

What are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them?

Psalm 144:3

What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you care for him?

Psalm 8:4

What is a human being?

Jesus People CUMC 2011, Week Two

901.483.0248

jasonbrianhood@gmail.com

1. A question everybody must answer, although the world's answers fail us

DISCUSSION #1: WHAT ARE THE SOME OF THE WAYS THE WORLD ANSWERS THE QUESTION, "WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING?"

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* #613: "The more enlightened we become, the more greatness and vileness we discover in man..."

Acts 17

Other religions, philosophies, ideas, and works of art tend to assume one or the other of these aspects of the human condition. Despair in Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*; Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*, describes the despair that comes when the only cues regarding our significance come from life in society around us, and the honest search many seekers have for meaning:

It is a pleasure to carry out the duties of a citizen and to receive in return a receipt or a neat styrene card with one's name on it, certifying, so to speak, one's right to exist. What satisfaction I take in appearing the first day to get my auto tag and brake sticker! I subscribe to *Consumer Reports* and as a consequence I own a first-class television set, an all but silent air conditioner and a very long lasting deodorant. My armpits never stink.

We all know perfectly well that the man who lives out his life as a consumer, a sexual partner...who avoids boredom and anxiety by consuming tons of newsprint, miles of movie film, years of TV time; that such a man has somehow betrayed his destiny has a human being.

According to one reviewer (Russ Douthat), the Oprah-approved bestseller-turned-movie *Eat Pray Love* is self-consciously theological: “this is the rare Hollywood production where the theological message is as important as the plotting. . . . Beneath the glossy surface, there’s the outline of a contemporary *Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which a scattered, baffled modern woman finds happiness by figuring out what God desires from her, and acting accordingly.”

After describing what God wants from the heroine – basically, break up with her husband for selfish reasons, shack up with a handsome young man then dump him, travel the world where she learns to meditate and forgive herself, then fall in love with a new guy – Douthat writes:

If everything “God” wants sounds suspiciously like what a willful, capricious, self-indulgent Western woman with too much time and money on her hands might want . . . well, then you’ve unlocked the theological message of the movie.

To quote the main character in the film: “God dwells with me, *as* me.”

He quotes G. K. Chesterton for contrast:

Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. . . . That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon, anything rather than the Inner Light; let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within.

2. Back to the beginning: God’s original design in Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Psalm 8 (used in Hebrews, etc.)

Psalm 2 (used in Acts, etc.)

Images in the ancient (and modern) world

Pharaoh and Caesar; Saddam and Mao; Coca-Cola, Google, and Macintosh

Structure of Society in the Ancient World

God(s), then any lesser gods

Emperor

Nobility

Priests

Commoners

Most Women and Children; All Slaves

“A man is the shadow of the gods; a slave is the shadow of a man; and the king is the mirror of the gods.” Letter to King Esarhaddon of Assyria, 7th century BCE

Amenhotep III made an inscription honoring Amon-Re [= sun god; think *Prince of Egypt*] as the god “who gives to them the breath of life,” the “breath which stays in all things”. Thutmose IV gave breath of life to vassal kings; goddess Hther and Amon [on an inscription at the Temple in Luxor...not Vegas, but Egypt] both give “sign of life/breath of life” to Amen-hotep III, with the latter saying “My Son, receive my likeness in thy nose.”

Thut-mose IV treading on heads of enemies; Egypt’s Apophis was serpent-god of darkness, and fought a daily battle with Amon-Re the sun god which ended at dawn [so imagine impact of plagues against Egypt]. Inscriptions cite perpetual enmity between Amon-Re and the serpent’s “seed”; Apophis’ Serpent head is wounded; according to Amon-Re, Apophis is “wiped out with my feet.”¹

¹ See sources of primary material such as Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*.

“Here it is important at least [to] allude to the meaning of creation in the Enuma Elish. There also man is made from the earth and there also it happens in the context of enthronement.” In contrast, “[i]n the Enuma Elish, man is formed to serve the gods. In Gen 2, he is [also] formed to be the king of the garden [JH: or the earth!].”

DISCUSSION #2: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS WE SEE HUMAN VALUE ASSAULTED IN OUR CULTURE? Try to list 3-5 ways you personally have your value diminished, and 3-5 ways in which you are tempted to exalt yourself.

3. The two vocations of every human being:
_____ and _____.

As Bob Dylan said, “_____.”

Case study: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. But note what Paul goes on to say about the Corinthians: they (1) own EVERYTHING, (2) are going to rule over the angels and should be capable of getting their affairs in order in the present, and (3) are the very dwelling place of God in this universe!

We were created to serve God and represent him, priests in God’s temple-world; queens and kings in his world-kingdom

Just as ancient kingdoms expanded and spread images of gods and kings all over their territory, so God’s kingdom will expand as his image fills the earth.

4. What happens to the “image” status and these two tasks after the Fall?

What stays the same: Genesis 5:3, 9:6; James 3:9

Implications for human work: chapters 3 and 13 in Chris Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*. Christians care about their world, their jobs, their city and their neighbors, and are called to participate in meaningful, wholesome labor and recreation and service. In short, they are to be truly human.

What's been damaged and betrayed: Romans 1:18ff, Genesis 3
We have the same roles, but they are not done in the same way.

What will be restored:

Daniel 7:9-14, 7:26-27

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 Corinthians 15

Romans 8

C. S. Lewis:

It is hardly possible for [us] to think too often or too deeply about [the future glory] of our neighbour. . . .It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you may talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet if at all only in a nightmare.

All day long we are in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in light of these overwhelming possibilities, with awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. These are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal.

When humans should have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that the greater glory of which Nature [the present creation] is only the first sketch.

5. Finding our Place in God's Kingdom

“God ordained humanity to be the primary instrument by which his kingship will be realized on earth... we need to qualify and explain this statement in many ways...[but at the same time] the human race has the unique role of bringing the kingdom of God to fruition and the wonderful destiny of sharing in his glory”

Richard Pratt, *Designed for Dignity*, 7

