

Saturday - Our Way Out

Monday, July 08, 2013
1:44 PM

Our Way Out

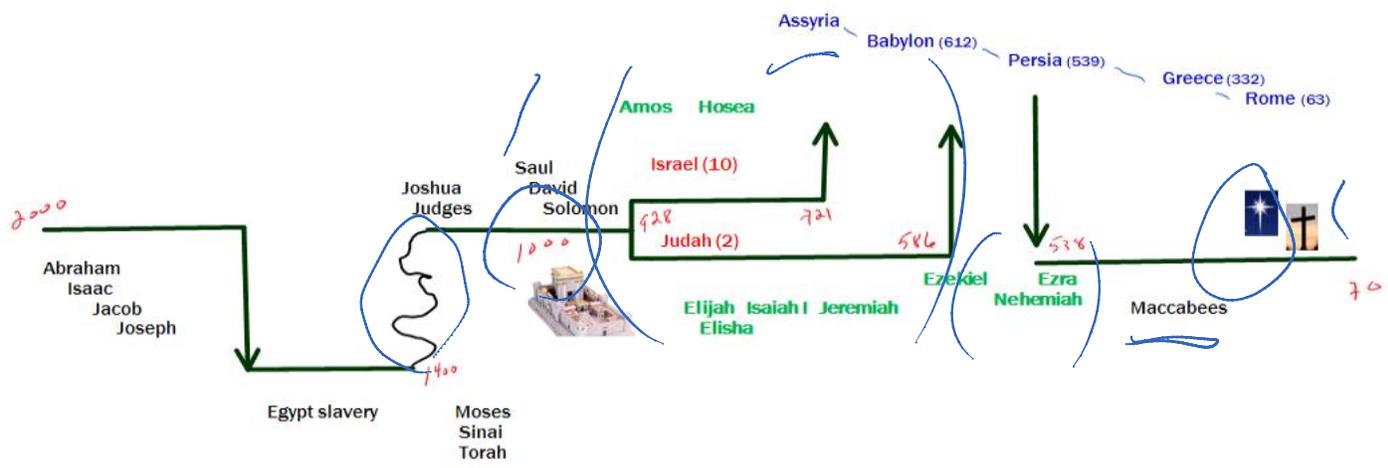
A short history of Israel, the content of Scripture
A three act play: creation, fall, redemption

Pope Benedict XVI writes, "The essence of original sin is the split into individuality, which knows only itself. The essence of redemption is the mending of the shattered image of God, the union of the human race through and in the One who stands for all and in whom, as Paul says (Gal 3:29), all are one: Jesus Christ." (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* p. 30.)

Genesis 1-11 is a pre-history.

According to Gerhard von Rad's commentary on Genesis, this is a three-fold rhythm happens several times The rhythm is composed **sin - Judgment - mercy**

	Sin	Judgment	Mercy
Adam & Eve	Disobey command about eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cursed be serpent • cursed be the ground • Toil • pain at child birth • husband will be master 	Exile - "He must not be allowed to put out his hand and take fruit from the tree of life also, and live forever" [in this state] Gen 3:22
Cain & Abel	Kill brother; first fratricide	Cain exiled soil won't respond to him restless wanderer	"anyone may kill me on sight" Not so. "the Lord put a mark on Cain lest anyone should kill him at sight"
Flood	How great was man's wickedness on earth	Flood J account: a big rain P account: <i>mabbul</i> crashes in	Ark Rainbow Noachic covenant
Babel	Pride, hubris	Confuse their language and scattered them over the earth	



Q: What is the merciful act of God?

a: Genesis 12: call of Abraham ... and Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, the Sabbath, the Temple, Jesus, and Pentecost.

Pentecost is the Tower of Babel turned inside out.

The first moved from one language into many,

the second moved from many languages into one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

We have made a breach with God, broken the covenant with him, alienated ourselves, And Biblical history is the story of God undoing our breach through a series of covenants.

Covenants

Covenant = promise, gratuitously made.

"A covenant, or *b'rith*, was, in Jewish tradition, an agreement which formed a relationship which was equal in binding force to a blood relationship. Consequently, the relationship does not cease even if the consent to the covenant is withdrawn by one or both of the parties." [Commentary on Code of Canon Law]

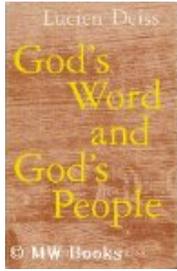
1. Noachic	<p>Noachic covenant with the whole human race: God will not destroy, but will redeem</p> <p>CCC 56 After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin God at once sought to save humanity part by part. The covenant with Noah after the flood gives expression to the principle of the divine economy toward the "nations", in other words, towards men grouped "in their lands, each with [its] own language, by their families, in their nations". [Gen 10:5; cf. 9:9-10, 16; 10:20-31.]</p>
2. Abrahamic	<p>Abrahamic covenant: (a) great nation, (b) given a land, (c) Messiah come from this people</p> <p>Book of Genesis is about nurturing the little seedling of the Abrahamic covenant along: story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the selling of one of his sons into slavery in Egypt, Joseph.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abraham thought he'd never have a son so takes matters into his own hands with slave Hagar (Ishmael) • Sarah gives birth in the geriatric ward to a son named "Laughter" (Isaac), because Sarah chuckled when the angel visitors said she would give birth • Isaac taken up Mt Moriah – was this the sacrifice of Isaac or the sacrifice of Abraham? yes. (The fathers of the Church see Isaac as a type of Christ – going to be sacrificed, ram caught in thorn bush (crown of thorns) instead. So is the cross the sacrifice of the Father or the sacrifice of Christ? Yes. • Isaac & Rebekkah have twins: which gets the covenant? Firstborn Esau, or trickster Jacob? God is sometimes watching out for the last person you'd expect; Jacob wrestles with God and sees ladder • Jacob is renamed "Israel" and has 12 sons –they jealously sell Joseph into slavery, but when famine comes to Israel this saves them. God's providence can't always be seen in the short run. Joseph is a type of Christ: debased for our redemption. "It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you." • Made slaves in Egypt: can the covenant survive this? Where's the land? where's the nation? where's the messiah?

<p>3. Mosaic</p>	<p>Mosaic covenant: name of God (“Yahweh”), 10 plague battle with gods of Egypt, Exodus, Sinai Qahal</p> <p>The Exodus is the defining moment in Israel's history:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they were made into a people, delivered by the hand of God ("Moses" = "drawn from the water." His child “delivered” / birthed) • going through the Red Sea is like going through a new birth: new people born • Moses is prophet, priest and king all rolled up into one; • Given Torah – what a blessing! Most fearful of capricious God, we don’t know what to do “I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt. Therefore, if I would be your God and you would be my people, have no other gods before me, honor my name and my day; and as regards each other, don’t lie, steal, murder, commit adultery, or covet” • Brought to Sinai and “assembled” – a Qahal ... 								
<p>4. Davidic</p>	<p>Davidic Covenant – King is “Son of God”, Temple established</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Period of the kings has three accomplishments: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Temple and Psalmody. Had carried ark of the covenant through wilderness in portable temple (tabernacle). The Shekinah of God (his glory) would visit it – fire descends (porch light is on). Solomon builds first temple in Jerusalem which stands for 400 years. 2. Scripture – “writing”. Who would write in the wilderness? Scholars estimate the oral traditions about Abraham and Moses are written now that there’s a court scribe (J and E) 3. Wisdom Literature – court also supports poets, sages: wisdom literature of Old Testament: Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Sirach 								
<p>5. Prophets refresh covenant</p>	<p>Refreshing the Covenant: Prophets</p> <p>In 972 the kingdom splits (civil war, taxes) into North and South.</p> <p>N = 10 tribes = Israel 721 captivity to Assyria (never return; “10 lost tribes”) S = 2 tribes = Judah 587 Babylonian Captivity (Babylon falls to Persia, Cyrus releases in 538)</p> <p>Series of kings face off against a series of prophets. Chapter titles from Louis Bouyer's <i>The Meaning of Sacred Scripture</i></p> <table border="1" data-bbox="370 1240 1446 1719"> <tr> <td>Amos and the God of Justice</td> <td>“How long, Yahweh, shall the wicked triumph?” “I hate your festivities”</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hosea and the God of Mercy</td> <td><i>hesed</i>, mercy. God espoused himself to Israel, like Hosea espoused himself to unfaithful wife. God does not wait for us to be just before he loves us; his unmerited love is the force that can make us just.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Isaiah and the God of Holiness</td> <td>The fire-eater has a coal touched to his unclean lips by angel. Holiness and justice are united (first time in human experience) “Holy, Holy, Holy, God of hosts; heaven and earth are full ...” “If your sins be as scarlet, they shall become white as snow” Messianic Banquet: nations gathered from east and west</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jeremiah and the God of the Heart</td> <td>“I am a laughing stock” (if God strikes us, it is out of love to chasten us)“I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD” Watching the Babylonian captivity coming</td> </tr> </table> <p>Ezekiel: “I will draw you out from among the nations, I will gather you together from all lands. I will remove from your flesh the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh.”</p> <p>Babylonian captivity from 587 – 538 when Cyrus of Persia lets Israelites return</p>	Amos and the God of Justice	“How long, Yahweh, shall the wicked triumph?” “I hate your festivities”	Hosea and the God of Mercy	<i>hesed</i> , mercy. God espoused himself to Israel, like Hosea espoused himself to unfaithful wife. God does not wait for us to be just before he loves us; his unmerited love is the force that can make us just.	Isaiah and the God of Holiness	The fire-eater has a coal touched to his unclean lips by angel. Holiness and justice are united (first time in human experience) “Holy, Holy, Holy, God of hosts; heaven and earth are full ...” “If your sins be as scarlet, they shall become white as snow” Messianic Banquet: nations gathered from east and west	Jeremiah and the God of the Heart	“I am a laughing stock” (if God strikes us, it is out of love to chasten us)“I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD” Watching the Babylonian captivity coming
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There were special times of Assembly when Yahweh assembled his people:

They were called a Qahal

Deiss -



Qahal signifies either an assembly actually gathered or a community (with a personality of its own) that can be gathered.

The "Qahal of the children of Israel" is therefore made up either of the whole community gathered at the foot of Mt Sinai around Moses, or of all the children of Israel whom Moses can call together when he wishes.

4 features of Qahal

1. Summoned by God
2. Hear God's word - covenants
3. Response
4. Ratified - Sacrifice

Many in the history of Israel:



Qahal

The Qahal Yahweh becomes the Ecclesia tou Theou

Four distinctive features of a Qahal	Bouyer's Definition of liturgy	Christian liturgy
Summoned by God	A meeting of God's people called together by God	assembly rite ✓
to hear a Word proclaimed (God offers covenant)	in order that the people may hear God's word (Logos)	liturgy of the Word ✓
people respond (actions: praise, adoration, supplicate)	adhere to that Word by prayer and praise	prayer/praise/supplication
sacrificial offering to ratify the covenant	seal the covenant by sacrifice.	eucharistic sacrifice ✓

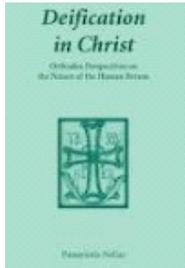
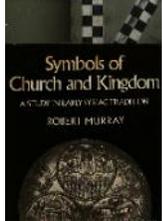
THE CHURCH (EKKLESIA) IS THE FINAL PERFECTION OF WHAT THE HEBREW BIBLE CALLED QAHAL YAHWEH — "THE ASSEMBLY OF YAHWEH." (BOUYER)

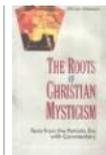
ekklesia to theon

What's the Church?

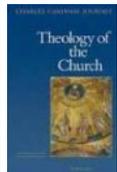
Cyril of Alexandria says "Satan has broken us up," but Augustine points out the remedy:

"Divine Mercy gathered up the fragments from every side, forged them in the fire of love, and welded into one what had been broken ... He who remade was himself the Maker, he who refashioned was himself the Fashioner."

<p>Panayiotis Nellas <i>Deification in Christ</i></p> 	<p>The Church is not a static situation. It is a dynamic, transformative movement. It is the perpetual marriage in space and time of the Creator with His creation, the enduring mingling of the created with the uncreated.</p> <p>... the created is rehabilitated sacramentally, is transformed, it becomes the body of Christ and lives as such.</p> <p>Church = Creation grafted onto Christ and dignified by the Spirit. <i>The Church is creation reassembled and restructured sacramentally. It is higher than the first creation.</i> The world is no longer the house of man only, but the house of the living God."</p>
<p>Balai - 5th c. Syrian Murray, <i>Symbols of Church and Kingdom: Early Syriac Tradition</i>³</p> 	<p>9. That he may be accessible to earth-dwellers, he has built himself a house among those with bodies. He has established altars like <u>mangers</u> where the Church may feed on life.</p> <p>10. Make no mistake, the King is here; let us enter the sanctuary and see him.</p> <p>41. Where art thou, Lord? Behold, in heaven. And where shall we seek thee? Behold, in the sanctuary. Heaven is too high for us, we cannot reach it; We see thee in thy Church, where we have access.</p>
<p>Olivier Clement <i>Origins of Christian Mysticism</i></p> 	<p>"the Church is nothing other than <u>the world in the course of transfiguration.</u>"</p>

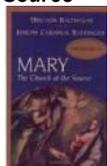


Charles Journet
The Church of the Word Incarnate



“The Church is the world being reconciled to God,” and “Thus the frontier of the Church passes through each one of those who call themselves her members, enclosing within her bounds all that is pure and holy, leaving outside all that is sin and stain ...”

Benedict XVI
Mary: the Church at the Source



“The Church is not a manufactured item; she is, rather, the living seed of God that must be allowed to grow and ripen. This is why the Church needs the Marian mystery; this is why the Church herself is a Marian mystery.”

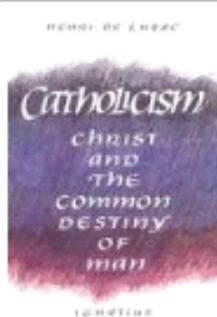
von Balthasar: “In Mary, the Church is embodied even before being organized in Peter”

Ambrose

The baptized are beautiful for having the Holy Spirit now living in them, looking out from their eyes, so to speak; they are beautiful for being transparent to the light of the indwelling Spirit and showing forth the beauty of what the Church really is, as it is intended by God. Therefore, Ambrose concludes, “the Church is beautiful in them.”

He reverses our ordinary grammar. He doesn't speak about the Church we go into, but the Church that comes into us; he doesn't speak about us being in the Church, but the Church being in us.

Eschatological Qahal



De Lubac, Catholicism: The Nature and Destiny of Man

Now the people called to the Mountain has expanded.

Isaiah (25) prophesied that the Messiah is coming to gather the human race from the four corners of the world into a huge eschatological Qahal on Zion:

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food” where death will be destroyed and every tear wiped away.

1. The Passover was the feast of the Israelite's Exodus from Egypt to attend the first Qahal
3. The Messianic Banquet of Isaiah is promise of the feast for all at the fulfillment of time
2. Jesus said he is the Son of Man who calls the Gentiles to the Messianic Banquet

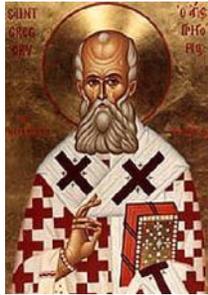
This was the expectation of the fathers:

HIPPOLYTUS:



like the queen bee, Christ comes to muster humanity around him.

GREGORY NAZIANZUS:



"There were at that time all kinds of miracles: God on the Cross, the sun darkened ... the veil of the temple rent ... water and blood flowing from his side, the earth quaking, stones breaking, the dead rising ...

Who can worthily extol such wonders?

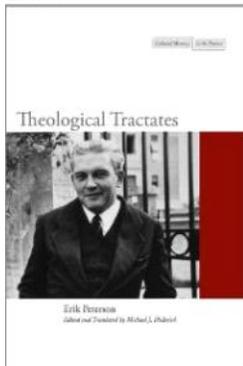
But none is to be compared with the miracle of my salvation: minute drops of blood making the whole world new, working the salvation of all men, as the drops of fig-juice one by one curdle the milk, reuniting mankind, knitting them together as one.

PASCHASIUS



For a change of metaphor there is that in which Christ is likened to a needle the eye in which, pierced most painfully at his passion, now draws all after him, so repairing the tunic rent by Adam, stitching together the two peoples of Jew and Gentile, making them one for always.

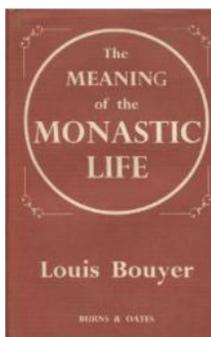
Erik Peterson



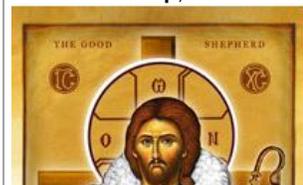
• "The worship of the Church is not the liturgy of a human religious society, connected with a particular temple, but worship which pervades the whole universe and in which sun, moon, and all the stars take part [T]he Church is no purely human religious society. The angels and saints in heaven belong to her as well. Seen in this light, the Church's worship is no merely human occasion. The angels and the entire universe take part in it."

*The liturgy is not one of Adam's religions; it is the cult of the New Adam
The liturgy is not a human religion; it is the religion of Christ perpetuated by us.*

Louis Bouyer



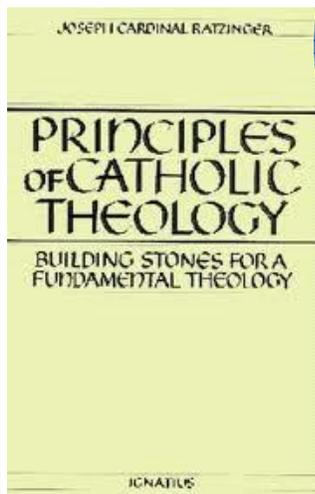
The patristic interpretation of the parable of the lost sheep shows us how this way, this truth, this life are all found in Christ. The 99 sheep in the fold are the cosmos of the spiritual creation, of which our own world, very far being the whole, is only the lower fringe. The hundredth sheep, gone astray, is mankind, with its own particular world, the material universe, of which it is the head. The shepherd leaving the fold in the depths of night to plunge into the dark and lonely ravines of a mountain lying under a curse in search of the one lost sheep, is the Word stooping down, even to us.





As if the immensity of the angelic world which had remained faithful was nothing to him and the Father in comparison ... we see him coming forth from his Father's house and going down to the deepest part of the chasm. Sharing all its sufferings, stripping himself of his divine glory, he finds the sheep in the abyss. Then he lifts it on his shoulders and, bent under the burden, retracing the painful road which it had trodden, he brings it back to the fold. As they both come in sight of the sheepfold, shepherd and sheep covered with the same wounds, their blood mingling, the unanimous joy of the faithful sheep ... is transfigured.

Benedict XVI -



"The essence of original sin is the split into individuality, which knows only itself. The essence of redemption is the mending of the shattered image of God, the union of the human race through and in the One who stands for all and in whom ... all are one: Jesus Christ." (74)

"I can know only because I am known, love only because I am already loved."

Love is the ground of identity, and failure to love is forfeiture of our capacity for living in the image of God, because God is love.

I cannot find better words than Ratzinger's to describe what is at stake, and I end with them because they affirm the absolute necessity for interrelationship at both the theological, physical, and psychical levels.

Something strange happens here. We have seen that the inability to accept one's *I* leads to the inability to accept a *thou*. But how does one go about affirming, assenting to, one's *I*? The answer may perhaps be unexpected. We cannot do so by our own efforts alone. Of ourselves, we cannot come to terms with ourselves. **Our *I* becomes acceptable to us only if it has first become acceptable to another *I*.** We can love ourselves only if we have first been loved by someone else. The life a mother gives to her child is not just physical life; she gives total life when she takes the child's tears and turns them into smiles. **It is only when life has been accepted and is perceived as accepted that it becomes also acceptable.** Man is that strange creature that needs not just physical birth but also appreciation if he is to subsist. ... [W]hen that psycho-physical oneness has been ruptured by which the "Yes, it is good that you are alive" sinks, with life itself, deep into the core of the unconscious - then birth itself is interrupted; existence itself is not completely established. ... **If an individual is to accept himself, someone must say to him: "It is good that you exist" - must say it, not with words, but with that act of the entire being that we call love.** For it is the way of love to will the other's existence and, at the same time, to bring that existence forth again. The key to the *I* lies with the *thou*; the way to the *thou* leads through the *I*.

We come now to the all-important question: Is it true, then, when someone says to me: "It is good that you exist"? **Is it really good?** ... Love alone is of no avail. It serves no purpose if truth is not on its side ... The content of the Christian *evangelium* reads: God finds man so important that he himself has suffered for man."

By this mingled blood, we are given a different kind of life. We have biological life by virtue of being born; but here we talk about Eternal Life. And it has a consequence on death. ...



Horror Story

AN ACADEMIC HORROR STORY

Lest any readers say they were unprepared, let them be warned at the outset that this is a horror story. It is an account of how an academic confronts death.

And lest I be unprepared, let me remind myself that everyone to whom I have so far told this story, laughs.

Although there is no place for it on the IRS form, I sometimes say that I read for a living. As with every profession, there are certain required tools of the trade, in this case, four in number.

First, a level desk and a firm chair in order to keep the spine of the book flat and the spine of the reader upright. No couch slouching.



Second, two pens: one dedicated exclusively to underlining, and another for scribing in the margins.



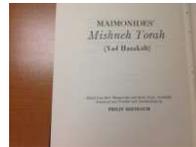
Third, a straight-edge to guide the underlining pen so that one's underlining is straight and crisp, not erratic like an EKG report. My preferred canon is a protractor of clear plastic which allows seeing upcoming text.

Finally, marking up a book in this manner requires that one own it, since librarians disapprove of exercising this sort of professional reading upon borrowed books. One must own the book.



To my way of thinking, if a book is worth reading, it's worth owning; if it's not worth owning, then it's not worth reading.

One day, a day which began like any other day, I came upon a quote from Moses Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* in the course of working on something or another.

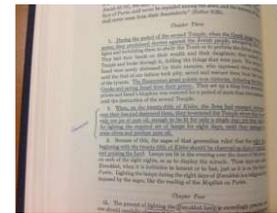
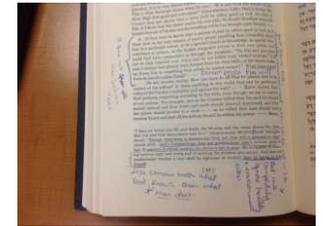


It was a beautiful quote. It was the kind of quote which incited an immediate resolve to read more by Maimonides, which would call for acquiring a copy of his book, for reasons I have explained. But at that moment a faint recollection came over me. Didn't I have something by Maimonides somewhere?



Yes, a search of the shelves revealed a one-volume abridgment of his *Mishneh Torah*. Now, where had that come from? Remembering farther, I connected it back to a course in Judaism in college which both Elizabeth and I had attended, so maybe she had bought the book and one day I quietly transplanted it from home to the office. (This has been known to happen.)

Thrilled at my good fortune of already owning Maimonides, I thumbed through the pages and, yes, there was Elizabeth's hand in the margins, and her scrawly underlining in the text (she also marks her books, but does not subscribe to my protractor theory).



But what was this? Something stood out to my eyes with all the startlingness which Robinson Crusoe must have felt upon discovering footprints in the sand of what he thought was a deserted island. Only in this case they weren't the footprints of a stranger, but the tracks of my own Birkenstocks: there was *my* bi-penmanship. Perhaps just that page, I thought with a panic ... but as I thumbed from cover to cover, my neat protractor lines and marginalia appeared on page after page.

I had not only forgotten what I had read in that book, I had forgotten that I had read the book.

That is how an academic experiences the power of death.

Most of the time, when we speak about the Christian victory over death we probably envisage the parousia, but this episode of transitoriness made me face another manifestation of death, and makes me think about another type of victory. The curse of death does not merely, suddenly show up at the end of life. It affects not only the end point, but also the lifeline leading up to that end.



In addition to the sudden stop at the end, death is the scoffing whisper in our ear along the way that it was all for nothing. Christian tradition clearly affirms that mortality is a consequence of sin, but the sheer act of dying does not quite cover all of sin's mortal consequences. We also live in death.



And living in death is like filling a colander with water: water must be poured in the top faster than it can run out the bottom. It doesn't matter exactly what is being poured in - for an academic it is knowledge, but for others it may be pleasures and accomplishments, tastes, sights, loves, or friendships - when one becomes aware that one's days are filled with what will not last, one experiences death's apertures. We are damaged receptacles.

St. Gregory of Nyssa likened this condition to the Hebrew slaves in the mudpits of Egypt. He observed that our "receptacles for pleasure" can be filled, but they're always emptied again before the next pouring.



We may enjoy finite pleasures repetitively, but every finite pleasure is subject to the power of death. Cyclical experiences flow into the soul like rivers empty into the sea, Gregory says, only the sea grows no larger.

"As soon as a person satisfies his desire by obtaining what he wants, he starts to desire something else and finds himself empty again; and if he satisfies his desire with this, he becomes empty once again and ready for another."

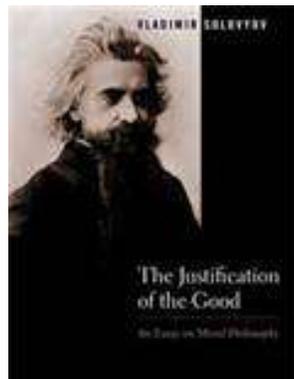


"What is the purpose of this passage of water constantly filling what is already filled? Why does the sea continue to receive this stream of water without being increased by the addition?" What is the purpose of streams of experience which do not raise the sea-level of our souls a quarter of an inch? The sting of death is felt when our souls are not increased by the inflow. Meaninglessness is the real power of death.

The Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov argued that a pleasure lasts only for the moment one is experiencing it, and after that it's no longer a pleasure, it is a memory.

Just as one cannot remember pain, only having been in pain, so one cannot remember pleasure, only having had a pleasure.

"All pleasures when they are over cease to be pleasures, and we know this beforehand. Hence the idea of a sum of pleasures is meaningless: the sum of zeros is not any larger than a simple zero." It does not overcome meaninglessness to stack up a collection of pleasurable moments.



In order to make good on their claim that Christ has overcome death, not simply death as the end of life but the power of death of which we are speaking here, Christians would have to know something that increases the size of their souls incrementally, something that doesn't just contribute to a sum of nothing.



This, the Gospel submits, would be love. Love overcomes death by giving eternal value to the moment.

Not a single finite pleasure will escape death's zero-sum game, but there is an infinite happiness to be had. Our mortal receptacles, because bound to death, will be empty before the next pouring; but our capacity for immortal things will be increased until we can contain the beatitude for which God created us.

We are made for immortal happiness - and I do not mean by the modifier how long the happiness will last, but from whom it must come. Only the Immortal One can satisfy us, and happiness will elude us until we stand aright in our vocation as eternal beings.



Already, one can participate in this eternal dimension. There is an entity, called the Church, which God has brought into existence and is bringing to completion. Its charter is the incarnation of Jesus, in whom the divine and human mingled, and who is the firstborn of many brothers and sisters with whom he shares his life. Liturgical life is participation in Christ's life in the Father. It is enjoying by means of Holy Spirit the relationship Christ has with God.

Liturgical life unravels death's shroud.

Christian liturgists are formed by baptism, which was called 'a return to Paradise' where death has no dominion; baptisteries were decorated like the Garden of Eden.



Liturgists are fed at the Eucharist, which antidote to death was called the 'medicine of immortality.'



And Christian liturgists are disciplined in spiritual asceticism as a sort of preemptive mortification.

Asceticism turns our allegiance away from the fading goods of the flesh to eternal goods of the spirit, not because the former are not good but because they fade.



In fact, liturgical asceticism consists of nothing but overcoming death by death, and being capacitated to contain the glory of God. Though space, time and matter will evanesce, they are capable of being made into a three-sided liturgical loom on which eternal life is woven, one day to be gently lifted off by the master weaver, without dropping a stitch, and fitted into his own radiant garment. The sepulcher becomes a birth canal.



To celebrate the eternal in time: this is our mystery and our marvel. We are made of such a nature that our receptacles for happiness can be capacitated to contain the Eternal One.

Do you realize, Gregory asks, "how much your Creator has honored you above all creatures? He did not make the heavens in his image, nor the moon, the sun, the beauty of the stars, nor anything else which you can see in the created universe.

You alone are made in the likeness of that nature ... you alone are a similitude of eternal beauty, a receptacle of happiness

Nothing in all creation can equal your grandeur. All the heavens fit into the palm of God's hand.

And though He is so great that He can grasp all creation in His palm, you can wholly embrace Him; He dwells within you, nor is He cramped as he pervades your entire being."



Divine nature mingled with human nature made a new thing. This thing would reshape the receptacle to fit it, if we would, enlarging us so that instead of filling and emptying ourselves, we could be filled with the fullness of life.

To realize that we were made for eternity radically reorientates priorities, as the saints have always witnessed.

“If you realize this you will not allow your eye to rest on anything of this world. Indeed, you will no longer marvel even at the heavens. For how can you admire the heavens, my son, when you see that you are more permanent than they? For the heavens pass away, but you will abide for all eternity with Him who is forever.”



Liturgical asceticism is the attitude toward the world which results from seeing the world in an eschatological light.



C.S. Lewis observed that people in the process of becoming holy “usually have a lot of *time*; you will wonder where it comes from.”



When death has been baffled, even the flow of time can be harnessed. When moments are seasoned with love, even cyclical time can become a progression and growth of the eternal soul.

And then the words of George MacDonald (the man whom Lewis said introduced him to holiness) come with comfort:



“Have I forgotten a thought that came to me, which seemed of the truth, and a revelation to my heart? I wanted to keep it, to have it, to use it by and by, and it is gone! I keep trying and trying to call it back, feeling a poor man till that thought be recovered – to be far more lost, perhaps, in a notebook, into which I shall never look again to find it!

I forget that it is live things God cares about – live truths, not things set down in a book, or in a memory, or embalmed in the joy of knowledge, but things lifting up the heart, things active in an active will.



True, my lost thought might have so worked; but had I faith in God, the maker of thought and memory, I should know that if the thought was a truth ... it must come again; for it is in God – so, like the dead, not beyond any reach: kept for me, I shall have it again.”

So asceticism is not spurning a fluctuating world, it is properly ordering our passions so that even repetitive, cyclical finitude may give birth to the glory of God.

Like a piece of driftwood floating on the circular, cyclical motion of repeatedly rising and falling waves, the soul can be carried forward as it rises and falls on seasons, days, years, repetitive acts, and recurring appetites.



But only if it is light enough to float. The asceticism created by the liturgical life, then, is not a solemn, grave thing: it teaches us to lighten up.