



WRESTLING GRACE

Sharing in the Life of God

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The Creator of all things, visible and invisible, set a “chain” in motion as the Prime-Mover. Despite human conceptions of a recurrent beginning or a steady state of existence — metaphysics points directly to God, and revelation continuously proves the point.

Cover:

Galaxy Triplet, ARP 274 as imaged by the Hubble Space Telescope wide field planetary camera 2

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First and foremost, God did not create evil. If God created evil, God would not be God, and all would be reduced to the human understanding of chance. If that were the case, nothing would have meaning beyond the self.

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The supreme-being, of necessity, must be considered; all good, all powerful; all knowing, and all merciful. To have created “all things.” God alone then, is the un-created source of everything that is, was, or ever will be. It is well understood, by reason, that the motivation for the ultimate give-away, i.e., (creation), is known by the word love; and since love cannot come from no-love, God. is Love itself.

Obviously, that is why man invented worship; an active acknowledgement of God's ultimate gift, existence; behind which there is nothing else. The unseen irrefutable (cause) of love, has love returned by what is called adoration.

All things tend to unite with their essential cause. Love, again, of necessity, suggests and longs for unity, it wants to re-

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constitute itself, re-produce itself by being united with its source. Being one with the Transcendent Good is its essential goal. If nothing exists beyond materiality, love has no meaning or relevance. Love needs the ultimate other — since all things revolve around the dynamics of exchanging love.

The human animal, whose freedom is tied to love, is conscious of a diversion or deviation, when love is purposely altered or modified (conflicted with its source); it invents itself as perversion (to a more or less degree), and is recognized as self-justifying falsification. Just as darkness is the absence of light, evil is the result of a (misrepresentation) or absence of love and can become habitual. Since the Ultimate Good can neither deceive nor be deceived, no evil can come from it. An earthquake that kills one hundred thousand people is not a distortion of love. A thief, murdering a victim, is. The first is an occurrence of nature — essentially good; the latter, a direct act perverting what is essentially good in humanity.

A projection of evil is called the "devil," Satan or Lucifer. A personification of evil under the names Satan, Apollyon, Asmodeus, Belial, Beliar, Beelzbul, Mastema, Sammael, and others, has generally come from ancient mythology. Satan, in Hebrew, meaning "accuser" or "adversary," is known to have been the chief of demons and evil spirits. Throughout the centuries Christian churches possessed a strong belief in Satan, influenced more by secular literature rather than by the Bible. However, literal understanding of certain biblical texts promoted the concept of a specific evil spirits, rather than' the corporate inclinations and adaptations of perverted love.

Reading biblical texts and taking them literally should never be considered wrong; but it must be evident to the many who do it, that one's imagination can supply images that may have been normal for the people of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Centuries and particularly those of the Middle-Ages, but certainly not for us in the Twenty-First Century.

Present day science continuously uncovers the marvels of the human mind and its enormous adaptability, creativity and capacity. When one simply recalls the new paradigms that have been developed since [Jung and Freud about the workings of consciousness and the unconscious, indeed “we are the stuff that dreams are made of,”] The ongoing studies of the brain as the basis of (conscious states) has made spectacular progress in the areas of brain-Mind Isomorphism, Emotionalism, Memory, Neuromodulation, etc

From the seventeenth century onward, practitioners of the so-called enlightenment have been largely concerned with materialism; to the point of trying to rationally eliminate God's existence, and rule out the concept of soul. For many, religion and revelation has become a monstrous fraud, regardless of the preponderance of people of “faith.” Those (in the know) have turned business, science, ethics and social, activism into pseudo-religions. The cult of the "self" and "existentialism" per se, is embraced by a fair portion of society with heroes like Whitman, James, Dewey, Russel, Sartre and others. The “Age of Analysis” had arrived and hooked up with Imperialism, Marxism and Totalitarianism. If you are a student of history you (do) understand that the events we call (current) are simply cyclic fluctuations in the advancement of societal evolution.

When we read the "Sacred Texts," we recognize that there are some things that are quite beyond the power of reason. They need to remain, for now, in the category of "mystery."

The radicalism of Christianity is well known to most of us. Its main tenets, those of "incarnation" and "resurrection from the dead," are certainly beyond our practical understanding and must be taken on the (faith) that Jesus preached, to be honestly believed. Once taken on faith, we can "Worship," which I think is intrinsic in all of us. (For, Christians, specifically, the inclination to faith is provided by the "grace" of God, and should be nurtured.) In a secular-materialist culture, it's the nurturing that can be a hassle. The presumed "Wall of Separation" in American practice, splits the citizen's consciousness between the two institutions that mean the most to him/her, aside from marriage; that is Church and State.

Needless to say, there is enough evidence to support this view considering the litigiousness in the system regarding church and state issues. Though I must say, the confrontations are often blown out of proportion by a secular press whose business now-a-days seems to be to (make) "news" rather than report it.

Most of the Sacred texts remain in the category of mystery, though much of the Bible checks out almost perfectly vis-a-vis other historic writings surrounding it. The Bible is a unique and wonderful combination of revelation and history, and probably the most important work of art of all time. I have always thought that all true art is more or less spiritually inspired, and certainly the Bible is chiefly that. What is meant by "spiritually-inspired" is a very personal thing, what is meant by

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religious~conviction is something else. When spiritual inspiration and religious~conviction come together—we're talking grace

Let's take an event known as the Temptations of Christ, and try to analyze it on the basis of history and revelation. Three of the evangelists recorded the event. Mark, considered the oldest of the four gospels, writes of the event briefly:

And at once the Spirit drove him into the desert, and he remained there forty days, and was put to the test by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels looked after him.

(Mark: 1, 12~13)

Matthew and Luke write more extensively of the event. (Matt: 4, 1~11) and (Luke: 4, 1~13). Since they are both very similar, we will stick with the Lucan version. It must be noted that all three Evangelists placed the event after Jesus' baptism and just before his public ministry.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for forty days being put to the test by the devil. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry.

Then the devil said to him, 'If you are Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone.'

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and their splendor, for it has been

handed over to me to give to anyone I choose. Do homage, then, to me, and it shall be all yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve.'

Then he led him to Jerusalem and set him on a parapet of the Temple. "If you are Son of God," he said to him, 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: 'He has given his angels orders about 'you to guard you' and again: "they will carry you in their arms in case you trip over ,a stone.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Having exhausted every way of putting him to the test, the devil left him, until the opportune moment.

The story of the Temptation of Jesus is the Lucan way of explaining the importance of steadfastness and obedience to God. If you are somewhat superstitious, and take the words of Luke literally you can imagine a wily, animal-looking character, finding a hot and bewildered Jesus stumbling around in the desert looking for shade and comfort. Knowing of his weakness, Satan offers him what would be more than satisfying to his physical needs. Making quick-spirited trips to a high mountain" then a parapet in Jerusalem, the devil is thwarted in his attempts to coerce the Son of God to pay homage to him. The story is complete in its emphasis on being faithful, and doing diligence to God by using references to the words of Psalm 91, Deuteronomy 8, v-J, and Deuteronomy 6, vv 13 and 16.

If you are more curious than superstitious and tuned to the workings of your own mind, you are fully aware of the dynamics between good and evil, which we have spoken of earlier as being a condition of human development through evolution.

Both Luke and Matthew take you to situations in the Old Testament which emphasize God's revelations to the Israelites. (Deut, 8:3) has us intelligently understand that God is known by human beings (a priori) and we do not simply live by (bread alone), that is, physically eating, but also by the spirit which is our life, our soul.

In Deut. 6: 13, we are taught that to love our Creator God is the essence of all law, and that we should not treat the love of “earthly” possessions as a substitute for the love of God.

In (Ps. 91) the story tells us of God's promise of protection for those who seek him, even under the most trying natural circumstances.

Finally, Deut, 6: 16 admonishes us not to test God's goodness by refusing his grace. It warns that our stubbornness and laziness could be the cause of our own spiritual suicide.

Whether or not this wilderness event ever historically took place' is irrelevant. What is most relevant is that the teachings of Jesus, the man; and Christ the Son of God, are made known to those who read the texts either literally or metaphorically. To paraphrase the famous saying of Walt Kelly's “Pogo”: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” One can say, whichever way you read the texts the message is loud and clear. Psalm 95

dumps it right in our laps when it says:*If only you would listen to him today!* Great art always , speaks universally because it is nearer the truth. Though revelation is more to the point than history in ' this "event," it is still important to try to make a historical connection as well.

An issue of Biblical Archaeology Review presented a very good article with regard to Jesus' baptism having taken place at Beth Abara, the biblical Bethany, beyond-the-Jordan. Bethabara, meaning House of the Crossing, lies on the east side of the river about "a forty minute drive from Amman and two hours by car from Jerusalem." Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan (John 1: 28) should not be confused with Bethany on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.)

"Roman and Byzantine archaeological finds help identify the site as that of Jesus' baptism." "In the Jubilee year 2000, John Paul II visited the site, and it has been designated by the Catholic' bishops of the Middle East as one of five pilgrimage sites in Jordan."

It is interesting to note that "Bethabara" is not far from the site of Quamran, where in 150 B.C., the Essenes split from the Jerusalem Temple Cult and settled in the "wilderness"; (the desert of the temptation story). "Under the leadership of a deposed high-priest they moved to the solitude of the desert to prepare for the advent of the Messiah." This is the area, scripture tells us, where Jesus wandered for 40 days. The Lucan narrator is careful to make a direct comparison to the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the Sinai; no human could do without food for 40 days and live. The Lucan writer knew well of the

penitent fasting which was the custom of the holy men (the prophets) of Israel. As a man fasting, and in a weakened state, Jesus had to have been completely aware of the duality of mind and matter and his “temptations” as real as yours and mine.

Following directly from the wilderness story Jesus is said to have chosen his first disciples, and began his public ministry with the words of the Baptist, "Look, there is the Lamb of God."

He promised Nathanael even greater things to come, when he said: "In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of Man."

For the chronicler of Luke, this was a wonderful opportunity to reference Jacob's dream in Gen. 28:12, when God promised the world to the descendants of Israel. For me, Jesus was about to deliver on that promise. We are all figurative descendants of the Israelites, the People of God, and we owe this in good measure to St. Paul. It is the geography of the story that appeals. It is conceivable that Jesus walked the twenty or so miles into the “wilderness” to pray and fast as a holy man would be prone to do. It is highly unlikely that Jesus told this story to the disciples but it is Luke's way of bringing the scripture into context with the (life) of the Messiah. In any case, the core of the temptation story is its emphasis on Jesus' fidelity to the Father by rejecting the inclinations of the flesh. For devotees of scripture, it doesn't take much to see how this story applies in our own lives. Dazed and hungry the man Jesus wrestles with his status as the “Lamb of God” who was to take away the sins of the world; anxiety which he would encounter again in Gethsemane.

Over the centuries, the obvious struggle inherent in the human psyche (between good and evil) contributed to the imagining of co-eternal and co-equal entities existing as opposing principles. This “radical dualism,” a primal conflict between two opposing forces, was held by the Manichaeans of the third century. Other groups followed with a modified view of this (dualism), where there is one major premordial principle, the good, and a second minor one, evil. At the end of time, so it goes, a great conflict would prove that good conquers evil. This concept was held by the Bogomils, the Cathars and the Gnostics. Two contemporary examples of dualistic doctrines are Descarte's distinction between mind and matter; and Kant's, between the noumenal (apprehended by thought) and phenomenal (known through the senses) still contested in many philosophical circles.

Since it would be absurd, by reason alone, to attribute evil to the “good,” one must conclude that God, who is called love itself, is the antithesis of evil. Scripture has us understand that the Father “saw all that he had made, and it was good.” (Gen.: 1).

Homo Sapiens, God's ultimate creation (considering evolution in some form as a given), was made in his own image and likeness. Thinking in the abstract, it can be said that our spiritual-freedom corresponds to the “nature” of God. Spiritually, we are like our Creator in terms of determining our own fate; supported by an interior awareness of from whence we came. In other words, right from the beginning, our conscience and the simple (revealed truth) of the living God's presence with us, has been a factor in all our decision making.' We have absolute supremacy over ourselves (soul and body/mind), but with a nagging notion of God's existence with

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us, unsupported by any practical "religious" imputation. (It is well understood that the cave-man worshiped.)

Our emotions are primally tied to the good and the beautiful. The sentient produces positive (and) negative "feelings," the differences of ease and dis-ease: order and disorder; comfort and pain are all part of being human.

Anyone who knows animals, knows of their innocence. No animal is evil. Looking into the eyes of the great, apes or even tropical-fish or lizards, you are seeing something good, something of the goodness of God. Animals receive the attribution of "evil" 'from the fear proto-humans had of them. Since, from an evolutionary standpoint, earthwise we are descendants of the "animal kingdom," survival is natural to us. Our inclination of reversion to an animal state is a constant existential threat to every thinking human being as a result of evolution.

Whatever evil is brought about by humanity against itself can inevitably be traced to self interest or survival. But, with the human race, there is the obligatory-option of conforming to the evidences of love; our eminent connection with God. My personal opinion is that there has never been a person alive who did not deeply understand that hypothesis, provided his or her reasoning powers were healthy. Love, with all its complications, is an inherent human trait. Our need is two-fold: (a) survival which is natural; (b) God (Love) which is the source of life and is supernatural. The tension between the two is obvious.

Just as we are conscious of our responsibility for the things we set in motion, I posit that God, our Father, is responsible when it comes to (our) existence. The Deity is revealed in all of his works. Who is so blind as not to see that? What man or woman does not know of the immense love which surrounds her or him, even under the worse natural conditions? We have witnessed that on the battlefield and in disasters. Isn't that the meaning behind the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends (John: 15, 13). Anyone who loves me will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make (a home) in him. (John: 14,23)

These are the promises of Christ which many billions held and hold by faith.

The omnipresent, supreme, uncreated being, whom we have known since we started to think transcendently, of necessity, has to be all-merciful to be God. We know (gratuitously) the Deity will not disown its offspring. A flow of loving-care is continuously coming our way from the (One) who is love. This favor, kindness or friendship, historically tied to mercy, is called (grace). Our merciful God is a compassionate “parent”; one whose “will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” no matter how we might object to it or try to dictate terms.

The Old Testament and Talmudic literature is rife with references to God's mercy. An article in, the Jewish Encyclopedia says: Grace, Divine: One of the attributes of God, signifying His loving-kindness and mercy, and particularly His compassion for the weak, the unfortunate, and

the sinful. It is in contrast with the attribute of justice, inasmuch as grace is granted even to the undeserving. The most significant Scriptural passage is in Exodus (XXXIV 6): *The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.*

In the Talmud divine grace is designated by the term *the attribute of mercy*, in contradistinction to *the attribute of justice*. In creating the world God combined the two.

Thus said the Holy One, blessed be His name! If I create the world with the attribute of mercy, sin will abound; and if I create it with the attribute of justice, how can the world exist? Therefore I create it with both attributes, mercy and justice, and may it thus endure. (Gen. R. XII.15)

"The Jewish literature is also full of the idea of divine grace. It is expressed in praise and adoration, in supplication, and in thanksgiving. God is addressed as merciful God, merciful Father, and merciful King."

In Christian theology it is a state of gratuitous sanctification by God; the state of a person under divine influence. Simply, grace is "unmerited favor." God's free action for the benefit of his children. What parent doesn't know about that? What individual has not known of a compassionate aura in a thousand different ways? On seeing one less "fortunate," we are apt to say: *There but for the grace of God go I*, are we not? Humanity reflects the sympathetic, the compassion of God, deep in its emotional nature. This is the *reasons of the heart, that reason does not know*, says Pascal.

Reasoning powers and mental processes can be tricky. A person can convince himself or herself that what he or she understands is true, is actually false, or that left is right or right is left, depending on which way one is facing. In the weightlessness of space there is no up or down unless you are oriented to the space ship, or can see the nearest planet, where down is from any point above its surface due to gravity.

With his Theory of Relativity, Albert Einstein imagined himself riding a beam of light traveling at light-speed. Space and time joined forces. Since then, it seems everything has become “relative.” But, the base angles of an isosceles triangle are still equal; one and one is two; the speed of Einstein's light is still 186,000 mi. per second, the Holocaust happened and Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem’s walls.

Relativity and relativism are two different things; but philosophically, the post modern world tends to think - there is no such thing as immutable truth, or the ultimacy of the existence of God.

All things, both physical and spiritual, have their philosophical beginning in metaphysics; and faith is still the grip we have on what we (know) to be true - positively or negatively. If we believe we are living on the ball we call earth - we are probably right. If we believe we are Napoleon, we're probably wrong.

The assurance of certain probabilities is a matter of necessary facts - taken on faith. Feelings are mercurial; love is sometimes blind; but billions are happily certain that God loves them, and say: “ThankGod” when something good happens to them. When the (physical) mind recognizes and objectifies the Spirit

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of God existing in our life's-force, the soul, due to the reality of the grace of God, we truly become (fully) human. Holy Scripture is the quickest way to understand that concept. Jesus put it this way:

If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; and you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John: 8, 31)

After Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John, before his public ministry began:

He came up from the water and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. ,And suddenly there was a voice from heaven, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on him.. (Matt: 3, 16,17).

, An earlier message that was to “renew the face of the earth,” was given to Mary: “Hail, full of grace”; followed by Elizabeth's: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Mary accepted with: *You see before you the Lord's servant, be it done unto me according to your word.*

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we saw his glory that he has from the Father as only , Son of the Father, full of (grace) and truth.

Amazing grace!, how sweet it is. One can, never get enough of it. Look into the cup of a tulip, or at the Galaxies from Hubble, or into the eyes of a child and see if that's not right.

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NOTES