

The Bible as One Story: Images as the Holy Spirit's Device for Making Scripture God's Word Written

Robert Farrar Capon

My approach to scripture, you probably have guessed, is not that of someone trained by the biblical scholarship critical fellowship. I studied under them as you all did, too. I managed not to think too much about them, because I didn't think much of them. When I was in seminary a number of us got together and wrote a series of four-line doggerel verses on the result of biblical criticism as we were receiving it when applied to the scriptures. I can only remember one of those stanzas:

Of wilderness wanderings, there'd not be so many;
of Abraham's stories, we dare say, not any.
The words of our Lord would no longer be dark,
and they'd all be contained in six verses of Mark.

That was prophetic! It was the late 1940s when I managed to do that.

My method with scripture is to approach it as a theologian—which is my trade, if I have a trade—and, specifically, as something which no one calls himself or herself anymore, as a dogmatic theologian. I have never liked the phrase “systematic theology,” because there are too many possible systems you can slap on it, and the system tends to run the theology. I always liked dogmatic theology because it made you deal with the given dogmas. And here's the wonderful thing about the dogmas: there aren't very many of them.

There's an old joke in the medical profession that dermatology is the easiest of all the specialities, because while there are 256 skin diseases, there are only two creams you can prescribe for them. And that's my theory about dogmatic theology. There are 256 heresies and 256 systems, but there are only two ecumenical dogmas: the Trinity and the Incarnation. The rest of it, the doctrine of the atonement (it comes out of the incarnation, but it must not be put before that), the doctrine of the sacrifice of Christ, and all the other business in the whole system of anybody's systematic theology—death, judgment, heaven, hell, and all that work up—I don't do that.

The Truth of Scripture: Poetic Gardens Tended by the Holy Spirit

I love the simplicity of approaching scripture as if it's true, but true to what it is, which is words. It's words, and it's poetry. I'm going to read you a poem, a little bit of which was quoted on the blurb in the program for today's lecture. This is a poem by Marianne Moore; she was the great and good friend of e.e. cummings and a great poet in her own right. The poem is entitled "Poetry," and it is about poetry. I am going to take two liberties with it. When I come to the word "poetry," I am going to read "scripture," and when I come to the word "poet," I am going to read "preachers." It doesn't happen often, but everything else is what this says. Remember now, this poem in my reading is now entitled, "Scripture."

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all
this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
it after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must. These things are important, not because a
high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them, but because
they are
useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand: the bat
holding on upside down, in quest of something to
eat, elephants, pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf
under
a tree, the immovable critic, twitching his skin that
feels a flea, the baseball fan, the statistician [I think of the book of Numbers]—
nor is it valid
to discriminate against 'business documents and
schoolbooks'; all these phenomena are important. One must make
a distinction,
however: when dragged into prominence by half *preachers*, the
result is not *scripture*,

nor till the *preachers* among us can be
'literalists of
the imagination'—above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have
it [scripture]...¹

Imaginary gardens with real toads in them. This is the function of poetry, the function of the poet. And certainly the whole thrust of scripture, I think, is to give us imaginary gardens with real toads in them. For my money, that solves all the problems of biblical criticism. All the fuss, all the whether Jesus actually said this or that or the other thing; whether the Garden of Eden was ever anywhere; whether there was ever a rainbow or a flood or a Passover, or a rock in the wilderness. All this niddling over whether it happened. That's not what counts. A poem doesn't have to happen. It has to be. A poem does not mean, it "bes." It is there; it is to be experienced. It seems to me obvious that anybody who has to literalize the Garden of Eden is nuts, because it obviously can't be an eyewitness account. There were no eyewitnesses at that time. And the other thing they forget is that Genesis is a late book in the canon. All the major prophets had started off before Genesis got into the canon.

We were taught J, E, D, and P are the four sources of Genesis. J is good because it's really old, and E is good because it's sort of old, and D is good because it's Deuteronomic reforms, and P is P because he's the priestly editor. For my money, here's the point of the whole process, the whole thing, the whole theory about J, E, D, P, and the editors and all this stuff. Finally along comes P—whoever he or they were—and he fixes the creation story from the Babylonian influences. He cleans it up. Obviously the Babylonian influence didn't have creation out of nothing, but P came awfully close to saying as much with the Genesis account as we've got it. So the Holy Spirit gets this P character doing the clean-up on all this stuff in Genesis, and weaving it together; and finally when P gets to the end of the book of Genesis, the Holy Spirit smiles and says, "Okay, that's a wrap."

In other words, whatever you want to think about P, he was the last guy who had his hands on the book that's in the canon now, and that book is as it stands. So, therefore, you don't have to fuss. The Garden of Eden is an image. It is an imaginary garden with the real toad in it, right? The

¹Marianne Moore, "Poetry" (altered), in *Selected Poems* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 36–37.

whole thing, the whole business, the Virgin birth, whatever it is—I'm not going to argue the literal anything of anything—there it is. It sits on the pages of the New Testament as the communication *from* God—the Word—to us, *of* God—the Word—to us. And we experience it as we experience poetry. I don't ever want to let anyone ask the question, "Did it really happen?" Because there are different answers to that and different things. Did the crucifixion really happen? In all likelihood. Did the resurrection really happen? Pay your money and take your choice.

But the whole thing sits on the page of the presentation as the garden with the real divine frog in it. That's what it's about. That's the whole business of the Paschal Mystery. The discovery of the divine frog, the real frog, in all the gardens of scripture. In the Paschal Lamb, the rock in the wilderness, the flood of Noah, the ark, tree of life, tree of the knowledge of good and evil, all this stuff—these are the gardens, the poetic gardens. And don't ask me whether this or that really happened. It's irrelevant, and it's irrelevant for one simple reason. We've been going on since the end of the seventeenth century looking for the historical Jesus. We decided that the Jesus of the church, the Jesus of the fathers, the Jesus of the medieval theologians, the Jesus of the Reformation theologians was now to be cashiered because of the progress of the Newtonian universe and the deistic thinkers as they came along. And we were now no longer to have a Jesus who was God, or a Jesus who did miracles, but instead a Jesus who, as a matter of fact, didn't do much of anything of what the Bible records him as having done. And, therefore, we began at the end of the seventeenth century this retreat into another Jesus, the search for a historical Jesus, because the Jesus in the Bible isn't historical.

This is baloney. It was a false search. The only historical Jesus that there is in the whole wide world is the Jesus on the pages of the New Testament. Nobody has ever found another, and no one will. Right? That's it. That's all we've got, and anything else that anyone decides—"this isn't by...;" and "this has to come out because Jesus didn't really say this;" and "this didn't have to come because this didn't really happen"—is all baloney. Because he, there on the pages of the New Testament, is the only historical Jesus there is. We receive him through the proclamation of the word of God, written, incarnate, and preached. That's the Jesus. And the point is, as soon as you start this business of culling out a more respectable Jesus from the intellectually disgraceful Jesus of the Gospels, all you get is clubs of people who want to cull out a different Jesus from the other guy's club.

The only true historical Jesus, the only historical fact that is Jesus, is the Jesus on the pages of the New Testament. That Jesus is all we have, and it's all we have in common. It's the only thing we have in common. We do not have in common the results of biblical criticism. We certainly don't have in common the results of the Jesus Seminar. We don't. It's fun to do that sort of stuff, but what does the church give us? The church gives us Matthew as year A, Mark as B, Luke as C, and John threaded through the whole thing, so you get John anyway, whether you like it or not. According to the Jesus seminar, you really shouldn't be preaching on John very much because Jesus didn't say that stuff. It's all in black ink; it's extremely doubtful. This whole business of culling out a more intellectually respectable Jesus is bad news, because it deprives us of the Jesus we have in common, and it prevents you from doing what the church is going to keep on telling you to do, which is to preach from John.

And in a sense, the most important thing about John is that he comes last. He is the latest one, practically. You can date Jude or somebody like that later, but John is AD 110 or something. John knows the others; he corrects the others. John brings the synoptics to perfection. John brings Paul to perfection. Nobody in the second century—and John is early second century—understood Paul except John. Marcion thought he understood Paul, but only John understood Paul. Paul had an extremely subtle mind, and John had an even more subtle mind, and so few, at least among the rank and file of Christians, were capable of fully appreciating either Paul or John.

The miracle of the canon of the New Testament is that it got here at all. That's the Holy Spirit doing body Greek on it, you know. How did he have to do it? He had to do it by visiting all these churches all over the place and working on whomever it was who decided whether they would read this thing that just came in the mail. They didn't have a Bible. This thing came as a letter, so it came in the mail. "You want to read this?" "Okay, I think so, guys. This is from Paul." "Well, let's read it." That's the Holy Spirit charley-horsing this process, to get the snowball going. And the Holy Spirit is very successful. By AD 150 we have pretty much settled that there are four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—pretty fast work for a random process.

The only historical Jesus, therefore, is the Jesus on the pages of the New Testament. And as a consequence, think imaginary gardens with real toads in them; that's what I want you to get out of scripture. Every time I say that, I hear somebody's gears grinding in there, thinking "you are forsaking truth." The truth is what's there on the page. That's the

historical truth. Right? Is what's on the page historical fact? Yes, it is. The text of the canon of scripture is an established historical fact. It is. It's not going to change that much. Fool around a little bit here and there, but the text is established. That is a fact. Be content with that fact, and then try to learn what kind of fact it is. And that's why I'm suggesting these imaginary gardens with real toads in them. You don't have to do that with everything in scripture, but there are some places it's mighty handy to have it in the pocket, because you will always, on that basis, be able to find the real divine frog.

You realize that for a long time in the history of the church—really until the end of the seventeenth century—people didn't have a problem with this stuff. The fathers didn't have a problem reading the Old Testament. They read it because they expected to meet Christ on its pages, and the Reformers expected to meet Christ on the pages of the Old Testament, and the lectionary expects us to meet Christ on the pages of the Old Testament. Unfortunately, we've been trained by a crowd who did in that approach to scripture. But the point is that we need to get back to that expectation.

What makes scripture one book, one story, one beautiful thread of revelation of the Paschal Mystery are the images by which it conveys the divine frog himself, and the threading of those images together by the Spirit over the course of the entire revelation of God; and it remains one story by the continued inspiration of the Holy Spirit of that revelation—even after the canon was closed—in the preaching of the church, by which the word on the pages is made alive in voice to the church Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, generation after generation after generation after generation after generation. That's what it's about. Scripture is not a book delivered or a book faxed in. It is a voice in the community of faith.

Keep in mind the most incredible thing about the early fathers is their memory. These guys were trained to remember. They didn't have concordances; they didn't have printed Bibles. They were lucky if they could get a copy of anything anywhere. They memorized like gangbusters. Even their mistakes are edifying. There is one place where Irenaeus says Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of the high priest. Well, it's wrong. You know what he did? Whom did Jesus raise from the dead? The daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, Jairus. But Irenaeus said the high priest. Why? Because in his head he was thinking in Greek: ἀρχισυνάγωγος is ruler of the synagogue, and ἀρχιερεὺς is high priest, and he just flipped them. That's all. It was his memory just flipping

between two things that were almost identical. So the point is these fellows had tremendous memories, and, consequently, the best concordance to the Bible you will ever own is the one in your own head. But you've got to build it.

There is one huge drawback that prevents us from building good mental concordances today: the proliferation of English versions. Back in the bad old days, when you only had the King James Version, you knew it. And one of the good things—no matter what else you want to say about fundamentalists—they know it. They've got it by heart. They don't do a lot of the right things with it, but that's okay. The words are in their hearts, and they've got a grip on it. The safest bet for anybody is to go back to the original languages—to Hebrew and Greek—and get good enough in Greek and good enough in Hebrew to be able to read only the Greek and Hebrew texts normally. That's the ideal, because those texts are not going to change.

When you keep reading among the RSV and KJV and NRSV and whatever else you're reading, the mental concordance never comes. The second problem—like the NRSV, which drives me up the wall—is that they are not sufficiently literal. They will take a word that occurs three times within a number of verses and translate it with three different words. But the translators are messing with the concordance the author had, the words he was playing with. Poetry is playing with words. Scripture is prophets and priests and rabbis and Gospel writers playing with words. Playing with words is not just a pastime, it's a craft, and that's what they were doing. And you cannot get anywhere with scripture without understanding this play. And, consequently, the best thing you can do for yourself, if you can't work with the original languages, is to stick to one fairly literal version; the RSV isn't bad, the KJV really is better, in fact, because it's extremely literal. I defy anyone to try to make sense of the Hebrew off the NRSV. Off the KJV it's a cinch. You can go back and forth.

Images for Scripture

So the Bible is *one thing*. Let me tell you a couple of things that the Bible is not, and a couple of things that it is, using images to describe what it is not—bad images for what it is not, and better images to describe what it is.

First of all, the scriptures are not a box full of uniform truth particles. That theory leads you very quickly to what used to be called

“bibliomancy.” You could open the Bible for the day, put your finger down with your eyes closed, and that is God’s word to you today. No! It will not work. Because the Bible is a tissue of words; and words support each other, and some words govern other words. So it’s not a book you can go to and randomly pick out something.

The first thing about a book made up of words is that not every word in it bears the same freight as other words. It’s true. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Paschal Lamb, are more important than the infant Samuel at prayer, which is practically all Victorian Sunday schools ever taught children. We romanticize. We sentimentalize. But the point is you can’t go in there with a simple-minded literalism and say, “I’ve got my truth for the day,” or “I can pull this out.” You have to be a much better reader than that. You have to live in the garden of scripture before you will see the toad, the divine frog, the diving fox in the bushes. You have to live in that garden, and that garden—the whole thing—has to get into you. Think of scripture—if you want to or have to, forget the word “imaginary”—as a garden, and you are going to live in that garden, and look, and watch, and get scared, and disgusted, and disinterested, and fascinated, and all the other things that will happen to any reasonable person in a garden.

All that stuff will happen to you, but you have to be in the garden, which is why you are supposed to read the Daily Office. It’s the church giving us a helping hand. Great! And the office has certainly improved since the Office of the Roman Rite, which was mostly Psalms and then quit—snippets of scripture. But now we get scripture. So be in the garden. And use the eucharistic lections—invite the laity over three years into a very good experience of the whole garden. And don’t let them ask you, “Is this really here?” Of course, it’s really here. I just read it to you. “Well, I don’t like it.” Well, that’s okay. “I do not like it either,” she began that poem, “There are things more important than all this fiddle.” Yes. It’s a great poem, if you really think of scripture. You don’t have to like it; you just have to experience it. As I said last night about Christian education, it is hanging the pictures inside the children’s little empty heads. Make sure the picture is in there. Make sure that the garden has gotten into their heads, that they have been into the garden, drawn into it and shown the garden itself by a good teacher and a good preacher, as scripture shows the garden forth. We are showing them a garden. You can change the imagery—showing through a museum, showing through a castle or something. But a garden is nice because it fits with the way the Bible

begins in Genesis 2 and 3. So that whole thing, the Bible, is not a box of uniform truth particles, but it is a garden.

The next image I can give you of the Bible is the image of a womb, which gives you an image that covers not only scripture to the end of the canon, but scripture in all its life within the church, in preaching and word and sacraments, throughout the time of the church, old and new covenant. So the scriptures are a womb in which the word of God gestates until it comes forth as the word of God written. And this means that the womb in which scripture gestates is the womb of the prophetic community, of the divine community, of the believing community, of the faithful community. That's the womb, because that's the place where scripture gestates.

For example, in the beginning of the Exodus, 1250 BC more or less, how much Hebrew Scripture was there written down? None. They didn't have Bibles in their pockets. They went out without them. They got out in the wilderness and had nothing. But the word of God was gestating in that community. It had begun to gestate in informal ways with campfire stories about guys named Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph and all this stuff, and it was working in there but nothing was ripe enough to pull out yet. You can't go into a womb when you want and pull out the kid. It won't work. You have to wait for the time, for the season of the word's gestation in the divine community on earth.

And, likewise, when the New Testament church begins, how much New Testament did they have? Peter on Pentecost? Not a scrap—none. There wasn't anything. They were proclaiming the word, they were listening to themselves proclaim the word. Paul is really the first New Testament scripture, but he didn't know he was writing scripture, either. He was handing out free advice right and left, and doing the first job of theologizing this whole thing, which is a great job. But he didn't know he was writing scripture, nor did the people who read him first know it was the Bible. Scripture meant Hebrew Scriptures at that point. And later on it finally gets there, but that's the Holy Spirit. The word gestates in the womb of the church, and it continues to be delivered in preaching by, to, and in the church. The word is always gestating and is always being born in the church. So think of scripture/church and church/scripture as the womb in which the word *written* gestated for many ages and finally arrived, and now think of scripture/church and church/scripture as the womb in which the word *preached* now gestates and is delivered in due season. That's what we are doing. We are midwives. We are midwives to the word to bring the Word forth in his season—one of the meanings of

the church year is that you get different seasons for different things to bring forth.

The next thing that scripture is not: Scripture is not a manufacturer's manual for the correct operation of human nature. When you buy a new Chevy, you get a Chevy manual, right? Where do you keep it? In the glove compartment. Do you read it every day? No! Do you join a group that meets every Sunday to sing from it and hear it expounded? No! Why? Because it's a question-answering book. When do you use a question-answering book? When you have a question.

Here's the trouble with that image: if you say to yourself that the Bible is a book to answer questions, it means you are putting yourself at the mercy of all the people who don't have a clue what the right questions are. Then you're going to answer all kinds of big, fat, dumb questions. The Bible is not a question-answering book. It's a question-posing book. It doesn't give you answers to *your* problems, it gives you problems you never knew you had. It gives you the *real* questions. The scripture, therefore, is the voice of the Word himself in the church.

Genesis 2 and 3: The Problem of Good and Evil

What I'm going to do is a little illustrating about this business of the garden of scripture and the womb of scripture with Genesis 2 and 3, which may turn out to be the next book after the one that isn't published yet. First of all, Genesis 1–3 are poetic narratives; they're artistic narratives. These narratives must be read as being written by a marvelous mind for choreography, because what happens there is not a chronological account. It is not a cosmogony. It was based on a Babylonian cosmogony, or something, but it was kicked way upstairs by the author of the book of Genesis. It was kicked up into ballet, into dance, into mystery. But that's been lost to us ever since the beginnings of rationalism at the end of the seventeenth century, and deism at the end of the eighteenth century, and God knows whatever it was in the nineteenth century—and God forbid that we should ever have to face what we did in the twentieth century.

We are finally—in physics—getting back to the point where the bottom of the reality is mystery. When you finally get down to the bottom of matter—not the atom, but the things inside the atom, not the things inside the atom but the things below that—when you finally get all the way down to the bottom, what have you got? You've got a dance with no dancers there. The bottom of stuff is non-stuff. It's not God or anything,

but that's where modern physics has ended up. The deeper you go the weirder it gets.

And this sounds a lot like scripture. It's about the dance of creation; it's about the ballet of creation, the choreography by the divine choreographer himself, of good and evil. The original creation that God made in Genesis 1 and 2—that whole thing—is the manifesting to us of the dance of good and evil. Good and evil are in the world to start with, because that's what the world is made of. In other words, the fathers of the church made a huge mistake. Generally speaking, Jewish theologians have not done this much, but Christian theologians have made the mistake of deciding that the Genesis accounts somehow had to be jimmed into a harmless good *Little Lord Fauntleroy* world in which nothing could go wrong. And then you ended up blaming all the stuff that does go wrong on the disobedience of Adam, the disobedience of the human race, with both evil and death as punishment for sin.

The Reformers, by and large, didn't escape from this, because they were unreformed late medievalists in many ways, and they just went on doing that stuff. And this whole idea that death came in physically, literally, as the result of some kind of disobedience won't wash, if you actually look at the accounts of Genesis 1, in which seeds die before they can bring forth life, in which fruit rots before the seeds can fall out, in which the fish eat the little fish, and the little fish eat the shrimp, and the shrimp eat the plankton. It's a whole world of bloodshed and roughness and savagery, all dancing gorgeously. The creatures of the land, like saber-toothed tigers, didn't have that set of choppers so they could eat vegetables. This is God's recipe for the gorgeous world that's here. Your body is right now decomposing what you had for breakfast. Everyone's smiling. But the point is that this gorgeous place works by blood.

It is a dance of accidents, of violent accidents. You have to use a little sense when you talk about creation. If God decided, which apparently God did, to make the earth out of hot slop, molten slop, and to throw it out in frigid space, what's going to happen? It will hold itself together by gravity, but then eventually it will start to harden from the outside in. And you get a crust on it. And sooner or later the crust does whatever it does, but every now and then, because the inside is still liquid, the crust moves. Earthquakes are the strangest event—proof of the power of bad theology. The strangest event in the history of the world is the Lisbon earthquake. Until then everyone had decided that the world was a perfect, wonderful thing. And the fact that the Lisbon earthquake could happen destroyed everyone's faith in God. We know a little better now. It was the tectonic

plates. Every now and then they move, and if you live on top of that, the whole building falls down on top of you.

This is the kind of world there is. This is the kind of world in which thermal currents are a normal occurrence, and in which tornadoes and hurricanes and everything else—all kinds of rough stuff—are always possible. The world is a rough, wild place, and its beauty is in its wildness. You all know, I'm sure, that man, Adam, is made twice in the first two chapters of Genesis. He is made male and female, all at once, in a group: "male and female created he them. In the image of God, created he them after the likeness of God," in chapter 1, at the end of the sixth day.

Then it starts all over again with a different story in chapter 2, and says that Adam was made out of dust. But the point is that Adam, the human race, is made in the image of God right there and was made in this rough, difficult, gorgeous world. You cannot have the gorgeousness of the world without the roughness. You're only pretending. The spiritualizers are only pretending; the romanticizers are only pretending. It is what it is, and it's all right, because at the end of every day in the six days, what does God say? "Good." Pats himself on the back, "Boy am I something. Good. Good." And at the end of the sixth day he says, "Very good. Terrific." God is pleased, and God is pleased with his wild mess, which is not a mess, but a thing of beauty, because it's a dance. A whole bunch of dancers from one point of view on stage can look like chaos, especially if you're lying on the floor looking up. But it isn't. You have to be back far enough from it to see the patterns begin to emerge in the dance. And that's why you have to live in the garden a long time, because you have to learn to see the patterns of how the garden works.

Unfortunately, we got off that tack. We could not accept evil in creation at the beginning. Therefore, when we got to the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we divorced them completely, and said one was the sacramental symbol or vehicle of what Augustine or Aquinas—I can't remember which—called the *donum superadditum*: that humanity, indeed, according to Augustine or Aquinas was mortal, but its mortality was forestalled by the super-added gift of the tree of life as long as humanity remained obedient.² But when they disobeyed at the tree of

²Editor's note: Capon seems to bring together here different points from both theologians. It is Augustine, arguing against the Pelagians, who asserts that Adam was subject to bodily death because of sin; Augustine thinks that the fruit from the tree of life would have acted as an anti-aging agent as he speculates that Enoch and Elijah have not been transformed from a mortal to immortal existence such as Christ

the knowledge of good and evil, then there was trouble, and they had to be pitched out of the garden. It says we have made the whole thing ride on a great difference between the two trees. Obviously the trees are not good or evil in themselves; they are both good. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil wasn't a bad tree; it was not there as something over against the tree of life.

My theory—I did this thing on hendiadys last night, right? One thing by means of two?— is to take the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as one tree, not to abolish the difference between them, but to take them as saying the same thing. They are about the goodness of the world, and the goodness lies in the mixture of good and evil in the original goodness that God makes. Now if you take that seriously, it means the prohibition of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was precisely *not* that you will bring evil into a world in which evil was previously absent, because death and all that stuff were there before. But it means that you will try to take over God's management of the balance of good and evil, of the delicate dance of good and evil, of the complexity of good and evil. Because God says, "I can manage good and evil with my hands behind my back. I don't have to touch them. I don't have to stop death to make a world of life." Correct? "I will get a world of life by letting death be death and life be life. I will keep my hands off the world." And, of course, in the final revelation of the management of God in the world, at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon, where are the hands of the incarnate Word? What are they doing? Nothing. Nothing. Hands off, the

after his resurrection: "or else, if there be any need of such sustenance, they [Enoch and Elijah] are, it may be, sustained in Paradise in some such way as Adam was, before he brought on himself expulsion therefrom by sinning. And he, as I suppose, was supplied with sustenance against decay from the fruit of the various trees, and from the tree of life with security against old age." See Augustine, *A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on the Baptism of Infants*, I.3 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 5 (Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 16. The Latin phrase *donum superadditum* appears in Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, Ia2ae, 109, 4, in answer to the question "Can man love God above all things by his natural endowments alone without grace?" In reply Thomas says, "Hence our conclusion must be that in the state of intact nature man did not need a gift of grace supplementing [*dono gratiae superadditae*] his natural endowments in order to love God naturally above all things, although he needed the assistance of God [*auxilio Dei*] moving him to do this." See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries*, vol. 30 (Oxford: Blackfriars; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

he rides the bicycle of history home to the Father. No hands. This is the whole point.

This is the divine way of handling evil. God handles the mystery of evil by letting it be, by leaving it be. Leave it be; let it be itself. And only God can do that. So the mistake that Adam and Eve made, that we made—and always read that as our story because it's the diagram of our sin—is to take over God's management of good and evil, which is either no hands at all or a left-handed management. But we said, "We're going to manage good and evil." And the point is not that we will stop doing good and start doing only evil. When we try to manage the balance of good and evil, we will do as badly by doing good as we do by doing evil. That's the whole point: that you can't trust us with nothin'. You can't, because you can't run this gorgeous, wild, crazy, beautiful dance of a world with your hands all over it. You have to leave the dancers free.

The devil's thing was, "You will be like God if you take a munch of this tree." Yes, *like*. But you will never *be* God, because you can't manage it. You can't; I can't; nobody can. The whole human race was never enough to manage it. Or at least, our mistake was that we tried to manage what we should have left alone. We tried to manage the delicate balance of good and evil. And, therefore, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are really the same thing in God, because God runs good and evil. God gives life, God gives death, God runs good and evil with his hands behind his back, and consequently, God does it all. And the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is simply the warning, "In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die." You will really die. You will die the death. But it doesn't mean, "I'll kill you." It means you'll kill yourselves. And you'll also, while you're at it, kill the whole world along with it. Only now have we realized we can do that, because nature was always a lot bigger than we were and came back into balance because nature left itself alone.

But now we are about to overbalance it. And the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the fruit of our management, has been accumulating very slowly, but more and more quickly as history goes on. In other words, there is an ecology of good and evil. This is so contrary to a lot of preaching, and certainly contrary to a lot of pastoral advice. "We've got to make evil go away. We've got to stop evil. We've got to put more people in jail. We've got to lower the definitions of crime so that we can run them all in." This is all nuts. You can't manage it. It won't submit to management. The thing is too fractious. The dancers are too willful. It's not going to work to do it that way.

If the world could have been saved by control and free advice, it would have been saved twenty minutes after Moses got down to the bottom of the hill. He's got the two tables there, and everyone looked at them, and he read them aloud, and they say, "Oh, yeah, we forgot. We're sorry. Well, never mind, it's all fixed now." It never worked that way. Free advice never saved the world, control never saved the world, and doing good on purpose never saved the world. The greatest evils, as you know and I know, are always done in the name of some gorgeous good. Hitler exterminated six million Jews and innumerable thousands and millions of gypsies all in the name of a beautiful vision of a gorgeous, blond, blue-eyed society, and sold it, by and large, to the German nation on that basis. We will do as badly by good as by evil.

There's a wonderful thing about marriage as sacrament. We have those words in there, "For better, for worse." In the Anglican rite, there is no "or" between those things. It's not a choice. This is a list. You get the whole package. You get better, and you get worse. That's it. That's the dance. Accept it. You promise in this covenant of marriage to live with it. You don't promise to survive it; you don't promise to like it; you don't promise to do anything right about it or anything else. You don't even promise to love it. The church is not the least bit interested on the day they marry anybody whether these people love each other or not. It's interested in *will* you love each other? *Will you?* Are you determined to love your way through this mess? For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. These are not "ors," they are "ands." All of them.

At the end of Genesis 2, in the story everything is rosy, because they haven't tried to manage good and evil. They have kept their grubby, little, sticky-fingered hands off the management of good and evil; and they are both naked, Adam and Eve, and they are not ashamed. This is the original beauty of creation with the human race's grubby hands not on it. You don't have to turn this into a timetable, a period of innocence. It's our truth. It's the truth of the human condition. And we know that, but for our screwing it up with our management, the place would look better. We know that now. We know that more than previous ages ever could know it. We know that we are to blame—the human race—we are to blame. Early church fathers had to jury-rig and charley-horse a theological explanation of human evil, and how it's so naughty and how it's so bad. We can see it; we can see in our management the place ceases to work. It's verging on giving up the act.

Therefore, when we consider whether we can stop it or not, the odds are probably not. But nothing ever loses, because there is always death. And where there's death, there's hope, because Christ is the resurrection from the dead; and in him, we are now risen, and everything is rosy. And the whole dance never once got seriously out of whack; only our participation gave us problems with it. The rest comes into balance by the Son's recapitulation of all history in himself, to the Father's ear, over the brooding of the Spirit.