

THE ONE AND THE MANY

Sometimes we have trouble with Christianity because Jesus was only one person. Even if He does end up the eternal Holy Spirit who called the worlds into being, we say to ourselves that on earth, He was still only one man. And how can it be true that all of us can relate to only one man? It does not make any sense that we could all identify with the Cross and awaken to our salvation by knowing ourselves forgiven there. Jesus was only one man. His ministry was in only one country. He came out of one culture and tradition and religion. It all happened at one time in history, and that was a long time ago. These things we sometimes say or sometimes think within ourselves. And then it seems to us that we have thought or said something important or even profound. We tell ourselves that maybe these really are authentic objections. Sometimes this throws people off the Path for a long time. (Not that God is unable to build our wanderings back into a path that leads us home.)

Let's skip all the backdrop and buildup and come straight to the culminating scenario of our day. It is the Last Judgment, the Day of Reckoning, only it's from a human point of view. It is the Great Courtroom Scene, only it's Humanity that is irate. Humans may be in the dock, from God's point of view: We did not keep the covenant. We were not obedient. We did not love God or each other with passion or consistency or devotion. And that caused a lot of trouble.

But God is also in the dock, from Humanity's point of view. In this scene, the voice of The People will also be heard. The People are angry about the experience on earth that God has designed and put them all through. God is, after all, accountable for God's actions too! The Creator is responsible for what is set in motion and left running. The Creator should keep a closer watch or turn it off, not just let things get so out of hand.

So Humanity's spokesperson steps forward to bring evidence before the Court. In this courtroom, there are no technical difficulties. As Counsel for Humanity speaks, clear and authentic scenes of what he is saying flash into every mind. As he talks, countless people begin to appear and recede in an incredible procession: wounded and dying victims of war; mothers trying, without success, to gather food for

their starving children. Scene after scene comes before the Court: disease, heartache, broken dreams, broken homes; people enslaved, betrayed, tortured, lonely, imprisoned, cast away. By the time Counsel for Humanity has finished, all in the courtroom are weeping uncontrollably, including God and all of God's Angels.

After a necessary recess and everyone is again composed, the Archangel Michael steps forward as Counsel for God. Michael's words also translate instantly into thoughts and visions within the minds of all present. And everybody is present. Michael begins slowly, speaking of God's hopes and intentions and how it was necessary – imperative – that human souls should experience freedom in a self-contained environment before being given access to eternal and endless dimensions. Michael then shifts to the design of creation: how most of the suffering was unnecessary, and how all creation was designed to lead humans into awareness of their dependency on God and on each other. The scenes begin to flow more rapidly, showing what the earth could have been like if people had honored Nature; had honored the commandments even they themselves believed in; had sought to live in harmony and love and cooperation. Every mind filled with pictures of life on earth showing beautiful scenes of cities and farms and villages, where people planned and studied and worked for themselves and also for the common good. Diseases were healed; poverty was only a starting over; wars were talked-out long before they turned into organized violence. All people felt a desire as well as a responsibility to obey God as the very first priority. Even people who were dying were far from miserable, for they were in the midst of loving friends, and they had all realized that they would meet again.

Then when the Archangel Gabriel steps forward to speak, the entire assembly knows that these are no mere speeches. This is the design. This really could have been true – should have been true. Then Gabriel begins to show what God has done to lead Humanity into this better WAY. New images form – of Moses, Buddha, Socrates, Jeremiah – and countless stories of light and enlightenment come before the Court. Finally the scenarios come to a halt, and there is a brief pause. Then a man appears carrying a cross up a hill. Again the entire assembly is in tears, including God and all of God's Angels.

Except ...

Except for Counsel for Humanity, who steps forward now and waits. After a long pause and the assembly is settled and attentive again, this spokesperson begins to speak. Pictures again flash clear in the minds of every being present. The scenes are flashing back and forth, back and forth – between the man with His cross and the suffering scenes of all the sons and daughters of earth down through the ages. For a long time, the pictures flash – Golgotha against all the rest of the world’s suffering. Finally, Counsel for Humanity raises his arm, and his fist is clenched. He lifts his voice and cries until it rings throughout all the halls and corridors of that Great Courtroom: “One Son is not enough! One of Yours for all of ours is not enough!”

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To Christian ears, there could hardly be a greater blasphemy. Jesus was not enough? The Eternal Spirit, descended in human flesh, coming in mercy instead of in wrath, trying to teach and reveal, preferring to suffer and die rather than harm us – and it is not enough?!

Mostly we are appalled at what happened to Jesus. We can barely believe that God would send the Son. In no way was that ever fair or right. The feeling of utter unworthiness – and the shock of our importance to God in Christ – has literally undone and redone and converted us generation after generation. Our own ingratitude and the ingratitude of the world are already an enormous paradox and our greatest crime. To suggest that one Son is not enough is unthinkable, and it should be unspeakable.

How many sons *will* it take? If we will not listen to the one, who is crazed enough to believe we will listen to the many? It does not take long to figure out who is playing Counsel for Humanity. What an age we live in: so greedy and ungrateful; so self-centered, yet so lonely; so crass, yet so hungry for meaning; so eager for some purpose, yet so empty for God. Is it any wonder that the blasphemies mount? Strange and offensive as they sound to our ears, we must learn to listen, to hear, to feel the pain beneath the utterance, and to respond. It is our world. We are Christ’s witnesses now. What do we say to the friend or neighbor who wrestles with such thoughts or speaks them boldly?

It brings us back to a principle that is ancient, not modern. It affects our perspective on many things. The track of its wisdom is found in some form in every major spiritual path around the globe throughout history. You recall it in teachings like: “*Inasmuch as ye*

have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:40) The point of the Good Samaritan story, in its proper context, is that we must stop trying to be perfect for everyone and start trying to help one neighbor at a time. We do not find truth in the many; we find it in the one.

When we are young, we think that "more" means more important. Tigers can do more damage than leopards, so tigers are more important. To be important, a thing must be big. The many are more important than the few. Even when we are young, something in us knows better. But as we learn to count and pay attention to the outer world, for a while we forget the unseen realms, and we lose the truth.

An airline crash that kills two hundred people is more important than a crash that kills only five people? A rock concert that draws three thousand people is more important than a prayer meeting that only four people attend? Do you still catch yourself thinking this way from time to time?

Is a symphony more beautiful because seven hundred people listen to it than it would be if only two people hear it? It takes more than two to *play* a symphony. That's a different principle, also very important. There must be a musician for every part. We have run into that truth before, and we will again. But do seven hundred listeners make the symphony more beautiful than two listeners? The thunder of applause will be greatly different. But the symphony can be heard by the one. The many cannot hear beyond the reaches of the one.

How is a big war different from a small feud? More people experience it, but what they experience is, in every case, experienced and perceived one person at a time.

What makes me care about humanity? How do I know that humanity is important, if I have never had a single friend? You already know what I am trying to say. I am only trying to get you to remember. When I was a young boy in third grade, I had a dog named Brownie. Not much of a name, but a lot of dog. Every creature on our small ranch loved Brownie. The goats let her help lick the kids dry when they were born. The cat sometimes curled up next to her to sleep. Even the chickens never ran from her. She loved and protected everything, and everything loved her back.

I watched a car kill Brownie. We were both off on a wide shoulder of the road, where we were supposed to be. Brownie was up ahead. The car swerved clear out of its lane to hit her. It never slowed down. One blink and my reality was changed forever. I had seen pure evil. It called forth within me evil to match.

When I reached Brownie, she was still alive. I do not know how much it hurt her when I gathered her in my arms. She tried to lick my face, but she was too weary. It was about three-quarters of a mile to my house through the orange groves. I tried to be careful and I never put her down, but she was dead by the time I got home. I learned many things that day that I will never learn any clearer. If every dog in the universe had been killed that day, could it have made me any sadder? If you had killed every person on the face of the earth that day, you could not have increased my grief. It does not mean others were not important to me. But whatever capacity I have for sorrow, it was already full that day. That has happened to me on some other days since, as it has for you. It is never a matter of the many. We care one at a time. Even when we do grieve for the many, it is because we remember the one and project it outward.

To seek the truth, we do not seek the many. We seek the one. Through the one, we begin to comprehend the significance of all. One Son is enough ... if you know Him.

How many sons did King David have? How many faithful friends had fallen in battle to save David from Absalom's rebellion? Even David could not stand the sight of Absalom for years because Absalom had killed his own brother, Amnon. Yet David's grief is complete as he mourns for Absalom. Everything else recedes from his consciousness. He does not mourn for Absalom his son who was a spoiled brat, a murderer, a treasonous leader of a rebellion whose purpose was to kill all of David's most loyal friends, and then also David, and then take over the kingdom. David is not mourning for his son Absalom who wanted to kill his own father and king. He is just mourning for his son, Absalom. Even Joab, who makes all of Hollywood's "hit men" look like pantywaists by comparison, is barely able to pry David out of his grief in time to save the kingdom.

The loss of one is a total loss. Grief is not the only illustration. It does not take a cast of thousands to discover love. It takes one other. We know nothing at all about love until we learn to care for one – one at a time. You think monogamy was not God's idea? I can tell you it was not man's idea!

Some things cannot be added onto. Quantity does not alter, qualify, or change grief or love or truth. As long as there is one person anywhere who is not in the church, who is not within the beloved community, who is not known and loved and forgiven and cared about, the Kingdom is incomplete. Do you still think that only a few will be saved? If so, you do not know or understand very much about Jesus yet. Only, we are supposed to be helping. Truth is not found in the many. It is found in the one. Who teaches us about leaving the ninety-nine and going after the one who is lost?

Everything we learn that has any true significance, we learn personally and in a specific instance or experience. We do not find the truth in the many or from the many. We find it in THE ONE. If we know Him and believe Him and follow Him, all things will be revealed. Even in the midst of chaos and confusion as incredible as our world now produces, we find salvation in and from The One. One Son is enough.

In that Courtroom Scene, however it actually happens, He will be the true Counsel for Humanity – one at a time. He will be our Advocate. If He cannot clear us of all charges, nothing can. No one else is even going to try.