

THE PULSE OF SPIRIT



EMISSARIES
OF DIVINE LIGHT

RAISE THE CUP!

10 DECEMBER 2007

Here is a quote from comedian Jay Leno: “With hurricanes, tornadoes, fires out of control, mud slides, flooding, severe thunderstorms tearing up the country from one end to another, and with the threat of bird flu and terrorist attacks, are we sure this is a good time to take God out of the Pledge of Allegiance?” He’s referring, of course, to the phrase “one Nation under God” and the objection of those who see this as a mixture of church and state forbidden by the Constitution. What, actually, does it mean to be “under God”? That can sound like subjection to an intolerable dictatorship. God is sitting up in the sky somewhere, a symbol of universal oppression. But when I look up into the clear blue atmosphere of day, I don’t feel oppressed. Here is a surround of enormous generosity; here is the sun giving life to the earth, and the air renewing forever the essences of growth. Is it so terrible to be under that? Look up! Here is a context of unfathomable love, within which, and under which, we exist.

The endeavor to deny that context is a primary aspect of what has been called the “fall of man.” That phrase describes an event that may have occurred some millennia in the past. But it happens constantly in the affairs of human beings today; it happens when we neglect, in any moment of our lives, to look up to the beauty of the context in which we exist. Then down we go, nuzzling around in the earth in search of some other reason for our existence.

“Just what is my reason for being here? Am I to be a musician? Am I to be a laborer? What is my purpose in life? Am I to make a million dollars?” (That doesn’t sound like much these days, with several hundred billionaires in the country.) “What shall I do?” So we search on the horizontal plane, forgetting what context we are under. In childhood we are asked to make various choices. “What are you going to study? Engineering? Education?” Those were the two paths open to me when I entered university. Should I become an engineer, like several of my uncles or my brother? Should I become a teacher, like a number of other members of my family? Those seemed the only options open to me. Well I didn’t particularly like either of them, but I had to make a choice, so as the lesser of two evils, I chose teaching. But was it a choice? As David Lesser pointed out to us last week, in that context, squirreling around in the hereditary state of human nature, any choices we make are totally imaginary.

So, on the basis of such choices I moved in a certain direction—probably not very different from the direction other choices would have led—and came to a juncture where I sensed a need for something else. Here are some lines from “The Buried Life,” a poem by Matthew Arnold, speaking of such a crisis: “But often in the din of strife / There rises an unspeakable desire / After the knowledge of our buried life.... / And we have been on many thousand lines, / And we have shown, on each, spirit and power; / But hardly have we, for one little hour, / Been on our own line, have we been ourselves.”

The various opportunities that open to us in that horizontal context do provide, apparently, considerable chance for power—whether it’s the million-dollar syndrome or the engineering syndrome, constructing great buildings, or the teaching syndrome, imparting knowledge and inspiration to these little creatures under your control. But it is all somehow unsatisfactory; we hanker after another existence. Arnold speaks of it as “buried life.” And we go digging for that buried life, trying to find ourselves, searching the depths of our personal psyche.

Why do we dig for ourselves? Why do we seek our destiny in the earth? Is it because we somehow realize that this outer form belongs in the grave? That is where we shall find it, if we dig deep enough. Indeed, the flesh belongs in the grave to the extent that it is not fully empowered by that which we speak of as “God.” This is as good a word as any to describe the universal context of our living. When God is ignored, we have to make great efforts to find ourselves, to dig ourselves up from somewhere underground. But if, being under God, we want to find the reality of life, what need we do? Look up!

Arnold’s contemporary, Robert Browning, in “Rabbi Ben Ezra,” fairly shouts that command: “Look not thou down but up! / To uses of a cup, / The festal board, lamp’s flash and trumpet’s peal.” There’s something exciting going on when you actually look up, raise that cup, give a toast to what is higher. “My cup runneth over” then; something real is known, and it is contained in the material substance I’ve been given for this moment’s use. It is a cup, this flesh, the context around me, this nation—wherever it is I find myself, the circumstances of my life are a cup full of blessing.

It is written that Jesus spoke of the “cup” he was required to drink. The first three Gospels say that he prayed for this cup to pass from him, as if somehow God was giving him the crucifixion. It was not God who gave him that cup but the circumstance of an unregenerate and unfeeling humanity. Nevertheless he was willing to accept it as if it was a cup given by God, and by doing so he transformed the cup. John’s Gospel describes the situation more accurately. When Peter had drawn a sword to defend the Master, “Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” Christians, generally, have interpreted those words as referring to the cup of crucifixion. Jesus had to go through that ordeal, because his Father had ordained it. Not on your life! The cup ordained of the Father was a cup that shines as the sun. How is it described in the Psalms? “The sun...rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race?” Blue sky, beauty! He was drinking the cup of the universe. Human beings handed him a cup of crucifixion, and he accepted that merely as a part of what needed to be done.

What we need to do with our life in this moment, in this moment, in this moment, has very little to do with the path we apparently have to walk. There is really no choice at all in that. You pretty well have to walk the path you have to walk, given the character of the outer form in which you exist and the character of the situation round you. But if you are in fact drinking the cup of the preservation and radiant expression of universal truth, then there’s no choice but to walk through the circumstances as they are, but to do it in a way that transforms them. You bring something into the circumstances that hasn’t been there before—because YOU are there!

A few weeks ago, in one of the services where Jane Anetrini spoke, she said this isn’t a spectator sport. You’re not sitting on the sidelines, watching someone else bring the power and glory of God into this life. Or if you

are, you're not going to see much, because if you are sitting on the sidelines you cannot actually see what is being presented. You can't see the cup that you're being asked to drink. You see only the cup that the surround of this degenerate humanity is offering. And you think you have to slave through that. But if you're in the game, actually in God's game, you see a totally different cup. You see it with something more than mortal vision. This cup is not evident to any of the five senses, or even to the sixth. What's that?—intuition, ESP, being able to “feel something out”? Most of the time when people say that they're listening for the word of God, or listening for life's word as to the next step they should take, they don't really mean they're listening for life's word. They're listening with this ESP to something else on the horizontal plane. It's just another way of observing the mixture of events and attitudes that exist round about and in one's own consciousness.

Martin Exeter, in a service some years ago, pointed out that beyond these six senses, there is a seventh. That is the one we use when we look up. At first we may not see too much, looking up, and it may even cause us to stumble. You look up and you trip over a stone and fall flat on your face. You say, “Oh, that wasn't a good idea, I shouldn't have looked up. Things went wrong for me when I looked up. I guess I'd better back down from that one and buy into the human culture which tells me to use only the six senses.” For most people, “only use five,” but for those who are “enlightened,” use the sixth. To sense what? More of what's in the horizontal world! Rarely, very rarely does anyone recognize, let alone say it to oneself, let alone genuinely act upon it, that there is another sense available. Actually we use that sense unconsciously or we wouldn't stay alive at all. But we keep closing it off and closing it off, in order to go digging in the earth for the self we think is hidden there somewhere.

What I'm seeking to bring to focus here this morning is a knowledge deep-ingrained in all of us, which has surfaced more in some than in others. Now that still sounds like something we might need to dig for, but not so. Words are as yet inadequate. The “buried life” that Arnold wrote of is the cup of a larger context for which we have had so little language, so little ability to state it in terms we can agree on, bring to focus, and say, “THIS is what we're about.” We can say “God,” but there are so many interpretations of the word that it leads off into all sorts of nooks and crannies of the horizontal world. We can say “love,” but depending on how you say it—“lo-o-o-ove...”—well, you're back in the nooks and crannies of human consciousness. We have as yet very inadequate language to describe what we're about. But somehow we know it. And we're knowing it more and more to the extent that we're actually in there, playing the game—and refusing, as we begin to discover this language, refusing to let anyone take it from us.

Here's an analogy from human language: About a century and a half ago, a few people in the Ukraine began to use the Ukrainian language to express in poetry the feelings of their inner hearts. It hadn't been done before, it hadn't been written down. And they had to expand the alphabet, to find letters to use which weren't in the Russian language that had been imposed upon them. You know, the easiest way to subject one people under the heel of another is to take away the subject people's language. Well, about mid-nineteenth century the Ukrainians began to use their own language. They had always spoken it in their own homes, but now began to use it to express their joy and sense of beauty in a written form. Yesterday I came across an essay on the Internet, published by Russia.com, claiming that the Ukrainian language had never existed, that it was invented by a few people in the nineteenth century—Shevchenko and Nechui-Levitsky and a few others—with the encouragement of Poland and other European nations, in order to divide and antagonize the Russians.

And so, here is this stupid lie being promulgated that there never was a native Ukrainian language, that it was an invention. And people will say that about the language of the Kingdom! “It’s something you’ve invented.” Don’t let them say it. Don’t let anyone ever get at you to say that the way in which you are bringing the truth of love into the world now is merely your own invention and therefore has no worth. Let us play the game we have to play, under God, with the sense—with all those six senses of the outer world, yes, but most importantly with this seventh sense that is the gift of an ability to look up. And, looking up, we also look out and around and below, and we do not stumble, because the seventh sense, we discover, actually includes all the others, makes all the others reasonable, intelligent and workable. And we do then have a language, the language of the truth of love, going far beyond any human language but expressible in human language, expressible in our actions, expressible in all the ways in which we allow our being to be known on earth. Express it, express it, express it!

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