon as a subject of concern in the sacred writings of our faith.

I will fully admit the ongoing battle in my own life against the *egoic*. It rears its ugly head when it feels attacked or exposed. For example, my ego dictates that I should be “the answer man” about things theological or church related. But, when I get “caught” without a good answer, my false-self

scrambles to find cover in fancy words or diversions. By contrast, my true-self, humbly acknowledges weakness and gaps in knowledge and graciously offers to find the missing answer at a later time.

That example isn’t exactly the most vivid one but, hopefully, it serves as an adequate illustration. The point is that the false-self, (the ego), can be tyrannical and destructive both of the “true self” and of the community. We see it manifest in ourselves and in others in various guises: “the ME-monster,” “the Know-it-all,” “the Righteous one,” “the Partisan,” “The Smug one,” among many others.

As a facilitator of the Lord’s work to create multiple Christian Church’s in Europe and Asia Minor, St. Paul was keenly aware of his own false-self, and the destructive power of this reality for ministry and community. His writings provide evidence of a keen vigilance about this:



“Therefore, that I might not become conceited, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan to beat me, to keep me from being conceited. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’” (2 Corinthians 12:7ff)

The current political climate and the divisions and factions within the church are, I would assert, indicators of the “egoic” overriding the “spiritual.” These problems are bigger than all of us, but we can all work on ourselves through the spiritual practices of our Sacred Tradition, following St. Paul and others. The watchword here is humility.