

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 3

MAN

http://www.stvincentscathedral.org/page/basic_christianity_course_document_files

INTRODUCTION

Revised 2/11/14

On Christmas Day in the year 1776, George Washington crossed the Delaware River standing up in a row-boat—if we can believe the famous painting—and he made a surprise attack on the British army. And he won a great victory.

That really happened.

It is also a *myth*.

That is to say it is part of that body of stories from the early days of this country which, together, help Americans to know who they are and where they came from. And as these stories have been told over and over again, they have become internalized and have formed the peculiar and particular thing called the “American character.”

Technically speaking, myths are defined as stories, both *historical* and *legendary*, which a community tells itself over and over again, from generation to generation, to form the character and personality of the community and to maintain its identity, its awareness of who it is.

Sometimes, in popular usage, the word *myth* means “traditional but un-historical”. That is not the correct definition of the word, and it is not the way in which I am using it.

Myth is the product of community, and can only be understood within the community. The myth explains the community, and the community explains the myth. And, in this technical sense, the Bible is myth. I am saying this not to cast doubt on the dependability of the Bible but to make clear what its function is.

God’s people, Israel, produced the books of the Old Covenant. His people, the Church (the New Israel), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which he gave them at Pentecost, produced the books of the New Covenant, as well as a lot of others, some of which also called “gospels.”

But before any of the books of the New Testament were written, the Church spread and grew relying on the spoken word, the “oral tradition.” Quickly the bishops and evangelists developed their own customary ways of telling the story. We might say today that each one of them developed his own “schtick.”

In those first years while the Church was still relatively small, the different leading evangelizers compared notes with each other. And so the different versions of the same gospel became more and more standardized.

For the first 200 years or so the agreed upon Oral Tradition continued as the primary version. St. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) who was a famous teacher in that great center of the

Church said,

“Those teachers, however, who preserved intact the true tradition, as it stems directly from the holy apostles Peter and James, John and Paul, by ensuring that a son always received it from his father, came, by the help of God, to us as well, in order . . . to sow [in us] those apostolic seeds.” *Stromata*, I, II, 3 cited in Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood*, Ignatius, 1988, p. 387

The People of God, in the light of the great Oral Tradition, and in consideration of who wrote the particular “gospels” or “epistles,” came to a consensus about which of all those books were to belong in the Bible, which were to be *canonical*, – and which were not.

So the Bible was produced by the Holy Spirit working through the Church. And the Bible can only be fully understood from within the life of the Church.

However, during the Reformation, in the 1500s, some people began to approach the Bible as though it could be understood without reference to the ongoing life of the Christian Community. The reformers, forgetting that the Bible derives its authority from the Church, appealed to the Bible against the Church, and tried to make the Bible the basis for a restructuring of the Church.

Let me give you some background to clarify what I mean. Back in the 400s when the barbarians overran the western part of the Roman Empire, civilization collapsed and fell apart. Schools could not be sustained. Reading became rare. And so in every locality, the commonly spoken Latin language degenerated into local spoken dialects which varied greatly from place to place.

These local dialects became, in due time, the languages which we now know as Spanish, Italian, French, Romanian and so on. We call them the “Romance” languages, because they all derive from the language of Rome.

Latin remained the literary language and the language of educated people. All the books were written in Latin, and only a few people could afford to own them. And more and more, as time went on, the ordinary people were unable to speak Latin or understand it.

So, by the time of the Reformation, in the Western Church, it had been centuries since ordinary people had been able to understand the Bible when it was being read during church services—or at any other time, for that matter.

All this was not some sort of devious plot by the Church to deprive people of the Word of God. It was simply a matter of a language barrier which had resulted from the accidents of history. But its consequences were, nevertheless, serious and severe.

The Bible’s function as myth was greatly weakened.

Although the great, archetypal stories of the Bible were known to ordinary people through Church teaching and preaching, and through the arts—notably the medieval “mystery plays,” stained glass windows, and wall paintings—the Bible itself, however, was not exercising its proper influence on the Church. And this must have been the cause, to a large extent, of the Church’s desperate condition on the eve of the Reformation.

It also resulted in generations of theologians whose understanding of Holy Scripture was diminished. And it was from their ranks that there came the people whom we call “the Reformers” – but they too, after all, were the products of a “sick” Church.

So when the reformers appealed to the Bible as an authority outside the Church, often they did not know what they were doing: they did not understand either the Bible or the Church.

By the grace of God, the Church of England, at the Reformation, did not attempt to radically re-invent the Church, although some of its members wanted to. But it did translate the Bible and all of public worship into the language of the people. And this allowed the Christian myth to begin resuming its function of forming the Church’s mind and character

Now, some 500 years later, we understand the Bible far better than the reformers did. And, for similar reasons, we understand much better the life of the Apostolic Church of the first century.

The Christian Myth deals not merely with natural events, “ordinary history,” but also with the interaction of eternity with time, with the intervention of God in human affairs. And, beyond that, it deals with the origin and existence of space/time itself.

Our myth has to use human experience, human categories, and human language to express that which lies not only within space and time, but outside of them as well.

So there is always an inevitable inadequacy in our myth, — the inadequacy of *understatement* — the inability to do justice to the reality.

CREATION

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit (Hebrew *ruach*, “wind” or “breath” or “spirit”) of God was moving over the face of the waters.” [Genesis 1:1]

The Christian myth begins with the creation of the universe out of *nothing*, which is symbolized by the endless waters of chaos shrouded in total darkness.

When the first space-walk occurred, the entire world watched it on TV as the astronaut went out of the space-craft and floated in emptiness, connected to the space-craft and, indirectly, to our world only by the “umbilical cord”. And we could imagine what would happen if that cord should snap. He would float out there in nothing *forever!*

Just to think about it gives you an uneasy feeling in the pit of your stomach!

NOTHING!

A nothing cannot think. But if you were a nothing, and God gave you the choice of either being nothing or being a salt crystal, which would you choose?

And when you discovered yourself to be a salt crystal you would want to burst into praise and thanksgiving. But salt crystals can’t do that. Nevertheless, God ought to be praised for every salt crystal.

In every pint of my blood there is a teaspoonful of salt. When I praise God, therefore, salt crystals praise God. You and I are the only way in which salt crystals can do that.

Which would you rather be: a salt crystal or a cabbage? A cabbage is a marvelous thing: it is alive. It has that mysterious thing “life”—what the Greek philosophers call a *vegetable soul*—meaning that it can take in nourishment and grow and produce little cabbages. But it cannot praise God.

People have vegetable souls. We speak of “couch *potatoes*.” We say things like: “I just sat there and vegetated” or “after the wreck he was just a vegetable.” So when we praise God, vegetable life, enzyme life, praises God.

Which would you rather be: a cabbage or a collie dog? Collies have *animal souls*. They are sentient. They have feelings, and they can think. But, as far as we can tell, they cannot praise God.

I too have an animal soul; and when I praise God, animal life praises God.

God loves animals and vegetables and minerals. I am his appointed agent by which his love is ministered to his creation. This is part of the meaning of the story of Adam in the Garden and the story of Noah and the Ark.

Man, then, is the priest of God’s creation. He is a combination of cheerleader and coordinator of recreation on a summer cruise.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

“God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’”

Man is made in God’s image, not vice versa. That is to say, God does not have ears and eyes and a nose and a mouth. But, rather, there is something in God to which man corresponds.

God is *personal*. He has purposes, and he chooses freely to create. He does not have to create. Man is personal: he is relatively free to choose, and he is creative. So it is as person that man is the *image* of God.

To be a person is to have some kind of *moral character*. For example, when we say things like: “John couldn’t possibly have done what you say he did; it’s not like him to be deliberately mean,” what we are talking about is his moral character.

So, to bear the *likeness* of God is to have the *same kind* of moral character that he has – the same kind of character that Jesus has.

God is also *social*; in fact, he is Society with a capital S. It is the fact that man is personal and social that gives him the capacity for fellowship with God.

Genesis pictures Adam (Hebrew for Man) as originally having fellowship with God. It was

an innocent relationship. It was a relationship which Adam was not aware of. What he was aware of was God.

That relationship was lost. Man, as we now know him, has the image but not the likeness.

In order for us to enjoy the fellowship with God for which he made us, we have to change. The story of Christianity is the story of men and women being willing to change – or, rather, to be changed.

Genesis says that after Adam was created, God brought all the animals to him in order that he might name them. That meant that he had authority over them. Animals are to Man as Man is to God. (And that fact has important implications for our stewardship of the animal world.)

- Who has not been followed home by a stray puppy? Dogs know they belong with people. Imagine what it must be like to be a dog without a master. Every dog has a human-shaped hole in his heart. And man has a God-shaped hole in his heart. That's the sort of thing St. Augustine meant when he said that "our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee".

Until a dog has found a master, he doesn't know what it is he wants. But when he has found a master, he knows he has "come home".

Until you find God and become domesticated by him, you don't know what it is you want. But when that has happened, you know you have come home.

However, dogs want to be accepted in human society on their own terms. And we can't allow that. It won't do for us, and it won't do for them. It won't fulfill their destiny.

Untrained, a dog wets on the floor, pulls on the curtains, steals food off the kitchen table, and is generally not fit for human society.

But when he has been domesticated and become obedient, we say he is *almost human*. Only then is he fully a dog. His potential is realized.

- If the mama dog has her puppies in the closet in the spare bedroom, they grow up never knowing what it is to be outside human society.

But if they are born out in the woods, miles away, in a hollow log, they won't know what it is they yearn for until someone goes out into the woods and brings them home.

That is something like what the Church means by the "Fall" of man. The result of it is that man does not know what he is for, until God goes out and gets him and brings him home.

- Men learn how to communicate with their dogs. For example, if your dog likes to ride in the car, sometimes you have to spell it (c-a-r) in order to keep him from getting all excited!

I can learn to communicate with God. But it is hard to learn his language. Prayer is *practicing* communicating with God. But since he can understand me perfectly, the most important part of prayer is not our speaking to God, but our listening to him.

THE DEFINITION OF MAN

[This next part is a little philosophical, but it provides important background for what is coming. So I hope that you will be patient and work through it with me.]

There are two classical definitions of Man, and they complement each other. One is by Aristotle (one of the greatest Greek philosophers, who lived from 384 to 322 BC) and other by Boethius (a Christian philosopher who died in 524 AD).

- Aristotle says that:

Man is a rational, sentient, living, bodily, *subsistent* being. Subsistent means really existing.

Among beings, some are only imaginary, and some are real (subsistent);

among real beings, some are bodily, and some are not;

among real, bodily beings, some are alive, and some are not;

among real, bodily, living beings, some are sentient (feeling) and some are not;

among real, bodily, living, sentient beings, some are rational, and some are not.

In real, living things like cabbages, the life of the cabbage is sustained by the body. But the body is kept in order by the life of the vegetable soul. When that dies, it begins to disintegrate and decay.

In real, living, sentient beings like dogs, the life is sustained by the body; but the body is kept organized and working by the animal soul.

In real, living, sentient, rational beings like you and me, the rational life is supported by the body. But the body is governed by the intellect. Unless the intellect sees to it that it eats – and eats the right amount of the right things (that is, unless the intellect governs the bodily appetites)—the result is disease and death.

In the case of animals, the animal soul functions automatically, by instinct. But instincts are not, by themselves, adequate for human beings.

Something is wrong: something is missing without which man cannot get along. It has to do with the nature of intellect:

WHAT THE INTELLECT CAN DO is to pick means in order to arrive at ends. When it seems to be picking ends, what it is really doing is picking means to achieve some further end.

For example: if you are out playing golf and it starts to rain, given the fact that you want to stay dry the intellect says, “In that case, the thing to do is to head for those trees over there.” As you are running for the trees, it may seem that the trees are your goal, or end. But in fact they are merely the means to the end—keeping dry.

WHAT THE INTELLECT CANNOT DO is to supply ends.

For example: recall the story of the boy in the previous class. He wanted money to buy a mower so that he could cut grass, so that he could go to college, so that he could go to medical school, so that he could be a doctor, so that he could make money ... or so that he could keep people well ... which brought him to the question, “What are people for?”

The fact is that none of us is born with a built-in understanding of his end or purpose. No one is born knowing “what people are for”.

A spiritual nature is supposed to govern the intellect. And through this spiritual nature man is intended to arrive at his final end or purpose—which is **to know God, to love God, and to enjoy Him forever.**

Theoretically, Adam and Eve were created with an intuitive knowledge, a mystical awareness, of their final end in God. That was lost—or abandoned—in the Fall; and so the intellect is left without a governor.

When the question of ends comes up, the *intellect* throws up its hands and says, “Beats me!” But the *body* has an answer: “food, warmth, comfort, sex, etc.”, just like a cat or a dog. So the intellect, for the want of better or higher ends, sets out to serve those lesser ones.

The devil, as traditionally depicted in art, has horns and hooves and a tail – because the *animal* nature of fallen man has taken over and is calling the shots.

The intellect is supposed to govern the animal appetites in the light, in the perspective, of man’s final end, instead of being controlled by them. The result of this failure of the intellect is sickness and death.

The intellect needs to be governed by a spiritual life, with which man is not born. It has to be restored to him by his being brought into contact with God, so that he can learn his true end. And then, over a period of time, he must have his intellect become obedient to the spirit, in order that it may govern the appetites and thus the whole body.

So the definition which Aristotle gave (based on his observation of natural, or fallen, man) has to be expanded in this way:

Man is a *spiritual*, rational, sentient, living, bodily, subsistent being.

And that brings us to

- Boethius

Boethius said: “Man is an *individual* substance of a rational nature”.

“Substance” is the noun version of the adjective *subsistent* which we have been using. So man is an individual entity or existing thing.

There are two principles of individuation in the case of human beings: that is to say, there are two ways to tell people apart—

Physical: I am a man, and my wife is not. I am bald, and she is not, etc.

Spiritual: With my eyes shut, I can tell the difference between myself and my wife. That is called “connatural self-knowledge”.

So man is *spiritual*.

MAN’S SPIRITUAL NATURE

Let’s try an experiment: I am holding up an ordinary pin of the sort that dressmakers use. Let’s all concentrate on the tip of that pin.

How many people could do that at the same time? Any number. Now, move your thoughts to the tip of the Washington Monument.

How long did it take you to get there? Did you go by way of (let us say) Atlanta?

During this experiment, where were *you*?—not “Where was your body?” but “where were *you*?”

What does it mean to say: “I was beside myself” or “I was a thousand miles away” or “I’ll be with you in spirit”?

Have you ever been “lost in a movie” or “buried in a book”?

For a large part of the time our attention is taken up by bodily things, and then we are where our bodies are – but that is not so all the time.

So man is both *body* and *spirit*. As a spirit, each person is a separate species with only one member.

Because we are spiritual as well as bodily, we are able to *know* and to *love*:

When I know, I take the essence of the other person or thing into myself and I can carry that with me.

When I love, I go out of myself and enter into the beloved, and I hurt when he or she hurts, and I rejoice when he or she rejoices.

Knowing and loving are spiritual activities. They are what the theologian and writer Charles Williams calls “mutual co-inherence”.

So not only is man spiritual, he is also *social*.

MAN'S SOCIAL NATURE

Not only is it not good, it is not possible to live alone, much less to be fully human. Alone, and apart from others, we do not get born, nor do we survive.

A part of the perfection of each human being is the development of a relationship with a community. The larger that community, the richer our affective and emotional life will be. Thus, in Heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, because in Heaven everybody is married to everybody else.

Someone raised in China is very different *inside* than we are. They and we are the products of very different communities: different families, different neighborhoods, different nations, different schools, and different churches.

Chinese communities have been formed by different myths from mine.

The Christian community involves more than those who are currently alive. It includes the contributions of people who were dead long before this country was founded. It includes influences that go back 2000 years to the Apostles and, before them, another 2000 years to the Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It has been said that to move a flower is to trouble a star.

A person learns *who* he is from his community, starting with his family. And he learns what his *end* or *purpose* is in the same way. We do not become human, much less fit for God's fellowship, apart from community.

So we must resist the lie which contemporary secular society tells us to the effect that each of us is an individual capsule of humanity. That is simply not true any more than an ion of hydrogen or an ion of oxygen is the unit of water. The unit of water is the H₂O molecule. And it is the family which is the unit of the larger community, not the solo individual.

SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF MAN

Man is a *liminal* creature. That is, he lives at the border or on the boundary between the world of *spirit* and the world of *matter*. [Latin *limen*, *liminis*, boundary]

Man is a unity of body and soul. He is not a soul *trapped* in a body. He is not a *ghost* driving a machine.

The reason there is no sin in Heaven is not because there are no bodies there – because there are bodies there. The Christian gospel is not the “immortality of the soul,” but rather the “resurrection of the body” which is what we affirm when we recite the Creed. It is not meaningful to speak of *disembodied* human beings. It cannot be imagined.

The Greeks and Jews had a vague belief that the souls of the dead left their bodies and went to *Hades* or *Sheol* where they only barely existed. And whatever that existence amounted to, it was not much. And they did not look forward to it.

In order for people to participate in the human community, communication is necessary. And that involves the translation of our thoughts and intentions into physical terms. Let me demon-

strate:

I am now thinking of a number between one and ten. I am going to look at a spot on the wall over there and visualize that number. As I look at it and think about it, let your minds go blank and be receptive to my thoughtNow that everyone has got the number, we can move on to the next topic.

Wait a minute. Did you all get the right number in your minds? (The number was —.)

You see: even when (or if) mental telepathy works, we can't tell if it has worked until we talk about it. We have to involve our bodies with voice and word.

We have to use symbols in order to communicate. Symbols are physical events which evoke or stand for certain ideas, intentions or feelings. Words are symbols: so are trademarks, company logos, bugle calls, smoke signals, and so on.

RITUAL AND CEREMONY

In moments of stress or awkwardness, words are not enough. Then we resort to special forms of *verbal symbolism* called *rituals*. These are special patterns of words which have developed in the community for dealing with particular situations. "Hello", "I love you", and "Good-bye" are simple examples of such rituals.

When even rituals are inadequate, then *ceremonies* are added. These are special *symbolic actions* which the community has developed to deal with those particular situations. Handshakes, salutes, kisses are all ceremonies.

Religious ritual and ceremony are, therefore, inevitable. The more profound the experience or the relationship, the more likely it is for ritual and ceremony to develop. Again, the larger the group that is involved in the experience or relationship, the more likely it is for them to develop.

The size of a warm, intimate group is limited by the number of people you can know on a first-name basis. The only way for a larger group to develop a sense of community and common identity is through common ritual and ceremony.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Baptist churches so often split. Since they choose to have little in the way of ritual and ceremony, they have to get small enough to have a sense of community. The big Baptist churches seem to be the ones that have robed choirs and such things. They also have Sunday School classes of 25 or less which are the real congregations.

Imagine that you are riding on a bus to the interior of, let us say, Pakistan. Everyone else on the bus is dressed in the local style. You feel entirely alone in a Muslim country. All of a sudden, the bus hits a pothole. And then you notice one of those on the bus making the sign of the cross! "He's one of us! I'm not alone!"

Ceremony and ritual which weld us together in a common act generate a sense of oneness and solidarity. That is why it is so great to sit around a campfire and sing all the good old songs. It is hard to imagine some of the new reformation churches surviving without a lot of congregational hymn-singing.

Christian ceremony and ritual are intended to overcome this sense of isolation, to enable us to lose our self-consciousness and to become part of something bigger. And that does happen in a spiritually mature congregation.

A spiritually mature congregation fills up the front rows on Sunday morning and sits close together. An immature congregation (as congregation) fills up the back seats first and sits spread apart.

CEREMONIAL AND RITUAL NATURE OF ALL RELIGION

All religions are ceremonious and ritualistic – even those which think they are not and tend to be critical of this aspect of Catholic worship. At the conclusion of an ecumenical church meeting, the Methodist minister says, “Now let us close our eyes and bow our heads in prayer.” He assumes that that is “just what you do” when you pray.

He doesn’t realize that Catholic Christians are more likely to kneel or stand to pray, and that we usually keep our eyes open—because more distractions come from within than from without, and also we are frequently looking at something like a cross or crucifix to overcome our distractions.

- Catholic worship is more ceremonious than, say, Baptist or Methodist worship, because we go to church for a different purpose than they do.

We go there to do something *active* and *expressive*: to make love to God.

They go there for a *passive* purpose—to have something happen to them: to hear a sermon or to listen to hymns sung by the choir and soloists.

- To refuse to engage in a ceremony with others is, in itself, a ceremonial act. For example, imagine that you are in a movie theater in wartime, and the show starts with the national anthem and a picture of the flag. If everyone except you stands up, someone is likely to reach over and jerk you to your feet.

At the time of the Reformation, in some places among some Christians, certain ceremonies were abandoned, because the doctrines they expressed or implied were being abandoned or denied.

- Ceremonies easily tend to become empty formalities. When that happens, there is a choice: the ceremony may be abandoned, or the meaning can be put back into it. The way to put meaning back into an empty formality is to do it deliberately and on purpose.

For example: when the honeymoon is nearly over and the passionate good-bye kiss has become just a peck, the husband can stop it altogether....Or he can start giving his wife long drawn-out, high-powered kisses. And then in time the feeling will come back

- When we abandon a ceremony because it seems empty, the next step is to lose what it was meant to express. When you stop showing respect for someone, it is not long before you stop having respect for him.

What happens in our bodies affects our souls, and vice versa. This is illustrated by the way a mother loves her new-born baby at once as a result of having invested herself in it for months.

HUMAN FREEDOM

Because he is a person made in God's image, Man can choose. He *has* freedom. He is intended by God to *be* free. But what is freedom?

There are actually two kinds of freedom: *initial* freedom and *terminal* freedom. Most of the talk you hear is about the first kind – initial freedom. That is the freedom which fallen man *has*.

But, in the long run, it is only the second kind – terminal freedom – the freedom to do those things which will fulfill my nature, attain my end, that really matters. [Latin: *terminus*, “end” or “goal”] It is only when Man is terminally free that he will be free indeed.

Initial freedom is simply the freedom to do what I feel like, such as play tennis.

But, just for fun, let's assume I was created by God to play tennis. Instead of being *homo sapiens*, I am *homo servens*.

If I belong to a country club which has a tennis court, and I have the time, then I have the initial freedom to play tennis. Only one thing is wrong: I cannot play tennis. That is, I lack the skill and strength and experience. So I am not terminally free to fulfill my nature by playing tennis.

The only way I can achieve the terminal freedom to play tennis is to sacrifice my initial freedom. I will have to give up doing other things while I practice and develop the skill to be able to play tennis. That is why the Collect for Peace at Morning Prayer speaks of our service of God as being “perfect freedom”.

If a law were passed to allow trout to vote, it would not add to the terminal freedom of trout. Terminal freedom for a trout is to swim around all day and eat flies, etc. A law permitting me to eat worms does not add to my terminal freedom.

A law forbidding me to buy wine on Sundays does not limit my terminal freedom, so I would not get too upset about it. But a law forbidding me ever to possess wine would get me really upset, because it would be interfering with my celebrating the Eucharist. And that would stand in the way of my attaining my terminal freedom.

Anything which prevents me from reading books, getting married, going to church, etc., is interfering with my freedom to pursue the real fulfillment of my nature.

LIMITS OF FREEDOM

Just as there are limits on what God can do, there are also limits on my freedom: I cannot do what I cannot imagine. I cannot do what is intrinsically undoable. That is, I cannot make a square circle any more than God can.

And every exercise of my freedom limits some further exercise of it. Each choice closes some

door for good. When I chose to become a priest, I gave up the chance to be an astronaut. When I married my wife, I gave up the chance to be a celibate monk.

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

Man's freedom makes him *responsible*. He is responsible for his ultimate destiny, because the likeness of God can be cultivated. Every choice I make conditions me, predisposes me, to make the same choice the next time. It is this pattern of repetition which develops the particular character a person has.

For example: Suppose that I have a loaded pistol in my pocket, and that I stand to gain from killing you. Even though there is no chance that I will be found out, I still will not do it. Why not? Because I am out of the habit of killing people.

I will not be terminally free until, as the result of making the long series of choices I am in the habit of making, I can no longer say yes to anything which diminishes me.

Theoretically, anyone in Hell could get up and leave and go to Heaven, if he wanted to. *But he doesn't want to!* (cf C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.)

It is the road to *Heaven* which is paved with good intentions—if they really are good and really are intended.

So anyone who has become the kind of person Jesus is – the kind of person who would like Heaven—can go there because God gives everyone his choice.

And anyone who doesn't like that kind of thing will not have to put up with it. He will be excused. That is called Hell.

But what of the person who, at death, wants to be the kind of person that Christ is, but so far isn't? What about the thief on the cross next to Jesus, who said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom"? He certainly wasn't the kind of person Jesus was, any more than the harlots and tax-collectors were. So let me tell you a parable:

During World War II, three young men are thrown together in the army. And, in spite of their very different backgrounds, they become buddies. One is well-educated, cultured and refined, a graduate of an ivy-league college; and he enjoys art, literature and classical music. The other two are poorly educated.

One Saturday evening they are at a U. S. O. club, away from home, feeling lonely, and with nothing to do. A local civilian comes in and invites them to a party; and they accept.

It turns out that the other guests are all cultured and well-educated. The conversation turns to the subject of modern painting. The well-educated soldier is entirely in his element. The other two can't take part, so they don't enjoy themselves.

For the first soldier it is heaven. One of the other two says, "Oh, hell." And he goes out and gets drunk.

The third soldier is just as uncomfortable as the one who left. But he sees the other guests having a great time and he wishes he could get in on their fun.

Well, at the end of the party, the host tells the two remaining soldiers that they have such parties every week, and he invites them to come back next week.

So the third soldier spends all of his free time that week at the base library boning up on modern art.

The next week, however, he is dismayed to find them discussing classical music instead. So that week he listens to records and reads the lives of the great composers, and so on.

But the next week the topic of conversation is the modern novel.

This goes on, week in and week out. The soldier keeps on trying to catch up – and, eventually, he too is able to participate fully in the weekly parties.

Anyone who wants to be there can go to Heaven. But, for the person who is not ready for it, it will require further preparation and painful readjustment.

This preliminary experience of Heaven for those who are not ready for it is called *Paradise*, or *Purgatory*. Jesus said to the thief, “This day you will be with me in Paradise.”

So Purgatory is certainly not another name for Hell, but rather for Heaven. Sometimes it is called the “Church Expectant”. The Church in this world is called the “Church Militant”; and, the Church, when it is fully entered into Heaven, it is the “Church Triumphant”.

But Purgatory, or Paradise, is not a “second chance”. As far as we know, this life is all the probation there is, and the die is cast by the time of our death, although it may only be after one’s death that he discovers what, or more correctly whom, he has been choosing all along.

MAN’S FALLEN NATURE

Man is capable of choice, and so he is a moral creature. Because of his choosing to rebel against God, he is a *sinner*. His problem is called “*Original Sin*”.

There are two false or distorted notions of what the doctrine of Original Sin means:

- The *puritans* hold that man is totally depraved, spoiled, ruined, no damn good, beyond hope of being fixed, utterly depraved. He is so far gone, they say, that even by the grace of God he cannot become good.

In England, in the 17th century, the puritans expressed this idea in a theological jingle—

“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Can’t put Humpty back together again.”

He is, they say, like a broken egg, or a light bulb that has been smashed. Their gospel is that God will gather up the pieces and cherish them.

- The *romantic humanists*, in reaction against the puritans, say that man is basically good, and that it is society or circumstances (environment and heredity) which mess him up.

But then, we must ask, what messes up society?

The Catholic doctrine says that Man is basically in good working order, but that he lacks the one thing that it takes for him to do what he is made for.

Man is like a light bulb—not smashed, but simply unscrewed from the socket. Such a light bulb may be good for darning socks on, or for putting under a hen on the nest. But it won't fulfill its real purpose of giving light until it is screwed back into the socket. And it cannot do that for itself.

So, to use the imagery of Jesus, Man is like a branch broken off a vine.

CHOICES TO BE MADE

If you are presently a branch separated from the Vine, do you believe you can go it alone?

Do you really want to?