

Jesus Christ - Our Redeemer and Judge

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him (Revelations 1:7)

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Readings from Early Church Fathers on the Twofold Coming of Christ



Christ Pantocrator (Ruler of All) - mosaic, 1148 AD, dome of Cathedral of Cefal, Palermo, Italy

Do not resist the first coming, and the second will not terrify you

by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)

Then all the trees of the forest will exult before the face of the Lord, for he has come, he has come to judge the earth. He has come the first time, and he will come again. At his first coming, his own voice declared in the gospel: Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds. What does he mean by hereafter? Does he not mean that the Lord will come at a future time when all the nations of the earth will be striking their breasts in grief? Previously he came through his preachers, and he filled the whole world. Let us not resist his first coming, so that we may not dread the second.

What then should the Christian do? He ought to use the world, not become its slave. And what does this mean? It means having, as though not having. So says the Apostle: *My brethren, the appointed time is short: from now on let those who have wives live as though they had none; and those who mourn as though they were not mourning; and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing; and those who buy as though they had no goods; and those who deal with this world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away. But I wish you to be without anxiety.* He who is without anxiety waits without fear until his Lord comes. For what sort of love of Christ is it to fear his coming? Brothers, do we not have to blush for shame? We love him, yet we fear his coming. Are we really certain that we love him? Or do we love our sins more? Therefore let us

hate our sins and love him who will exact punishment for them. He will come whether we wish it or not. Do not think that because he is not coming just now, he will not come at all. He will come, you know not when; and provided he finds you prepared, your ignorance of the time of his coming will not be held against you.

All the trees of the forest will exult. He has come the first time, and he will come again to judge the earth; he will find those rejoicing who believed in his first coming, for he has come.

He will judge the world with equity and the peoples in his truth. What are equity and truth? He will gather together with him for the judgement his chosen ones, but the others he will set apart; for he will place some on his right, others on his left. What is more equitable, what more true than that they should not themselves expect mercy from the judge, who themselves were unwilling to show mercy before the judge's coming. Those, however, who were willing to show mercy will be judged with mercy. For it will be said to those placed on his right: *Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world.* And he reckons to their account their works of mercy: *For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink.*

What is imputed to those placed on his left side? That they refused to show mercy. And where will they go? *Depart into the everlasting fire.* The hearing of this condemnation will cause much wailing. But what has another psalm said? *The just man will be held in everlasting remembrance; he will not fear the evil report.* What is the evil report? *Depart into the everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels.* Whoever rejoices to hear the good report will not fear the bad. This is equity, this is truth.

Or do you, because you are unjust, expect the judge not to be just? Or because you are a liar, will the truthful one not be true? Rather, if you wish to receive mercy, be merciful before he comes; forgive whatever has been done against you; give of your abundance. Of whose possessions do you give, if not from his? If you were to give of your own, it would be largess; but since you give of his, it is restitution. *For what do you have, that you have not received?* These are the sacrifices most pleasing to God: mercy, humility, praise, peace, charity. Such as these, then, let us bring and, free from fear, we shall await the coming of the judge who *will judge the world in equity and the peoples in his truth.*

Quotes from early church fathers on the Twofold Coming of Christ

- » [The Twofold coming of Jesus Christ](#), by Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD)
- » [Keep Watch, he is to come again](#), by Ephrem of Edessa (306-373 AD)
- » [When Christ comes, God will be seen by men](#), by Irenaeus of Lyons (115-202 AD)
- » [Don't resist the first coming, lest you dread the second](#), by Augustine (354-430 AD)



The Last Judgement in Revelation

by Romano Guardini

Near the end of his life, during his last visit to Jerusalem, Jesus spoke these words:

“And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty. And he shall send his angels with a trumpet, and a great voice: and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, and from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them.” (Matthew 24:29-31)

And again: “When the Son of Man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty. And all nations shall be gathered together before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. Then shall the King say to them that shall be on his right hand: ‘Come, blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.’ Then shall the just answer him, saying: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; thirsty, and gave you drink? And when did we see you a stranger, and take you in? Or naked, and cover you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?’ And

the King answering, shall say to them: ‘Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me.’

And then he shall say to them also that shall be on his left hand: ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink. I was a stranger, and you took me not in; naked, and you covered me not; sick and in prison, and you did not visit me.’ Then they also shall answer him, saying: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he shall answer them, saying: ‘Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it unto me.’ And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

If we shake off the seeming familiarity which comes from having heard them often, these passages strike us suddenly as strange and disconcerting. This is not how we should expect things to be. Here premises are taken for granted to which we are not sure we can give assent. But if we have some acquaintance with revelation, and know enough of men to treat certain of their unconscious assumptions with caution—and these are the first steps in Christian knowledge—it is this very feeling that here is something disconcerting that alerts us to the fact that we are face to face with an essential and crucial element in our faith. The disconcerting element here lies in the concrete, the personal approach.

Habit of the modern mind

The habit of the modern mind is to take seriously only that kind of thinking that interprets everything in terms of natural necessity or of intellectual laws. Existence for us has become a system of matter and energy, of law and natural order. Every process takes place within that system. Children or simple folk may think of natural objects as being manipulated by superior beings, as they are in legends and fairy tales, but the educated adult does not. For him the first condition of intelligent thinking is to conceive of the universe as an interconnection of physical and spiritual laws, which govern man and his destinies as well as the historical process.

If a final judgment is posited—a procedure, that is, by which the life and deeds of man are scrutinized, judged, and given their eternal value—we would have to think of it as a judgment in which man, or more properly his spirit, comes into the unveiled light of God, and in that light, his life becomes transparent, and his worth is made evident.

Christ comes as judge

In Jesus’ discourse on the Last Judgment, however, this is not at all what takes place. The judge is not an abstract deity, an all-wise, all-righteous spirit, but Christ, the Son made man. Nor does man, by the mere fact of his death, or the world, simply by coming to an end, appear before God. Rather, it is Christ who “comes.” He comes to the world and wrests it from a condition in which “this-sidedness” and the subjection to natural law make possible the obscurity of history. A final investigation is carried out which brings all existing things into the presence of Christ. Men, not only their spirits, appear before him—men in their concrete, soul-and-body actuality; and not individual men only, but “the world.” In order to make this possible, the body—the deceased, corrupt body—rises up from the dead, not by any natural necessity, but in obedience to the summons of Christ. And the act of judgment is not simply illumination in the eternal light and holiness of God, but an act of Jesus Christ, who was once upon earth and now reigns in eternal glory. He reviews mankind in its whole history, as well as each particular man, passes judgment, and assigns to each man that form of being which accords with his worth in the sight of God.

Sheer fantasy or myth?

To modern man, all this appears as sheer fantasy—at best as symbol. To his mentality, this kind of thinking is on the level of children and primitives. Mythology, folklore, and fairy tales treat universal processes in this

anthropomorphic manner, that is, as modeled on human conduct. Children, as soon as they grow up, and primitive people, when they become civilized, perceive that the universe is governed by inflexible laws and must be conceived of in philosophical or scientific terms. The Christian teaching of the Last Judgment is just a myth and must give way to a more serious and advanced view of reality.

A direct intervention in human history

Again we have to decide where we stand with regard to revelation. Are we to confine our faith to our emotions, and adapt our thinking to that of current views, or shall we be Christians in our minds also? For what modern man describes as childish, primitive, and anthropomorphic is the essential, distinguishing quality of our faith. For when the worth of the world and of history are finally determined, it will not be by universal natural or spiritual laws, nor by confrontation with an absolute, divine reality, but by a divine act. Let it be well understood—by an act, and not through the workings of some force of nature or spirit, just as the economy of salvation does not rest upon some higher natural order but upon a direct intervention of God, which takes place in the sphere of human history and finds constant expression in this sphere; and just as the world did not evolve as a natural reality from natural causes, but as God's work, summoned into being by his free and all-powerful word.

If we want to be Christians in our thinking also, then we cannot conceive of the relation of God to the world, to man, and to the whole of existence in terms derived from natural science or metaphysics, but only in concepts belonging to the personal sphere; that is, precisely in the despised anthropomorphic concepts of action, decision, destiny, and freedom. Such is the language of Scripture, and when a man has striven for truth with sufficient sincerity and above all with sufficient patience for false notions to fall away and things to show themselves in their true light, he comes to see that in the final sifting of values, what really meets the case are those so-called anthropomorphic concepts.

A sign of contradiction

The judgment is the last in the series of God's acts. It proceeds from his free counsels, and is carried out by him whose intervention in history was rejected by men at his appearance upon earth, but whose destiny, since God is faithful, accomplished our redemption. Throughout history, he has remained as a "sign that will be contradicted," (Luke 2:34) as the touchstone for men and for nations. It is he who executes the judgment. He is doing it because he is God's Son, because he is the Word "through whom all things were made," (John 1:3) and to whom the world belongs, whether the world acknowledges it or not.

How does God's judgment take place?

The strangeness which reverses our scientific and philosophic notions reaches still deeper. How does this judgment take place? On what is it based, and according to what standards does it determine a man's worth?

At first glance we might assume that what is judged would be a man's actions and omissions, his deeds as well as his character, the details as much as the whole, each according to the multiplicity of rules and norms pertaining to it. Instead, we see everything fused into only one thing: love—the love that is aroused by compassion for man's need. And what is here in question is plainly that first and greatest commandment, and the second which is like unto it, as Jesus taught in the Gospel, the commandment of love, of which the apostle speaks as of "the fulfilling of the law" (Matthew 24:37-39; Romans 13:10). Consequently, although it is only the love for one's neighbor that is mentioned, the commandment includes the whole realm of love; only love is spoken of, but this love includes doing and becoming and being what is right.

To love Christ

How will this standard of love be established and applied? The judge, we might suppose, would say, "You have obeyed the law of love and are therefore accepted," or, "You have denied the law of love, and are therefore rejected." What he says, however, is, "You are accepted because you have shown love to me; you are rejected

because you denied me love.” This, too, is comprehensible, we might answer, since love is the first commandment and should be practiced toward all men, and since Christ, who enjoins this commandment and fulfilled it himself to the uttermost, has placed himself, as it were, behind each man to lend final weight to each individual being.

The highest standard of love

This might well be so, but once we examine the context without bias, we find that this is not what Christ teaches. The highest standard of love is not the love Christ preaches and to which all are obligated, including Christ himself; the highest standard of love is Christ himself. It begins in him and persists through him. Outside of Christ, it is nonexistent, and philosophical disquisitions on the subject have as little to do with this kind of love as he who in the New Testament is called the Father has to do with “the divinity of the heavenly sphere” or the concept of “cause and effect” has to do with God’s providence.

The Christian meaning of judgment

Now there opens before us the uniqueness, the awesomeness and, yes, the scandal of the Christian meaning of judgment: man will be judged according to his relationship to Christ. Truthfulness, justice, faithfulness, chastity, and whatever else is considered ethical are in their deepest meaning the right relationship to Christ. If we speak of truth, we imply a general attitude of the mind, namely, the fact that we recognize something in the light of eternal reality. But in the prologue to his Gospel, John gives us to understand that this interpretation of truth is but an interpolated, conditional link. Ultimately, truth is the Word, the Logos himself, and knowledge, accordingly, is knowing the Logos, Christ, and all things in him.

The same applies to judgment. If we speak of goodness, we imply the highest value; and by right conduct, we understand the realization of good. But according to the discourse on the Last Judgment, Christ is the good, and to do good means to love Christ. Truth and goodness, in the final analysis, are no mere abstract values and concepts, but someone—Jesus Christ. Reversing the approach, we might say that every intimation of truth, however fragmentary, is also the beginning of a knowledge of Christ. Similarly, any charitable action is directed toward Christ, and reaches him in the end, just as any wicked action, whatever its immediate context, is, in the end, an attack upon him. Goodness may shine out in various places, in man, things, and events; but in its essence it shines forth Jesus Christ. The doer need have no thought of Christ; he may think of other people only, but his act ultimately reaches Christ. He need not even know Christ and may never have heard of him, yet what is done is done to Christ.

The fulfillment of redemption

To pierce with his glance the width of the whole world and the course of thousands of years, the life of each man and of each nation and community, to judge and affix to each the meaning it bears eternally, is God’s act of doom. Christ will come and execute that judgment. It will be irrevocable because it is true, because it is the exact account without remainder of every man, every community of men. It is irrevocable also because it is an act of power as much as of truth, power that is absolute and irresistible. By this judgment the state of man and of mankind will be settled before God forever.

But Christ is not only Judge; he is also Redeemer. Even as Judge he is Redeemer. The judgment is not the revenge of the offended Son of God, not his personal triumph over his enemies. By saying that truth and goodness are a person—Christ—it is not suggested that any personal element would intrude and blur the impartial validity of truth and goodness. The judgment is justice, yet not justice in and for itself, but justice bound up with the living mind and love of Christ. The Last Judgment is the fulfillment of redemption.

Greater than history

The vastness of such a view of things is overwhelming. It disrupts and reverses modern thinking and its conception of existence as the expression of natural law or a philosophical system. It is not ideas and laws that matter, but

reality. The most real of realities is a person, the Son of God made man. He is what he was, Jesus of Nazareth. But he will be manifest as Lord, mightier than the world, greater than history, and more comprehensive than all that is called idea, value, or moral law. These things exist and are valid, but only as rays from his light.

Seeing Christ in everything

The doctrine of the Last Judgment is, at bottom, a revelation of Christ. It shows us, too, the task which confronts us if we want to be Christians in the true sense of the word. It implies seeing Christ in everything, carrying his image in our hearts with such intensity that it lifts us above the world, above history and the works of men, and enables us to see those things for what they are, to weigh them and assign to them their eternal value—in a word, to be their judges.

[This article is excerpted from *Eternal Life: What You Need to Know About Death, Judgment, and Life Everlasting*, Chapter 4, by Romano Guardini, 1998 edition by [Sophia Institute Press](#), Manchester, New Hampshire, USA. Used with permission.]



Romano Guardini (1885-1968) was an influential Catholic philosopher, author, and priest in Germany. He was chaplain for a Catholic youth movement and chair of the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Berlin until the Nazis forced him to resign in 1939. He openly opposed the Nazi ideology. His books, lectures, and homilies influenced many Christian thinkers, especially in Central Europe, including Josef Pieper and Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI).

Guardini's book, *The Last Things*, was first published in German in 1940 and in 1966 by Werkbund-Verlag, Würzburg, Germany, under the title *Die Letzten Dinge: Die christliche Lehre vom Tode, der Läuterung nach dem Tode, Auferstehung, Gericht und Ewigkeit*. Copyright © 1989 Matthias-Grünwald, Mainz (second paperback edition 1995). All of the rights of the Author are vested in the Catholic Academy in Bavaria. The 1998 edition, *Eternal Life: What You Need to Know About Death, Judgment, and Life Everlasting*, published by Sophia Institute Press uses Pantheon's 1954 translation by Charlotte E. Forsyth and Grace B. Branham, entitled *The Last Things*, with slight revisions to that text. English translation Copyright © 1954 by Random House, Inc. This translation published by arrangement with Pantheon Books, a Division of Random House, Inc.

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The Last Judgment, painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, Vatican 1536-1541

Jesus the Coming Judge

by Tom Wright

Introduction: From the very beginning of Christianity – it's already there in some of the earliest traditions – we discover the belief that the Jesus who will appear at the end will take the role of judge. This is not an isolated belief. Indeed, within its Jewish context, it is more readily explicable than the parousia itself. However, it's important that we explore its meaning within early Christianity, and its significance for today and tomorrow. Modern man has sloth, that is, sorrow about God, because God is dead to him. He is the cosmic orphan. Nothing can take the place of his dead Father; all idols fail, and bore. When God is dead, it is the time of the twilight of the gods as well.

The picture of Jesus as the coming judge is the central feature of another absolutely vital and non-negotiable Christian belief: that there will indeed *be* a judgment in which the creator God will set the world right once and for all. The word 'judgment' has carried negative overtones for a good many people in our liberal and post-liberal world. We need to remind ourselves that throughout the Bible, not least in the Psalms, God's coming judgment is a good thing, something to be celebrated, longed for, yearned over. It causes people to shout for joy, and indeed the trees of the field to clap their hands.¹ In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance and

oppression, the thought that there might be a coming day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be. Faced with a world in rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God *must* be a God of judgment. The liberal optimism of the nineteenth century had a long run for its money, outlasting some of the more obvious counter-arguments provided by the huge systemic evil of the twentieth century. But more recent theology has returned to the theme of judgment, recognizing that the biblical analysis of evil corresponds more closely to reality.²

The Old Testament hope for the creator God to bring judgment and justice to the world, to set the world right, became focused in the later biblical period on Israel's longing to see God overturn the oppressive regimes of the pagan world. It would be like a great, cosmic law-court scene. Israel (or at least the righteous within Israel) would play the part of the helpless defendant. The Gentiles (or at least the particularly wicked ones) would play the part of the arrogant bullies who would at last meet their match, and get the justice (the 'judgment') they deserved.

The most famous scenario which expresses all this is Daniel 7. There, the Gentile nations are depicted as huge, powerful monsters, while Israel, or the righteous within Israel, are depicted as an apparently defenceless human being, 'one like a son of man'. The scene is a great law-court setting, whose climax comes when the judge, the Ancient of Days, takes his seat and finds in favour of the son of man against the monsters, of Israel against the pagan empires. The son of man is then given authority and dominion over all the nations, in a deliberate echo of Adam being given authority over the animals in Genesis 1 and 2.

What happens when this is transposed to the New Testament? Answer: we find Jesus himself taking on the role of the 'son of man', suffering then vindicated. Then, as in Daniel, he receives from the Supreme Judge the task of bringing this judgment to bear on the world. This accords with numerous biblical and post-biblical passages in which Israel's Messiah, the one who represents Israel in person, is given the task of judgment. In Isaiah 11, the Messiah's judgment creates a world where the wolf and the lamb lie down side by side. In Psalm 2, the Gentiles tremble when the Messiah is enthroned. Again and again the Messiah is stated to be God's agent to bring the whole world, not just Israel, back into the state of justice and truth for which God longs as much as we do. So the early Christians, who had concluded from Easter that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, naturally identified him as the one through whom God would put the world to rights. They didn't simply deduce this from their belief in his future coming or appearing. Actually, it may have been the other way round: their belief in Jesus' messiahship may have been a decisive factor in the emergence of the belief in his final coming as judge.

Certainly by the time of Paul this belief is well established. The summary of what Paul said on the Areopagus in Athens concludes with the statement that God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world by a man whom he has appointed, giving assurance of the fact by raising him from the dead.³ Paul can refer almost casually (in Romans 2.16) to the fact that, according to the gospel he preaches, God will judge the secrets of all hearts through Jesus the Messiah. Although people often suppose that, because Paul taught justification by faith, not works, there can be no room for a future judgment 'according to works', this only goes to show how much some have radically misunderstood him. The future judgment according to deeds, a judgment exercised by Jesus at his 'judgment seat', is clearly taught in, for instance, Romans 14.9–10, 2 Corinthians 5.10 and elsewhere. Equally important, these are not isolated places where Paul is quoting a tradition that doesn't fully fit with his developed theology. They are fully and tightly integrated into his thinking and preaching. For him, as much as for anyone else in the early church, the final judgment, exercised by Jesus the Messiah, was a vital element, without which all sorts of other things simply wouldn't stand up.

In particular (though there isn't space to develop this here) this picture of future judgment according to works is actually the basis of Paul's theology of justification by faith.⁴ The point of justification by faith isn't that God suddenly ceases to care about good behaviour or morality. Justification by faith cannot be collapsed, as so many in

the last two centuries have effectively tried to do, either into a generalized liberal view of a laissez-faire morality or into the romantic view that what we do outwardly doesn't matter at all since the only thing that matters is what we're like inwardly. (Those who over-anxiously defend a doctrine from which all mention of 'works' has been rigorously excluded should consider with whom they are colluding at this point!) No: justification by faith is what happens in the *present time*, anticipating the verdict of the *future day* when God judges the world. It is God's advance declaration that, when someone believes the gospel, that person is already a member of his family no matter who their parents were, that their sins are forgiven because of Jesus' death, and that on the future day, as Paul says, 'there is now no condemnation' (Romans 8.1). Clearly there are further questions to be asked about how the verdict issued in the present can so confidently be supposed to anticipate correctly the verdict issued in the future on the basis of the entire life led. Paul addresses those questions in several ways at several points, particularly in his expositions of the work of the Holy Spirit. But for Paul (and this is the only point I am making in the present context) there was no clash between present justification by faith and future judgment according to works. The two need, and depend upon, one another. To go any further would demand a fairly thorough exposition of Romans and Galatians, for which there is obviously no space here. [#5](#)

Once again, the Pauline picture is filled out by other references in the New Testament. This is no flash in the pan or Pauline idiosyncrasy; it is common early Christian belief. [#6](#) It is the central point in that long paragraph in John 5 which caused so many headaches to those earlier scholars who tried to make John's gospel teach simply a present eternal life, rather than also the future one:

The father doesn't judge anyone; he has handed over all judgment to the son, so that everyone should honour the son just as they honour the father. Anyone who doesn't honour the son doesn't honour the father who sent him. I'm telling you the solemn truth: anyone who hears my word, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life. Such a person won't come into judgment; they will have passed out of death into life. I'm telling you the solemn truth: the time is coming – in fact, it's here already! – when the dead will hear the voice of God's son, and those who hear it will live. You see, just as the father has life in himself, in the same way he has given the son the privilege of having life in himself. He has even given him authority to pass judgment, because he is the son of man. Don't be surprised at this. The time is coming, you see, when everyone in the tombs will hear his voice. They will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. I can't do anything on my own authority. I judge on the basis of what I hear. And my judgment is just, because I'm not trying to carry out my own wishes, but the wishes of the one who sent me. [7](#)

The main point to notice, once more, is that all the future judgment is highlighted basically as good news, not bad. Why so? It is good news, first, because the one through whom God's justice will finally sweep the world is not a hard-hearted, arrogant or vengeful tyrant, but the Man of Sorrows, who was acquainted with grief; the Jesus who loved sinners and died for them; the Messiah who took the world's judgment upon himself on the cross. Of course, this also means that he is quite uniquely placed to judge the systems and rulers that have carved up the world between them, and the New Testament points this out here and there. [8](#) In particular, as we have already seen and as some medieval theologians and artists highlighted, Jesus comes as judge much as Moses descended the mountain into the camp where idolatry and revelry was in full swing. The Sistine Chapel itself reminds us of the day when careless and casual living, as well as downright wickedness, will be brought to book. [9](#)



Trumpets and opening of books - detail from The Last Judgment, painted by Michelangelo

Within the New Testament, and within subsequent Christian theology, this judgment is *anticipated* under certain circumstances. I have already spoken of justification by faith. The same is true, in 1 Corinthians, for the eucharist: eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus means confronting here and now the one who is the judge as well as the saviour of all.¹⁰ And the same is true, of course, of the work of the Spirit, as we see once more in John 16. When the Spirit comes, declares Jesus, he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and judgment.¹¹ The final judgment, in other words, will be anticipated in the present world through the Spirit-led work and witness of Jesus' followers.

Second coming and judgment

The so-called second coming of Jesus, then, when properly understood in the New Testament and subsequent Christian teaching, is no afterthought to the basic Christian message. It hasn't been as it were bolted on to the outside of a gospel message which could stand complete without it. We cannot relegate it to the margins of our thinking, our living and our praying; if we do, we shall pull everything else out of shape. I now want, briefly, to draw out a few final points of relevance for us today.

First, the appearing or coming of Jesus offers the complete answer to the literalist fundamentalists on the one hand and to the proponents of that 'cosmic Christ' idea I outlined in Chapter 5. Jesus remains other than the church, other than the world, even while being present to both by the Spirit. He confronts the world in the present, and will do so personally and visibly in the future. He is the one to whom every knee shall bow (Philippians 2.10–11), as well as the one who took the form of a servant and was obedient to the death of the cross (Philippians 2.6–8). Indeed, as Paul stresses, he is the first because he did the second. In his appearing we find neither a dualist rejection of the present world, nor simply his arrival like a spaceman into the present world, but the *transformation* of the present world, and ourselves within it, so that it will at last be put to rights, and we with it. Death and decay will themselves be overcome, and God will be all in all.

This means, second, that a proper shape and balance are given to the Christian worldview. Like the Jewish worldview, but radically opposed to the Stoic, the Platonic, the Hindu and the Buddhist worldviews, Christians tell a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. Not to have closure at the end of the story – to be left with a potentially

endless cycle, round and round with either the same things happening again and again, or simply perhaps the long outworking of karma – would be the very antithesis of the story told by the apostles, and by the long line of their Jewish predecessors. And, precisely because Jesus is not collapsed into the church, or indeed the world, we can renounce on the one hand the triumphalism that conveniently makes his sovereign lordship an excuse for its own, and on the other hand the despair that comes when we see such hopes dashed, as they always will be, in the follies and failings of even the best and greatest Christian organizations, structures, leaders and followers. Because we live between ascension and appearing, joined to Jesus Christ by the Spirit but still awaiting his final coming and presence, we can be *both* properly humble *and* properly confident. ‘We proclaim not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants through Jesus.’¹²

Third, following directly from this, the task of the church between ascension and *parousia* is therefore set free both from the self-driven energy that imagines it has to build God’s kingdom all by itself, and the despair that supposes it can’t do anything until Jesus comes again. We do not ‘build the kingdom’ all by ourselves, but we do build *for* the kingdom. All that we do in faith, hope and love in the present, in obedience to our ascended Lord and in the power of his Spirit, will be enhanced and transformed at his appearing.¹³ This too brings a note of judgment, of course, as Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 3.10–17. The ‘day’ will disclose what sort of work each builder has done.

In particular, the present rule of the ascended Jesus Christ and the assurance of his final appearing in judgment should give us – which goodness knows we need today – some clarity and realism in our political discourse. Far too often Christians slide into a vaguely spiritualized version of one or other major political system or party. What would happen if we were to take seriously our stated belief that Jesus Christ is already the Lord of the world, and that at his name, one day, every knee would bow?

You might suppose that this would inject merely a note of pietism, and make us then avoid the real issues – or, indeed, to attempt a theocratic take-over bid. But to think in either of those ways would only show how deeply we have been conditioned by the Enlightenment split between religion and politics. What happens if we reintegrate them? As with specifically Christian work, so with political work done in Jesus’ name: confessing Jesus as the ascended and coming Lord frees up the political task from the necessity to pretend that this or that programme or leader has the key to Utopia (if only we would elect him or her). Equally, it frees up our corporate life from the despair that comes when we realize that, once again, our political systems let us down.

The ascension and appearing of Jesus constitute a radical challenge to the entire thought-structure of the Enlightenment (and of course several other movements). And, since our present western politics is very much the creation of the Enlightenment, we should think seriously about the ways in which, as thinking Christians, we can and should bring that challenge to bear. I know this is giving a huge hostage to fortune, raising questions to which I certainly don’t know the answer, but I do know that unless I point all this out one might easily get the impression that these ancient doctrines are of theoretical or abstract interest only. They aren’t. People who believe that Jesus is already Lord, and that he will appear again as judge of the world are called and equipped (to put it mildly) to think and act quite differently in the world from those who don’t. I shall pursue these questions a bit further in the final Part of the book.

In particular, of course, the hope of Jesus’ coming as judge, to put right all that is wrong in the world and to give new life to the dead, is the context for one of our central themes, to which we can at last turn. If all this is so, what can we say about the future that awaits every one of us, every baptized believer in Jesus Christ? What precisely do we mean, for ourselves, when we speak of the future resurrection?

[This article is excerpted from the book, *Surprised by Hope*, Chapter 11, by (c) Tom Wright, and first published in 2007 by the [Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge \(SPCK\)](#), London, Great Britain. Used with permission.]



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Notes

[1](#) Ps. 98.8; the whole Psalm is relevant, as are several others in that section of the Psalter.

[2](#) See particularly Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994).

[3](#) Acts 17.31; cf. 10.42.

[4](#) On all this, see my *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997; Oxford: Lion, 2003), ch. 7, and *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (London: SPCK, 2005; US title, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), ch. 6. See also 'Redemption from the New Perspective' in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, G. O'Collins (eds), *Redemption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 69–100; '4QMMT and Paul: Justification, "Works," and Eschatology' in Sang-Won (Aaron) Son (ed.), *History and Exegesis: New Testament Essays in Honor of Dr E. Earle Ellis for his 80th Birthday* (New York and London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 104–32; and 'New Perspectives on Paul' in Bruce L. McCormack (ed.), *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 243–64.

[5](#) See my *Romans in the New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. X (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 393–770; the various volumes of *Paul for Everyone* (London: SPCK; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press: Galatians and Thessalonians, 2002; The Prison Letters, 2002; 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, both 2003; Romans (2 vols), 2004); and *The Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), esp. chs 7, 8, 10 and 13.

[6](#) Cf., e.g., 2 Tim. 4.1; 1 Pet. 4.5.

[7](#) John 5.22–30.

[8](#) E.g., John 16.8–11, about which there is no space to say more at this point.

[9](#) See Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 271.

[10](#) 1 Cor. 11.27–34.

[11](#) See esp. T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976), 158.

[#12](#) 2 Cor. 4.5.

[#13](#) This is the logic behind, e.g., 1 Cor. 15.58; see my *The Way of the Lord: Christian Pilgrimage in the Holy Land and Beyond* (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), ch. 9, and below, Chapter 13.

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Readings from Early Church Fathers on the Twofold Coming of Christ



The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ, by Lodovico Carracci 1594-95

The Twofold Coming of Jesus Christ

by Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386 AD)

We preach not one coming only of Jesus Christ, but a second also, far more glorious than the first. The first revealed the meaning of his patient endurance; the second brings with it the crown of the divine kingdom.

Generally speaking, everything that concerns our Lord Jesus Christ is twofold. His birth is twofold: one, of God before time began; the other, of the Virgin in the fullness of time. His descent is twofold: one, unperceived like the dew falling on the fleece; the other, before the eyes of all, is yet to happen.

In his first coming he was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger. In his second coming he is clothed with light as with a garment. In his first coming he bore the cross, despising its shame; he will come a second time in glory accompanied by the hosts of angels.

It is not enough for us, then, to be content with his first coming; we must wait in hope of his second coming. What we said at his first coming, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” (Mark 11:10, Psalm 118:26) we shall repeat at his last coming. Running out with the angels to meet the Master we shall cry out in adoration, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:39).

The Savior will come not to be judged again but to call to judgment those who called him to judgment. He who was silent when he was first judged, will indict the malefactors who dared to perpetrate the outrage of the cross, and say, “These things you did and I was silent” (Psalm 50:21).

He first came in the order of divine providence to teach men by gentle persuasion; but when he comes again they will, whether they wish it or not, be subjected to his kingship.

The prophet Malachi has something to say about each of these comings. “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” (Malachi 3:1). That is the first coming.

Again, of the second coming he says, “And the angel of the covenant whom you seek. Behold, the Lord almighty will come: but who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap; he will sit like a refiners and a purifier” (Malachi 3:2-3). Paul pointed to the two comings when he wrote to Titus, “The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13). You see how he has spoken of the first coming, for which he gives thanks, and of the second to which we look forward.

Hence it is that by the faith we profess, which has just been handed on to you, we believe in him “who ascended into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead; and his kingdom will have no end” (Mark 16:19, Mark 13:26, 2 Timothy 4:1).

Our Lord Jesus Christ will, then, come from heaven. He will come in glory at the end of this world on the last day. Then there will be an end to this world, and this created world will be made new.

Quotes from early church fathers on the Twofold Coming of Christ

- » [Keep Watch, he is to come again](#), by Ephrem of Edessa (306-373 AD)
- » [When Christ comes, God will be seen by men](#), by Irenaeus of Lyons (115-202 AD)
- » [Don't resist the first coming, lest you dread the second](#), by Augustine (354-430 AD)
- » [The Twofold coming of Jesus Christ](#), by Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD)

Readings from Early Church Fathers on the Twofold Coming of Christ



Transfiguration of Christ by Raphael, 1516-1520

Keep watch, he is to come again

by Ephrem of Edessa (306-373 AD)

To prevent his disciples from asking the time of his coming, Christ said: “About that hour no one knows, neither the angels nor the Son. It is not for you to know times or moments.” He has kept those things hidden so that we may keep watch, each of us thinking that he will come in our own day. If he had revealed the time of his coming, his coming would have lost its savor: it would no longer be an object of yearning for the nations and the age in which it will be revealed. He promised that he would come but did not say when he would come, and so all generations and ages await him eagerly.

Though the Lord has established the signs of his coming, the time of their fulfillment has not been plainly revealed. These signs have come and gone with a multiplicity of change; more than that, they are still present. His final coming is like his first. As holy men and prophets waited for him, thinking that he would reveal himself in their own day, so today each of the faithful longs to welcome him in his own day, because Christ has not made plain the day of his coming.

He has not made it plain for this reason especially, that no one may think that he whose power and dominion rule all numbers and times is ruled by fate and time. He described the signs of his coming;

how could what he has himself decided be hidden from him? Therefore, he used these words to increase respect for the signs of his coming, so that from that day forward all generations and ages might think that he would come again in their own day.

Keep watch; when the body is asleep nature takes control of us, and what is done is not done by our will but by force, by the impulse of nature. When deep listlessness takes possession of the soul, for example, faint-heartedness or melancholy, the enemy overpowers it and makes it do what it does not will. The force of nature, the enemy of the soul, is in control.

When the Lord commanded us to be vigilant, he meant vigilance in both parts of man: in the body, against the tendency to sleep; in the soul, against lethargy and timidity. As Scripture says: "Wake up, you just, and I have risen, and am still with you," and again, "Do not lose heart. Therefore, having this ministry, we do not lose heart."

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Readings from Early Church Fathers on the Twofold Coming of Christ



When Christ Comes, God will be seen by men

by Irenaeus of Lyons (115-202 AD)

There is one God, who by his word and wisdom created all things and set them in order. His Word is our Lord Jesus Christ, who in this last age became man among men to unite end and beginning, that is, man and God.

The prophets, receiving the gift of prophecy from this same Word, foretold his coming in the flesh, which brought about the union and communion between God and man ordained by the Father. From the beginning the word of God prophesied that God would be seen by men and would live among them on earth; he would speak with his own creation and be present to it, bringing it salvation and being visible to it. He would “free us from the hands of all who hate us,” that is, from the universal spirit of sin, and enable us to “serve him in holiness and justice all our days.” Man was to receive the Spirit of God and so attain to the glory of the Father.

The prophets, then, foretold that God would be seen by men. As the Lord himself says: “Blessed are

the clean of heart, for they shall see God.” In his greatness and inexpressible glory “no one can see God and live,” for the Father is beyond our comprehension. But in his love and generosity and omnipotence he allows even this to those who love him, that is, even to see God, as the prophets foretold. “For what is impossible to men is possible to God”.

By his own powers man cannot see God, yet God will be seen by men because he wills it. He will be seen by those he chooses, at the time he chooses, and in the way he chooses, for God can do all things. He was seen of old through the Spirit in prophecy; he is seen through the Son by our adoption as his children, and he will be seen in the kingdom of heaven in his own being as the Father. The Spirit prepares man to receive the Son of God, the Son leads him to the Father, and the Father, freeing him from change and decay, bestows the eternal life that comes to everyone from seeing God.

As those who see light are in the light sharing its brilliance, so those who see God are in God sharing his glory, and that glory gives them life. To see God is to share in life.

Quotes from early church fathers on the Twofold Coming of Christ

- » [Don't resist the first coming, lest you dread the second](#), by Augustine (354-430 AD)
- » [The Twofold coming of Jesus Christ](#), by Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD)
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Homeward Bound: But Where Are We Headed?

by James Munk

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about "home": the place for which we long, and believe that if we reach, we'll finally be satisfied – our heart's destination. This desire for home seems to be programmed into us – into all mankind. It is therefore unsurprising that man has given himself many places to which he can attach the title of "home".

For some, it is the glassy, white-clad apartment in the sky – a feat of modern architecture, an understated (but unmistakable) tribute to one's very good tastes. Others look for the oversized country manor atop 40 acres: with a swimming pool, four-car garage, and a go-kart track – for the kids, naturally. For others still, it may not even be a change to *their* house; rather, a change to their neighbor's – if the neighbors would just keep the noise down, and the property value up, then, finally, that would be home.

Some instead look for home in an emotional or social state that promises contentment. After all, there are more solutions than brick-and-mortar ones: maybe financial security, safety, fame or recognition in one's field.

Did you find your dream home in that list? I found mine. And we fool ourselves if we think we've never felt our

heart wrap around one of these homes – and found our plans and pocket books attempting to possess it.

But often paired with this longing is a sense that in the end, these things will disappoint us. For myself, I find it hard to believe that if I just got into one of the smaller lofts in a downtown high-rise, I would cease to be interested in the master suite at the top. These “homes” aggravate our appetites but do not satisfy our deeper longings. Our senses tell us something’s in the oven, but we know we’re not invited to dinner. We are faced with a longing for home and with the unhappy knowledge that it cannot be found here. What are we to do? CS Lewis has excellent insight:

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

Our home is not here, and John 14:2 gives us some insight as to its location: “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” We are invited to call the house of the Lord, “home” – to be with him, and live with him forever.

The Command of detachment

This invitation is extraordinary, and its glory is outside of our comprehension. However, it brings with it a challenge while we still live in this world. Our current life and world are not our final destination, and like the child who has plopped down on the sofa, we hear our father say, “Don’t get too comfortable”: a simple way of saying, don’t order your life in a way that makes it harder for you to leave this place. The Bible presents this challenge, this call to detachment, in a somewhat starker form:

“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

These are not easy words to hear. I like the world. I even like a few of the things in the world! But the Lord seems serious that I not become too attached. And when considering the Lord’s commands from an eternal perspective, this makes a lot of sense. Further, anything but a certain detachment from the world is foolishness! “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul” (Mark 8:36)?

But this call to detachment from the world is not hardship for hardship’s sake – a sort of spiritual boot camp. It is the loving direction from a father as he helps his sons and daughters navigate the stock markets of eternity. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt 6:19-20). Consider the Titanic – when the ship was going down, the class of one’s cabin was trivial; a spot on the lifeboat was not. The things of this world are passing away, and our home is not here; and so the Lord says, “Don’t get too comfortable.”

The challenge of engagement

This command for detachment from the world comes with a somewhat paradoxical call to vigorous engagement. This follows from a very simple toggle between home and work. If our home is not here – if our rest is not here – work, engagement, is the somewhat obvious alternative. And this seems to be the way the Bible talks about the

identity of the heaven-bound on earth: “laborers” in the field from Luke 10:2, “servants” in the Parable of the Talents in Luke 19, and perhaps most famously, the call of the apostles to become “fishers” of men. I am unfamiliar with the parable that begins, “The kingdom of God is like a man in his armchair.” While we wait for our eternal home – our eternal rest – we are to be working for our Lord.

But beyond labor, engagement has a second, and more challenging, component: love. Consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

Jesus loved Jerusalem, but not in the “I Heart NY” sense of the word. One can suppose that Jesus’ attraction to Jerusalem was not on account of all its wonderful cultural amenities – its cafés, historic shopping centers, or exotic restaurants. His love was not contingent on “liking”: it was a love based on commitment, and a desire for the people – his people – to come to a good place. His was a love for the mission field, out of love for the mission. Not necessarily the field: in some ways, despite it.

This love challenges me – do I love my city, my temporary home, with the same fervor Jesus loved Jerusalem? Doubtful – and that gap exists for many reasons. But I know of at least one way to narrow it. When we cease to look for a place to be our home, we are freer to love a place because it is where the Lord has asked us to be. We become free to labor out of love for those around us and out of love for the Lord – not necessarily because we like where they happen to be, or where the Lord has put us.

Our eternal home

In all this “our home is not here” talk, there can be a tendency to borrow an approach that is a hybrid of two different systems of belief: Hindu indifference to the thing of this world mated with a Wall Street work- alcoholism. But these miss that our approach to this world is grounded in the hope of the one to come. Far from a stoic indifference to the world or a grueling approach to labor, our lives should be marked by a joyful abandonment and a contagious zeal for the work the Lord has giving us. If we need convincing, consider what’s coming:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell 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 21:3-4).

Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come (Isaiah 60:5).

These passages describe our true home – our final destination: a promise of wealth, comfort, eternal life, and a new order. And this promise is the beginning, not the end. If we consider our afterlife simply in terms of wealth, satisfaction or comfort that can be understood here and now, we’ve stopped short of the best part. Even if we hope our heavenly reward to be all the riches of the earth, we’ve set our sights much too low. Our inheritance is the Lord, himself: “LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance” (Psalm 16:5-6). We are invited to the House of the Lord; and more, invited forever to be with him. Our home is not here – and praise the Lord: we’re invited to a far better one.

[James Munk is a mission director for [Kairos North America](#) and a member of the [Work of Christ Community](#) in Lansing, Michigan.]



Reading the Stars – Signs of Hope from the Creator of the Cosmos

by David Mills

The things we have declared different we have declared lesser,” declared Christopher Impey, an astronomer at the University of Arizona and “sworn agnostic,” to a reporter from the Tucson Citizen. He had just won a three-year, \$275,000 grant from the Templeton Foundation to host a lecture series titled “Astrobiology and the Sacred: Implications of Life Beyond Earth,” and seemed to think that the finding of life on other planets, even microbial life, would upset the religious.

Secular Hope

The article proceeded with his thoughts on the matter, but that is not what interested me about it. At the very end, he says: “It’s extremely unlikely that if we were to discover a civilization or entity that was not from this planet, that they would not be far beyond where we are technologically.” That is the article’s closing quote, the one that is supposed to leave the reader thinking “Wow,” but it left me wondering “Why?”

We have no reason to think that such a civilization would be so vastly superior to us, especially if we were the ones to discover them. It is a statement of blind faith. Impey’s dogmatic confidence on the subject of the superiority of alien races seemed a funny thing coming from someone who was so agnostic about God, for whose existence or non-

existence we have so much evidence. And yet so many secular people of scientific bent seem to find in the heavens that which they do not find on earth.

They find God, of a sort. “I consider myself a spiritual person,” the evolutionist philosopher Michael Shermer said in an interview with the Rocky Mountain News. “I have an awe of nature, a sense of transcendence when I see an eclipse or a Hubble space telescope photograph. These things all generate a sense of transcendence, spirituality, every bit as warm and fuzzy and religious as when I was a religious person.” There is, he continues, “a source of transcendence and it’s evolution; these deep-seated moral sentiments were given to us as members of the species by evolution.”

I still do not know why very intelligent men find this kind of thing satisfying. Shermer is claiming that a blind, literally pointless string of complete accidents of which man is a product is “a source of transcendence,” which produces a “spirituality” which is “warm and fuzzy and religious.” Something that has no mind or will can “give” us something we do not have otherwise.

But why should he feel a “sense of transcendence” when he sees an eclipse? All that is happening is that an accidental moon of an accidental planet accidentally orbiting round an accidental sun, accidentally passes in front of the sun and blocks out its light for a few minutes. How is his emotional response justified by an accident? What does he think has been transcended? I am sure he does not feel warm and fuzzy and religious when he sees two cars collide on the highway, but he should, since accidents give him a sense of transcendence.

The word “transcendence” must mean an authoritative word from outside, something greater than man that tells him something he does not know or shows him something he does not see. I am afraid I do not see how the process of evolution can be said to transcend us who are one of its products, any more than the factory assembly line can be said to transcend the car made on it.

Secularism’s Hope

But people who do not believe in God still look to the heavens to give what religion once provided. I wonder if Impey’s faith in the existence of superior aliens expresses one of the materialist’s eschatological hopes: that though Jesus will not descend from the skies, some other savior might. (I use “materialist” to mean someone who believes that the material world is all that exists.)

Many quite intelligent people believe that the question of human origins and the meaning of human life would be answered if we found that we came originally from another planet. As was obvious to one of our children, then nine or ten, when I mentioned this idea to him, this only pushes the question back to another planet, it does not in any way answer it. But as I say, a lot of intelligent people think it does.

When I first wrote about this on *Touchstone*’s blogsite, a reader told me that someone had once challenged him to read Carl Sagan’s novel *Contact*, thinking he would not be able to defend his faith against Sagan’s vision of the cosmos. “The effect,” he told me, “was rather the opposite. I found myself marveling that Sagan, who never tried to hide his contempt for religious belief, wrote a book about aliens who were utterly god-like. They were all-wise and super-moral, and they were coming to us, to teach us to be more like them. I was amazed that Carl Sagan, who could not abide the idea of God, could easily conceive of an alien race who were, for all practical purposes, an awful lot like gods.”

Which makes me suspect that what many materialists (or secularists) really believe is “Anything but God,” no matter how implausible or illogical a belief their atheism leaves them, and makes me wonder if, having removed God from the cosmos, they simply do not like the idea of man being alone in the universe. I wonder if they cannot bear the

burden of living by the vision of the cosmos their philosophy gives them. It is easy, and often quite useful, to say “There is no God,” but perhaps harder to feel safe and secure in a godless universe.

Aliens seem to me a very poor substitute for God, but if the secularists won’t have God, what other possible friend from outside this world could they have, but creatures from other planets? The Christian would say that we are made to look for a Friend outside—St. Augustine’s “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee” is one of the ways this has been said—and if man will not look for a Friend, he will look for friends to take his place. The clearer-thinking secularist will say that this only proves that the truth is hard to bear.

Another reader responded to the same article by noting that “We know that we need an alien understanding (a perspective that exists apart from us), an alien salvation (a salvation that exists apart from us, for we know we cannot save ourselves), an alien righteousness (a righteousness that exists apart from us, for all of our actions are sinful).” We make up counterfeits and idols because we will not accept the reality. “We are desperate for a word, for an answer, a wisdom apart from ourselves, because it fills our need at the deepest level; but we reject God and the true answer because we would be as God, knowing good from evil. And hence this whole fascination with *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, alien encounters, and the like.”

That seems to be true of some secularists, anyway. They and their peers seem to think that intelligent life must exist somewhere in the universe, simply as a matter of the odds. “Space is really big,” they say. “With all those billions and billions and billions of stars, there must be intelligent life *somewhere* else.” Some of them feel that the idea that all those galaxies could have been created solely for man is just absurd. That a universe so vast should exist with only one race on one world to appreciate it seems to annoy them greatly.

The Christian, on the other hand, can be perfectly agnostic about the existence of other intelligent creatures, because he does not claim to know what God has done with the rest of the cosmos. It does not bother him in the least to think that we are the only creatures with minds and souls in the universe, that man has no peers anywhere, that the unimaginably vast space around our small planet is entirely empty of life. It does not bother him for at least two reasons.

A Creative God

First, the Christian knows that God loves creating. We are not surprised that he might make billions of stars because he wanted to make billions of stars, because making billions of stars gave him great joy (if we can speak so of God). We are not surprised that he might make billions of stars of which we will never know, because he did not make them for us.

That is what creators do. Almost every museum in the world seems to have one of Monet’s paintings of lilies. If a man so loved painting lilies, how much more would God love making them? And God has a lot more time, and a lot more energy, and much better resources, than Monet. G. K. Chesterton explained this in “The Ethics of Elfland,” the fourth chapter of his great book *Orthodoxy*.

He begins by pointing out that the modern materialist mind believes that repetition is evidence of death, but that most earthly things vary because they are dying or dead. We take a bus because we are tired of walking, and walk because we are tired of sitting still. We see this in children.

A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough

to exult in monotony.

Here is where the modern makes his mistake. He thinks of God, understandably enough, as a grown-up. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.

Second, the Christian knows that a God who would take his form and die for him, especially after he had treated God so badly, would do anything for him. In the picture of the Son of the Father dying on the Cross he sees a love for whom making billions and billions of stars would be a trifle, like a billionaire taking a friend to lunch at McDonald’s. A man who believes in the Incarnation and all that followed can easily believe that the Creator made the universe entirely and solely for man. He has swallowed the camel and will hardly strain at a gnat.

The Christian who knows a little of God’s love for him can imagine the Father saying, “Oh, stars, they’ll love stars. They’ll make up lots of stories about them. The children will have such fun looking at the night sky and finding shapes in the stars. And think what their poets will do with the stars, especially that Dante. And when they get around to inventing astronomy, how much joy they’ll get from finding out about the universe. I know: Let’s put in lots of stars they won’t see till the middle of the twentieth century, or later. And let’s give them some puzzles to work out, like black holes and quasars. And dark matter, that’ll keep them going for awhile.”

That is the sort of universe in which the Christian lives. It is the sort of universe in which even the heavens are a present, the stars like packages under the Christmas tree. It is the sort of universe in which a boy standing in his yard in some dreary American suburb can look up at the Big Dipper and say with delight, “What? For me?”, in which a girl tending her family’s goats in a field in Africa can look up at Venus shining just after sunset and say, “Thank you!”

A Cheerful World

The Christian lives in a much more cheerful world than the materialist. He has no need to look for friends scattered about the universe to quiet his feeling of being alone in the cosmos, because he knows he is not alone. Although why the materialist finds aliens comforting, I don’t know. If human life is, as he must believe, merely the result of a vast number of random mutations, I do not see what comfort it is to know that elsewhere in the universe are creatures—creatures we shall almost certainly never meet—who are also the results of a vast number of random mutations.

The Christian knows that he is not alone in the cosmos, that he has a Friend and a Father, who may have made everything he sees just for him.

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The Wonder of Christ

by Origen (185-254 AD)

Of all the marvelous and splendid things about the Son of God there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely, how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very Word of the Father, and the very Wisdom of God, in which were created "all things visible and invisible," can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man who appeared in Judaea; yes, and how the wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a child and uttered noises like those of crying children; and further, how it was that he was troubled, as we are told, in the hour of death, as he himself confesses when he says, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death"; and how at the last he was led to that death which is considered by men to be the most shameful of all—even though on the third day he rose again.

When, therefore, we see in him some things so human that they appear in no way to differ from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they are appropriate to nothing else but the ...nature of deity, the human understanding with its narrow limits is baffled, and struck with amazement at so mighty a wonder knows not which way to turn, what to hold to, or whither to betake itself. If it thinks of God, it sees a man; if it thinks of a man, it beholds one returning from the dead with spoils after vanquishing the kingdom of death.

For this reason we must pursue our contemplation with all fear and reverence, as we seek to prove how the reality of each nature exists in one and the same person, in such a way that nothing unworthy or unfitting may be thought to reside in that divine and ineffable existence, nor on the other hand may the events of his life be supposed to be the illusions



The Virgin of the Rocks by Leonardo Da Vinci, 1495

caused by deceptive fantasies.

But to utter these things in human ears and to explain them by words far exceeds the powers we possess either in our mortal worth or in mind and speech. I think indeed that it transcends the capacity even of the holy apostles; nay more, perhaps the explanation of this mystery lies beyond the reach of the whole creation of heavenly things.



Origen (185-254 AD) was a Bible scholar and philosopher based in Alexandria, Egypt and later in Caesarea in Palestine.

He lived during a turbulent time of barbarian invasians, periodic persecutions, and rampant Gnostic heresy. The death of his father as a Christian martyr deeply affected him. The Christian historian Eusebius tells us that Origen was only seventeen when he took over as headmaster of the Christian Catechetical School at Alexandria. He was a prolific writer of homilies, scripture commentaries, and treatises.

Under the persecution of Decius in 250, Origen was imprisoned and underwent appalling torture. After his release he died at the age of 69 in 254.



Joseph as a young man with the boy Jesus, by El Greco, 1597



Agony in the Garden, by James Tissot, 1896



Doubting Thomas, by Caravaggio, 1602-03

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Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6)

by Guido Gockel

In the midst of all that is going on in the various countries of the Middle East, the Arab Spring, I must honestly say that on a human level I have no hope for peace there in the Holy Land. All the efforts of the political powers over the years have led to a worsening of the situation.

Does this mean that I am without hope? Not at all. I am full of hope because I have a different way of looking at the Holy Land, namely the biblical way, and this way is full of hope.

When I look at the Holy Land from a political point of view, I don't know what is happening. Recently a senator friend told me that the longer she is in politics, the less sure she is about what is true. What is true in the Holy Land? As a simple example, during the Palestinian Intifada, journalists sat comfortably in the American Colony Hotel reading the local papers on which they based their articles. Can this count as accurate firsthand reporting, especially when politicians use the media for their own agenda?

However, from a biblical view I think I can see what's going on from a broader spiritual context. It is the battle between God and Satan, between good and evil.

One weekend when I was making my way to my house in the Jerusalem suburb of Beit Hanina, I saw a young man accosted by an Israeli special unit. He was stripped and, although there was no evidence of anything, one of the officers killed the young man with a gunshot to the head. The next day, the papers reported that another Palestinian suicide bomber had been stopped. On the following Sunday, I heard a gunshot at the checkpoint that was about 100 yards from my home. An 11-year-old schoolboy had been shot. He was lying on the ground still alive when they flipped him over with a robot to check for explosives, but found none. Five hours or so later, when the boy finally

died, the ambulance that had been in attendance all the while was allowed to take him away. The next day, the news reported that another suicide bomber had been stopped. It turned out the boy was deaf and mute and thus had not heard the soldier who commanded him to stop.

During the weekend, seeing what I'd seen, I was filled with anger. I began to read the prophet Daniel and asked myself, "Who can I call to stop this senseless folly, and realized that there is no one who can halt it. At that point I understood the words of St. Paul: "It is not flesh and blood that we fight against, but the principalities and powers of darkness in the heavenly places."

The battle is much bigger than the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the world powers. And Satan wants the Christians out of the region. When Palestinian terrorists fire on an Israeli settlement, and the Israelis fire their rockets back, Christian homes have often been destroyed — not because they want the Christians out, but Christians always "happen" to be in the wrong place. Satan certainly wants to keep Christians from letting their light shine.

No one, for instance, can accuse the United States of being anti-Christian. But why were its atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the only Catholic communities in Japan? The Christians just "happened" to be in the wrong spot.

In the battle between God and Satan, God made a covenant of peace with Abraham and his descendants. Scripture talks about a covenant of salt (Numbers 18:19). This is a custom in the Arab culture and Arabs still refer to people eating salt together as a sign of friendship. When two friends fight, people will say, "Didn't they eat salt together?" God established this relationship with Abraham and his offspring.

First, there is Abraham's son Ishmael. You recall that Abraham and Sarah were already old and, as was the custom among the people, when the wife was infertile she would offer her maid to the husband so he could have offspring. It was thus that Ishmael was born through whom the Muslims trace their origin. Of him Scripture says, he will be "a wild horse of a man, his hands against every man and every man against him" (Genesis 16:12). But God loved him and blessed him and his descendants, promising them to become a multitude of nations. Therefore, if we fight Muslims we fight God who has promised to bless them (I am not talking about terrorists, who blaspheme by invoking the name of God).

Secondly, there is Isaac, the son of the promise. It is with him that God established an everlasting covenant, meaning it is through his descendants that the Prince of Peace was to come into the world. The descendants of Isaac are also not without problems. God said of them as He spoke to Jacob, "you have striven with God and men, and have prevailed."



It is of the Jewish people that Jesus was born as a son of Abraham. He is the Prince of Peace. What is peace? Paul in his epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians tells us that peace is our reconciliation with God, and therefore with one another. As those who believe in Jesus, we Christians hold the key to peace, namely the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is the heart of our faith; without it, there would be no Christianity. Although Jews and Muslims talk about forgiveness, it is not central to their faiths. In fact, their greatest virtue is “honor” – that is, honor of the nation, the race, the tribe, the family. When you do something to my family, woe to me if I don’t take revenge. I have to show that I honor my race, tribe, or family. The Christian witness through forgiveness even of our enemies is crucial for peace.

Peace will come, “not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit,” says the prophet Zechariah.

One of my frustrations is the frequent talk about the numbers of Christians in the Holy Land. But as Maronite Patriarch Bechara Peter Rai told journalists recently, whether we are a large number or a small number, all that matters is that the church is there.

David’s greatest sin was not his affair with Bathsheba, as bad as that was, but God punished David more severely after he took a census of his people. By this act he showed that his trust was not in God, but in manpower. It was very displeasing to God. In Scripture, we see that God fights the battle. He fought pharaoh as the people were being led through the Red Sea. He conquered Jericho as the people processed around the city seven times. He fought the battles around Jerusalem, when the warring enemies of Israel slaughtered one another.

The battle of Midian is a beautiful example of how God fights. He told Gideon that his army was too large, and ordered him to send home those who were afraid. But still there were too many, so God had Gideon make a selection by ordering people to drink water from the river. Only those who were scooping up the water with their hands while keeping their eyes on the surroundings were chosen: a mere 300 men who were then instructed to surround the enemy camp holding jars with candles in them. Thus, the battle was won through people who were vigilant, obedient, and filled with the fire of God’s Spirit.

Why then do we count the number of Christians remaining in the Middle East? Isn’t it ironic that Caesar Augustus conducted a census when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was born? Let those who are fearful in the Holy Land go, and

let God select “a remnant.” Scripture talks about a remnant from which Jesus was born. It will be a remnant from which peace will come.

On that horrible weekend when I sought refuge in Scripture and began to read the prophet Daniel, I began to understand what God said to Belshazzar, “You have been weighed in a balance and found wanting,” and that very night Belshazzar died and his kingdom was given to another. And a peace came upon me that has not left me. A peace that has helped me to get some distance from the situation, as if indifferent but not so. I realized then that peace will come from above, just like it had come to me.

God asks of us that we pray for this peace to come, and that he would strengthen the Christian remnant in Jerusalem and all the Holy Land so that they may be aflame with the fire of the Holy Spirit, and to watch and pray. For peace will come to Jerusalem and thus spread throughout the world.

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Home: Our Abiding Place

by Jeanne Kun

Home is where the heart is

The simple word “home” has a strong impact on us. For most of us thoughts of home are agreeable and pleasant, evoking images of warmth, shelter, rootedness, safety, security. Home is where the heart is. It’s that place of our origin, a haven, a resting place, the spot where we know we belong, the place we call our own, a source of refreshment to us. To feel “at home” is to be at ease, on familiar ground. Home: our abiding place.

And so the idea of going home is usually a welcome one; with fondness and anticipation we make that trip. The statement, “you can’t go home again” has a sharp poignancy about it.

With a realization of these many aspects of home, it becomes significant that Jesus extends this particular invitation to us: “Abide in me!” (John 15:4), or, actually using our image, the Jerusalem Bible reads, “Make your home in me.”

The Lord is our shelter, refuge, and resting place

More than any earthly home, it is Jesus himself who is our shelter (Psalm 91:1), our rock and refuge (Psalm 62:7), our dwelling place (Psalm 90:1). He offers himself as our resting place (Matthew 11:29), our refreshment. We have a sure confidence of belonging to him, and he even allows us to claim some “ownership” of him, too: “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Songs 2:16). As we grow into a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus, we find ourselves more and more at ease and on familiar ground in his presence. As with our home, “where our treasure is, there too will be our hearts” (Luke 12:34). And we look forward to finally arriving at our “homeland” in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

What a rich comparison there is in seeing Jesus as our home. Even our most appealing notions or most pleasant experiences of our earthly homes pale in the light of Jesus as our true and lasting abiding place. A wealth of insight lies before us in this concept for our prayer and reflection.

“Make your home in me”

But we can find even more in this comparison as we search the Scriptures further – more to thrill us, more to excite us, more to move us to an active response to Jesus’ invitation. While inviting us to make our home in him, Jesus went on to say he wants to make his home in us: “Make your home in me, as I make mine in you” (John 15:4). In other words, Jesus requests that we make a place to receive him, to welcome him, where he can take up permanent residence with us. Earlier in his gospel, John expressed the same idea this way: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), or, more literally, “pitched his tent among us” – made his dwelling place in our midst.

How can we respond to such a request? And such an offer! What can we do to make more of a place for Jesus to enter into our lives? Perhaps the most concrete action we can take is to embrace the Word who dwells among us – to get to know the Word made flesh by getting to know the spoken and written word of God in Scripture. St. Paul gives us advice that is finely tuned to our analogy: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). Again, the translation that the Jerusalem Bible offers strongly underlines the image: “Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you.”

Taking Scripture to heart

This image helps make real one of my favorite (and to me, most helpful) ways of approaching Scripture. I often think of Scripture and relate to it in terms of “making it my own.” To me, that means not only reading Scripture, but taking it in, loving it, embracing it, pondering it, allowing myself to be molded and taught by it, obeying it, having it as my fingertips and in the front of my mind; in short, becoming so familiar with God’s word that I can really say that I’ve made it “my own” – my way of thinking, my way of life, my guide, my nourishment.

One doesn’t build a house or home overnight. Nor has Scripture instantly become my own. It has only been with daily patience, daily discipline, daily prayer for insight into the word of God, over years and years, that this familiarity has been growing, that the word of God is truly finding a home in me. And there have been many days of being hard put to find the time to read Scripture; or while having the time, no desire has risen in me for this reading. But little by little, gradually but steadily, Scripture has pervaded my life, has taken a hold of me, and is finding that place in me that God desires and yearns for. It is being written on my heart.

Make a worthy home for the Word of God

In Old Testament times, the God of Israel gave his people a way of holding onto his word to them. The direction he gave to them so long ago has been relevant, meaningful, and effective for me as I have striven to let the word of Christ find a home in me. Urging the Israelites to prize his word, Yahweh said, “These words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

May you, too, write the word of God on the doorpost of your house. As you make your home in Christ, may you also make a worthy home for his word in your heart.

[Jeanne Kun is President of [Bethany Association](#) and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

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Anna's Heir

poem by Jeanne Kun

I stand, Lord, keeping eager watch
as Anna did in distant times before me,
filling the full measure of her years
secluded in the temple
in adoring expectation.
Now I am heir to her post,
a sentinel
still waiting through the long darkness
for the dawn of your return.

All my longing is for you, O Lord,
as I stand poised on tiptoe,
straining with my whole being
to catch that first glimpse of you.

Shatter the darkness
(oft times threatening to close in and surround us)
with that fierce and burning brightness
of your splendor and your beauty.

Then I shall follow Anna's suit
and raise my voice to you in glad thanks

and tell of your redemption
to all who've yearned so long for you.

[Jeanne Kun is President of [Bethany Association](#) and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.
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Hearing God and Making Decisions

by Sam Williamson

John is about 55 years old. He manages a division that until a few years ago had 20 people; it now has less than half that number. But – of course – his division is expected to produce as much as the original group. You know, “Work smarter not harder.” Right!

In addition, John is actively involved in his local community, running a Boy Scout troop, coaching his kid’s soccer teams, leading the high school Sunday School program, and running a couple youth retreats each year. He has been trying to off-load some of this work, but finding people to step up to the plate in the various organizations has been disappointing.

John feels at the end of his emotional reserves. His gas tank is on empty, and he is running on fumes. His attempts to reduce his stress have failed because he can’t find anyone else with his level of commitment.



John needs to make changes but he doesn't know what to do. He longs to hear God say, "Do this." or "Do that." He recently read a passage in Acts where God tells Paul not to go to Asia and instead to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10), and John's reaction is, "That's what I'm talking about! I want that kind of clear direction." I suspect he'd also appreciate handwriting on the wall.

So far, however, God seems to be silent. So what is John to do? Haven't we all longed for a specific direction from God at one time or another? Doesn't God seem silent at times?

John recently met with friends to discuss his situation. It turns out this situation is not new. He is chronically overcommitted. He frequently takes the project no one else can fix, and he succeeds time and again. Others ask more (and more) of him because he simply gets things done.

Why does John so often become enmeshed in the multitude of management tasks?

- He claims – and his friends agree – that it isn't for money; much of his activity he does for free, and he lives fairly simply and is reasonably generous.
- He also claims – and his friends agree – it isn't really for the prestige of title; John is content to work in the background, getting things done without the title.
- He also claims – and his friends agree – it isn't mainly for the affirmation; in getting things done, John often makes unpopular decisions when he knows what is needed.

I don't know John's heart and I don't know what he should do (though I have some ideas!). But his story reminds me of someone else's story.

Mine.



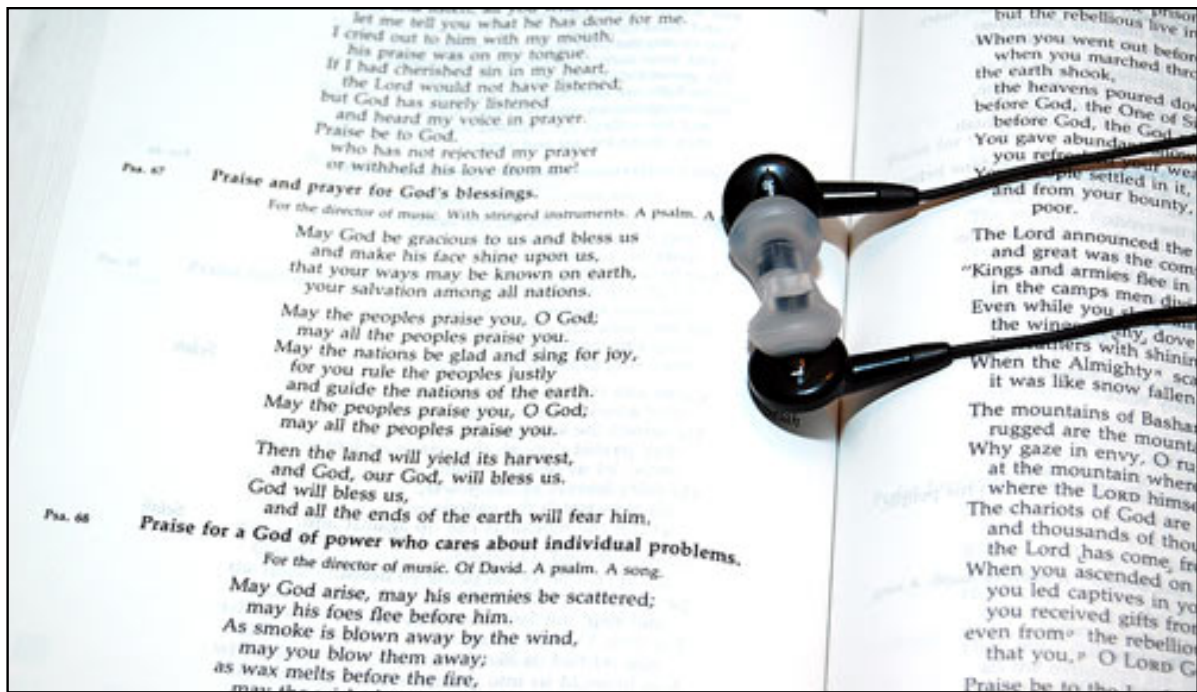
Throughout my life, I've been the victim of a "Go-To" Guy syndrome. When a situation at work or church needed someone to get something done, I was their man. I can volunteer faster than a crisis can be created. Before the plea leaves their lips, I'm offering my "Go-To" Guy services.

There was – and to some extent still is – an inability in me to see a situation objectively. Despite being overwhelmed with work and family, someone could trump my decision-making process by appealing to my "Go-To" Guy syndrome. A personal bias can color choices. I don't always weigh all the factors equally; one factor – my "Go-To" Guy illness – disproportionately outweighs the others.

God has been showing me another way that he gives direction. God sometimes gives specific direction ("Go to Macedonia not Asia") but when he doesn't do so, it might be he is doing something more incredible. Most of the time I probably need more than a simple "yes or no," or "turn right" or "turn left." I really need a change in my heart's motivation.

God's directional voice is teaching me to become the kind of man who makes good decisions.

If my five year old son asked me if he could go outside and play Frisbee, I'd say, "Dinner will be served in half an hour, so don't go far." If my twenty-five year old son asked me if he can go outside and play Frisbee, I'd say, "I've trained you to be the kind of man who makes good decisions, so make one." I want my twenty-five year old son to come to me for wisdom, but I also want him to grow in a personal maturity to make good decisions.



When God seems silent in our prayer for a decision, it is not because God is absent. Very often he is arranging circumstances to bring us to a place where the very motivations of our hearts are changed. He is freeing us from some weight that holds us down.

A Christian thinker once wrote:

“Whatever controls you is your lord. If you live for power you are controlled by power. If you live for acceptance you are controlled by the people you are trying to please. No one controls him or herself. You are controlled by the lord of your life” (Becky Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*).

And the lord of my life was being the “Go-To” Guy.

If God simply answered any one decision question – should I take on this responsibility? – without dealing with a root idol in my life, then I would be stuck again (in a week or a month or a year) with this endless cycle of trying to please the practical lord of my life.

But if instead God roots out a practical lord of my life – an idol of self-satisfaction by being the “Go-To” Guy – then I can become the kind of man who makes good decisions.

God is speaking to me and directing me, but in ways I didn’t expect or imagine.

When we are stuck in a rut, longing to hear direction from God in a decision, might the seeming silence of God be his way of moving us to more deeply examine the practical lords of our lives? Maybe God is going after the “trump cards” in our lives, the things that give us personal validation apart from him: money, prestige, being a “Go-To” Guy, popularity, being a great parent, comfort, having a great ministry, and the like.

Maybe he is giving us more than we even ask or think.

Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish [Antioch](#), a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbo he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men's retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. His is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.



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The Eternal Springtime Will Surely Come

by John Henry Newman

Once only in the year, yet once, does the world which we see show forth its hidden powers, and in a manner manifest itself. Then the leaves come out, and the blossoms on the fruit trees and flowers; and the grass and corn spring up. There is a sudden rush and burst outwardly of that hidden life which God has lodged in the material world. Well, that shows you, as by a sample, what it can do at God's command, when he gives the word. This earth, which now buds forth in leaves and blossoms, will one day burst forth into a new world of light and glory, in which we shall see saints and angels dwelling. Who would think, except from his experience of former springs all through his life, who could conceive two or three months before, that it was possible that the face of nature, which then seemed so lifeless, should become so splendid and varied?...

So it is with the coming of that Eternal Spring for which all Christians are waiting. Come it will, though it delay; yet though it tarry, let us wait for it, "because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Therefore we say day by day, "Your kingdom come," which means, "O Lord, show yourself; manifest yourself; you who sit between the cherubim, show yourself; stir up your strength and come and help us" (Psalm 80). The earth that we see does not satisfy us. What we see is the outward shell of an eternal kingdom; and on that kingdom we fix the eyes of our faith.

Shine forth, O Lord, as when on your Nativity your angels visited the shepherds; let your glory blossom forth as bloom and foliage on the trees. Bright as is the sun, and the sky, and the clouds; green as are the leaves and the fields; sweet as is the singing of the birds; we know that they are not all, and we will not take up with a part for the whole. They proceed from a center of love and goodness, which is God himself; but they are not his fullness; they speak of heaven, but they are not heaven; they are but as stray beams and dim reflections of his image; they are but the crumbs from the table.

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Fishing boats at Tyre harbor, scene from Lebanon, watercolor by David Kurani

Springtime in Lebanon - Part 2

recent art work by David Kurani

David is a noted Lebanese landscape artist. He teaches classes in art and theater at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. David has exhibited widely in art galleries and private collections throughout Lebanon, Europe, and the USA. He recently completed a 6-month sabbatical dedicated to painting the Lebanese landscape. He and his wife Gisele and their three sons are active members of the People of God in Lebanon, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit.



Flowers, watercolor with body color , by David Kurani

From the artist: I love painting nature - just going outside and looking at it is medicine for my soul. I feel palpably better after gazing at it. To try and capture some of its beauty and upbuilding effects can be both a challenge and a relaxation at the same time. And I feel happy contentment if I am able to capture some of it and bring it inside to those who cannot go outside so much, or to the particularities of that interesting place/time/light.

Of course God is behind it all. The scenery is his handwriting, the weather his mood, the appreciation of them his inspiration and the creative process his impulse built on his precedent. I am reminded of a thought offered by Bernard of Clairvaux which goes, in effect: "The beauty around us is meant to remind us of, and point us towards, the perfection of beauty in its author and creator, our God." I thank God every time I finish a picture; I feel each one is a gift from him.

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