

The City of Man

I would like to talk about evolution. Not the science. I am not qualified. I want to talk about the mythology of evolution. I am qualified to talk about that, and I want you to feel for a moment the grandeur of this mythology.

In the beginning there was nothing. Then, in ways science has not explained there was something. We call it matter, “matter endlessly, aimlessly moving to bring forth it knows not what. Then by some millionth, millionth chance ... conditions at one point of space and time bubble up into that tiny fermentation which we call organic life. At first everything seems to be against” its survival. “But life somehow wins through. With incalculable sufferings ... against all but insuperable obstacles, it spreads, it breeds, it complicates itself ...”

After vast stretches of time “there comes forth a little, naked, shivering, cowering biped, shuffling, not yet fully erect, promising nothing: the product of another millionth, millionth chance. His name ... is Man ... He thrives. He begins killing his Giants. He becomes the Cave Man with his flints and his club, muttering and growling over his enemies’ bones, almost a brute, yet somehow able to invent art, pottery, language, weapons, cookery and nearly everything else ... dragging his screaming mate by her hair ... and cowering before the terrible gods he has invented in his own image.”

At last, at long last, “He learns to master Nature. Science arises and dissipates the superstitions of his infancy. More and more he becomes the controller of his own fate ... {He} now {rules} the planet ... {Genetics} have made certain that only demi-gods will now be born: {psychotherapy} that none of them shall lose or smirch his divinity: economics that they shall have to hand all that demi-gods require. Man has ascended his throne. Man has become God. All is a blaze of glory.”

“To those brought up on (evolution) nothing seems more normal, more natural, more plausible, than that chaos should turn into order, death into life, ignorance into knowledge,” nothingness into the universe as we know it.

The maestros of this mythology would have you think this majestic conquest of nature is the whole story. They conceal the tragedy to come. This story will end, but not to make way for another, even more satisfying chapter in the story of Man. It will just end. The laws of physics teach us that the “The sun will cool – all suns will cool – the whole universe will run down,” like the battery in your cell phone runs down and dies. “Life (every form of life) will be banished without hope of return from every cubic inch of infinite space. All ends in nothingness ... It brings us to the end not of a story, but of all possible stories.” (All quotations in this section are taken from C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, “The Funeral of a Great Myth,” 86-88)

What then would human existence mean: the Bible, Shakespeare, the Declaration of Independence, antibiotics, Hiroshima, the Holocaust, ISIS, all the agony and ecstasy of mankind through the ages? It would mean only what we pretend it means, because there is nothing beyond ourselves to confirm its meaning. There is no ultimate justice we can count on to condemn human brutality. There is no ultimate mercy to pardon the guilt of our brutality. There is no ultimate voice to say of our long struggle against the darkness, “Well done!” When the curtain falls on the long story of Man, it’s done, as though nothing ever happened. Thus runs the master story in the City of Man. It accounts for everything – well, everything except the yearning for eternity, which God planted in every one of us, and which refuses to go away.

The City of God

It is not so in the City of God. **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** (Genesis 1:1) Long before that, God in love decided to create a community on earth He could call “My people.” So, He created Man in His image and likeness. Male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26, 27) The image and likeness of God gave Man the power “to invent art, pottery, language, weapons, cookery and nearly everything else.” God had given Him the spark of divinity we call freedom. He was free to love, and he was free not to love. He could even turn against His Creator. He did just that.

God would have to create His community on earth out of a humanity that came to be **without hope and without God in the world.** (Ephesians 2:12) Humanity was **dead in transgressions and sins.** (Ephesians 2:1) If God did not act, all would be lost. He acted. No one saw it coming. East of the Mediterranean, He planted a band of wandering Arameans, whom we later called the Jews. He began with Abraham and promised that he and his descendants would bless all nations on earth. He fashioned those descendants into His chosen people. For 1500 years God made covenants with Israel and drummed into their soul that He is the only God, the Maker of heaven and earth. Other nations were excluded from God’s chosen people. (Ephesians 2:12)

In the fullness of time and in a mystery God joined Himself with Jewish flesh in blessed Mary’s womb and in His Manhood set about to emancipate all nations from their sins at great cost to Himself. Israel’s moment had arrived, and Israel’s leaders missed it. They refused Him and had Him killed, unwittingly fulfilling God’s eternal purpose.

The New Testament never refers to the death of Christ as a tragedy or a travesty of justice but as a deliberate act of love. **God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** (John 3:16)

A person is now included in God’s chosen people by faith in Jesus Christ. You believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you say publicly, “Jesus is Lord,” and you are baptized into His name. You have come back to life spiritually. The Bible calls this process from God’s decision before the world began to the death of Christ to the next baptism and forward to the New Jerusalem *salvation*. Jesus Christ has saved Mankind from spiritual death.

However, an unexpected misunderstanding arose. The first Christians, all Jews, believed in Jesus, formed the first Church, spread the news about His resurrection, but did not want to tell anyone about it except their fellow Jews. God had entered the world in person through them, and they thought they could keep it a secret.

Christ shattered the misunderstanding. Something unprecedented began to happen in synagogues and house churches of the Roman Empire. Little bands of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus began meeting together to worship Him. It wasn’t easy. They disagreed with each other about how believers should observe the Sabbath. They disagreed about what food they should eat. They disagreed about where they should buy meat. They disagreed and could be disagreeable, but they worshipped together and tried to get along. The unthinkable was happening.

The wisdom of God emerged. There was not to be a Jewish Church and a Gentile Church. There was not to be a Black Church and a White Church and an Asian Church and a Latino Church. There was to be one Church. Those labels may be convenient

shorthand for the ethnic make up of congregations, but if we aren't careful, and we have not been careful, convenience may kill the optic nerve of our spiritual sight, so that we can no longer see that "red and yellow, black and white," all Christians are **members together of one body**. There is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church whom God calls "my people."

The Church had broken out of its Jewish beachhead and begun to fulfill her high calling. In union with Christ the Church worldwide was and is **being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit**. The Church is – and that means you are - the flesh in which the unseen God shows Himself to the world. We are the "anchor that God has sunk into the soil of creation." (Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, 256)

Christ has moved in and made Himself at home in the Church. He aims to have the run of the house and to make necessary changes to the house and to the habits of the house. He lays on His people the burden and the joy of living in a way that is worthy of being His dwelling place on earth. They are to work together to grow the Church out of her recurring ignorance and divisiveness into unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. They infuse the moral wisdom of humanity with new motives. They resist the devil by prayer and the word of God, by being truth tellers and seeking to do what is right in God's eyes, by being peacemakers, and trusting God.

The ages accumulate, like leaves in autumn, and silently, surely, like flowers irrupting in spring, the Church spreads over the whole world. Simultaneously, the Almighty inserts His hand into the glove of history: technology shrinks the world, a global economy emerges, and the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the International Monetary Fund draw the nations closer together. The Lord of all is preparing the world for "the one far off, divine event toward which the whole creation moves": **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ**.

Then, one day, "even as rafts float down a river, So shall the centuries drift, trailing like a caravan, Coming for judgment, out of the dark, to" Christ. (*Doctor Zhivago*, 559) **I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.** (Revelation 20:12) Ultimate justice will be rendered. Ultimate mercy will be extended. Rewards will be distributed to those who withstood the darkness.

I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:2-3) Man has been raised from the grave he dug for himself to the glory prepared for Him before the creation of the world.

Take Aways

We have come to the end of that story and to the beginning of all other stories we can't wait to live. Thus runs the master story in the City of God. It is the story of God and Man. It accounts for everything, and it satisfies the yearning for eternity in each of us. It

is true, whether anyone believes it or not. I believe it because it has ravished my heart. It ravishes my heart, because I believe it.

At the center of this story is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead back to life in an indestructible body. That act teaches us that His death on Good Friday was not a tragedy or a travesty of justice. It was the wisdom of God and the power of God. It was the expiation of our sins and the sins of the whole world. It was God's way of reconciling the world to Himself. The resurrection of Jesus teaches us that death has started to work backwards. A new creation has begun.

The Church bears witness to this master story. In a mystery she embodies and carries forward the new creation right under the nose of the old creation. She does it by her worship, her proclamation of the gospel, her works of mercy, and her repentance.

God brought you here this morning – to hear the master stories of the City of Man and the City of God. You will join sides with one story or the other. These stories set before you **life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life.** (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Choosing life means aligning yourself with the City of God. That means you don't stand aloof from the Church, which alone tells and embodies the master story of the City of God. Join yourself to the Church. Join yourself to this church, Brandywine Valley Baptist Church. You can find here a place to anchor, where you won't be blown around by every wind of doctrine and by an incoherent public culture that calls good evil and evil good. Christ is here. Hope is here. Reconciliation is here. Discipline is here. Why don't you be here?