

III. FROM EDEN TO JERUSALEM

Thus the history of the city, divided in two by Jesus Christ, goes from Eden to Jerusalem, from a garden to a city. God created man in a garden, in the middle of the world. He gave him as his environment a particular and limited bit of nature — not all of nature. We are not told that man occupied all of creation, but rather that he had a limited space over which he was sovereign. He was the delegated master, but lived only in the garden. Eden was a part of creation, and a closed garden where what we call nature flourished and where God chose to place the king of his creation. This is where God wanted him — there and nowhere else. And in our world of today there is still a trace of this: man always attains a better equilibrium, always feels his best, and probably *is* his best, in a primitive environment. This is no ideology of the country, nor some brand of naturalism, but only a simple observation corresponding with the revealed fact that God wanted man in that situation. This makes it all the more striking, all the more strange, that at the end of history God gave up the plan which he had himself ordained and chosen. He does not restore the order that he had installed, but creates another. Henceforth man will have another environment: walls, streets, houses, public squares. Stone will replace trees. Beryl, onyx, chrysoprase are to be the mirror of man's being, whereas his pleasure used to be in cedar and oak.³

³Must we again call to mind that here we are dealing with a myth? Not a falsehood, but a sign, not material reality, but truth, not legend, but the revealed word, not a description, but a message, not an identity, but an identification. But from the very fact that it is a myth, we cannot be indifferent to its form. We cannot take from it a general idea as its nucleus while neglecting the surrounding material, as one keeps an almond after throwing the shell away. For this very shell, with its words, its literary style, is full of meaning. The city designates much beyond herself, although it is nevertheless the city. Faced with the problem of the new Jerusalem, are we to ask: "Is this really a *city* that will come down? Will we know him face to face? Or is this only a manner of speaking, a figure, a myth, a symbol (in the lightest meaning of the term)?" Perhaps this manner of speaking is there to show us what God's final intentions are for man and for his work. But in this case we see that God chose as a type *the* city in order to reveal to us his good intention. By affirming that he has chosen the city as a place of meeting for him and us, he proclaims his decision to save all men. Therefore, to the extent that the city is herself one of man's works, raising the problem of the myth with respect to her has no more meaning and may be considered as an intellectual game. In the myth of the final city, we may see an answer to the problem of life, of history, of man's work, and not an object of mystical speculation or intellectual knowledge.

Why has God so changed the situation? What fundamental difference has led God to give up, as it were, his first plan? Simply the history of the world, and more particularly the minute history of man sandwiched in somewhere between the beginnings and the re-creation. It is because of this history that God sets about reorganizing the primitive state of things. "Behold the former things have passed away, and I make *all* things new," says the Lord.

If God chooses this new form it is simply because man has chosen it. Man wanted this setting, this environment, and scorned the one prepared for him by God. From the beginning man worked desperately to have his own little world, independent of all that God desired. And God will give him the perfect work which he himself could not bring about. God will realize man's setting. But in his new world one of man's desires will not be satisfied: the desire for the absence of God. Man wanted to build a city from which God would be absent, but he never managed. God will make for him the perfect city, where he will be all in all. Thus we might say that it is uniquely man's decision that provoked God to act, which incited him to accept what man was desiring and seeking, and which caused him to transform his creation.

This is no place to get caught up in the ridiculous problems of God's knowledge and omnipotence, and all the casuistry having to do with man's liberty in regard to God's will. Once and for all we must finish with man's absurd pretension to fathom the mysteries of God's will. If God is truly God, he is outside the reach of our intelligence; if God is truly God, our intelligence can never grasp anything but a falsification of his true nature. "Who are you to answer back to God?" But in the precise details of this revelation given us of God, we can, in any case, perceive one astonishing thing, and that is the patience of God's attention and love for man. For non-Christians this love may have no existence; otherwise they would accept Jesus Christ. And for Christians, this love is *too* well known, since they think they know Jesus Christ. Now it is true that the center of God's love is in Jesus Christ, but it is also well to understand that his love reaches every man's life. God in his love, because he *is* love, takes into account man's will, takes into account his desires and his maddest intentions, understands his wildest revolts, takes into account all his endeavors. God does not want to save an abstract man, but you and me, each man in his particularity. God did not love Man in Jesus Christ, but every crushed and miserable soul in the midst of the wandering crowd. And God

has kept his records throughout history. Certainly not an account of merits and demerits, of sins and good works. All that has already been taken care of in the pardon streaming from the cross. His accounts are those of the suffering and hope, the inventions and the refusals, the desires and the gropings that man has experienced throughout history. And God keeps it all in order, so as to respond to them all, so as to do what man has been trying to do, so as to give an answer where man did not ask for help, but tried to go it alone. God assumes to himself even man's revolts and transforms them, remakes them. Progressively, then, God assumes all of man's work. This is the meaning of God's creation, for man, of the new Jerusalem.

God is certainly relinquishing none of his rights! He is no less God and never will become man's *famulus* by some magic or some religion. He is master of the day and hour. He still guides the how and answers the why. But because he is love he has reserved a part for man, and answers man's demands. And to a great extent this puts man back in his place. You thought you had killed God? Really? Because your techniques allow you to go faster than sound? Because uranium has enabled you to measure the age of the world? Because you observe that you can make matter disappear in your machines faster than sand through your fingers? Because you burst the atom and can now annihilate the earth? Because you know that space is not a straight line? Because your police methods can arrest anybody anywhere? And in all that, you say, you nowhere saw God! And because good receives no reward, and evil is not punished, because you can exclude God from your political organization, because the churches have failed and are rapidly losing members, because you organize the world to your every whim and the masses follow you and no longer believe in God, you say that the era of religion is at an end (and there I agree), but add, in an unfortunate confusion for brains so well organized, that God is dead. As though God were dependent on your decision, no less. You draw up his death notice as you drew up his birth certificate: the God who is dead is the one you made up for yourselves, and not the one who created you. And all of man's fantastic history, as little as he may want to hear it said, is only a part of the great historical line traced by God himself. All your enormous accumulation of works and power, every bit of it, God takes over for himself, assimilates it into his plan. And he does not wipe out even what you made against him. God does not fight against man. He is not trying to deprive him of his conquests. On the contrary, he accepts them. He enters

into man's little game, patiently follows the rules man has fixed, and walks in the paths man has opened.

Such is the meaning of the Bible as a book written by men. God did not adopt an original means to reveal himself. No, he expressed his revelation in the forms and modes invented by man for his own affairs. And this is also the meaning of God's decision to take over for himself man's invention of the city. God does not reject this world of revolt and death, he does not annihilate it in the abyss of fire. Rather, he adopts it. That is, he takes charge of it. And the immense vanity that man put into it, God transforms into a city with gates of pearl. Thus, and only thus, does our work take on meaning, both significance and direction. No longer is it a vanity among vanities. No longer is it a permanent return to nothingness. Civilizations pass and go under, leaving behind a few ruins buried by vines, and the stones lose their grip and fall in silence. But nothing is forgotten. All the pain and hope represented by these walls is taken over by God. And because of it all, God is preparing this same setting for man, but made new. And because all of this is in God's plan, his Jerusalem will be the fulfillment of all that man expected.

It is in Jesus Christ that God adopts man's work. For Ephesians 1:10, translated literally, tells us that Jesus is the great recapitulator. God formed the plan of uniting "all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." Things on earth! It is not restricted to "natural" things, to the creation itself. No such distinction is made. God's plan also includes things invented by man, what he laboriously put together piece by piece learning from experience and failure. Both his technical failures and the marvels of his cleverness. All this is "recapitulated" in Christ, summed up in him, taken over by him. In a brilliant transfiguration all of man's work is gathered together in Christ. Not that man's inventions are labeled one by one, as in the presumptuous display cases of American museums where the inventions judged most characteristic are kept for future generations. For God's way of judging is not ours. What will he preserve? We have no way of telling. Perhaps the great summing up will include all that exists, as the ark sheltered both unclean animals and clean. In any case we see that this is what will happen with the city. She is the characteristic example of God's adoption. And this is also true, but with no explanatory details, of all that made up the glory of the nations (Rev. 21:26).

Perhaps it is only the city that is mentioned by name because the city is clearly considered, as we have seen, as man's

great work. However that may be, we do have the assurance that everything will share in her lot. And this is accomplished in Christ, which means that these works are both judged and saved, both freed and subjected, because this is one way that Christ fills his triple role as prophet, priest, and king. Outside Christ, there is absolutely no way for man's work to be elevated. Outside of Christ, the vanity of Ecclesiastes is fully true, and the curse remains over the city. Outside of Christ, all goes back to nothingness. And if man returns to dust, the concrete of his cities returns to the sand from which it was taken.

There are no whys to be asked. This is the path God has chosen, and we have but to follow its shining traces through history. But because Christ is Savior and Lord of both creation and mankind, he is also Savior and Lord of man's works. In him, God adopts man *and* his works. He tolerated it through the world's history and now he himself has taken charge of it. He has chosen to dwell in it. And just as the man living in the city is directly subject to the spirit of the city, now those who dwell in it are in communion with God, for he has truly assumed it in the most classical meaning of the term, and has transfigured it. For even in the resurrection, God does not shatter men's hopes. Rather, he fulfills them there. And on the other side of death, in his new creation, God renders to man the setting he preferred.

But he renders it to him in Christ; that is, in the new creation, all that Christ came to accomplish is finally realized. Direct communion with God is reestablished, so there is no more Temple or church. Uncorruptible, immortal life is again man's. The balance of creation is re-created when Christ, after uniting all things in himself, hands everything over to his Father. And all this happens in the new Jerusalem, so as to forever link man's work with Christ's. In this city, the adventure of Christmas is totally realized and finds its culmination. Man's version of the incarnation finds an eternal home. This is the very heart of this extraordinary manifestation of God's love. And if this work of man takes its meaning in Christ, it is God's desire that man's great work, re-created, be an expression throughout eternity of God's great work.

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But this must not become for us a pretext. And perhaps as a precaution, we should state this teaching a bit more precisely. When we spoke of man's work, we were, of course, re-

ferring to the results of man's physical labor, what he manufactures. It is not a question here of moral or spiritual works in a Roman Catholic sense, works which might possibly lead to one's salvation. Neither do we have in mind the works of faith as an expression of the Christian life, the meaning given them by Paul. The works we are thinking of have no relation with man's spiritual destiny, are in no way a manifestation of his morality, good intentions, or piety. We have confined ourselves to the purely secular sense of works as the results of man's labor, what he makes. We were then able to observe that this work is in fact connected (but in no way because of man) with his spiritual destiny, or rather, with God's action for man in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit.

But if such is the case, we are constrained to indicate very briefly a consequence of considerable importance: man's work, what he makes, is not neutral. It is certainly tempting to hold that techniques are neutral, that anything to do with work in this sense is beyond the classification of good and evil. However, we should already have been wary in the knowledge of the close relationship between work and Adam's fall. But even that is at the most an indication that works after the fall may be used for good or for evil. We must take another step, for the biblical teaching on this subject is not moral in nature. We must not try to search out good and bad works, nor to pass judgment on work itself or on different works with regard to some moral rule. This is not how we are to assert that man's works are not neutral. We are not saying that different kinds of work are to be classified as good or as bad according to the guidance of the conscience, for example. If we were to do so, we would lose ourselves in an indefinite casuistry which experience has taught us to be useless and endless. The casuistry of a just or unjust war, for example, has taught us that. Moreover, it is because experience showed how uncertain and vain such study was that man went back to the idea that perhaps mechanical creations are neutral, after all: "All that counts is how something is used." The tragedy of the whole thing is that we already know exactly how man will use his work — created by a radically evil man, itself radically evil. We already know that the evil work will be utilized by the evil man. How can it result in anything else but the terrible fabric of history: Plague, War, Famine. The black horse, the red horse, the pale horse? So we are not trying to come up with a moral classification, but rather to consider how man's work fits in with condemnation and redemption. We must recognize that man's technical adventure is not on the level of

a base materiality destined to perish. Neither is it the immortal glorification of the human city. It is in the circle which takes in everything, within which God has locked up everything, in his curse and in his pity. It is in this respect that man's works are not neutral.

Then why worry, someone may say, since God in his love has definitively adopted everything, and his pardon is, after all, as valid for what man produced in God's favor as for what he produced against him? And why, since even the city, as we have studied, is to be rebuilt, should we not surrender ourselves to the angel of the city and its spirit of power? This is obviously the greatest temptation provoked by the message of pardon in Jesus Christ, and it proves first of all that we have understood absolutely nothing of what God's forgiveness means.

We must press this problem even closer, attack it from several sides. First, we must distinguish between the history of the world in its relationship with God and the life of a man in the same relationship. If God proclaims that the final destiny of the city, after its bloody epic, is to become the new Jerusalem, it is nonetheless true that during her earthly history she is under the most terrible of condemnations, and that as individuals with a life to live we are in contact with the condemned city and not with the new Jerusalem. And we must realize that while we participate in that work, we are participating in a work of death which is under a curse. It is not because we have reason to hope for the city that we are individually to give ourselves over to the demons presently at work in her. We have a full assurance for ourselves, but it leads us into other work than hers. Although we know that at the end the city is to be transfigured, this is a revelation of God's grace and is absolutely not to be forced into the present course of things. But that is just what we would be tempted to do.

Next, we must repel this great temptation by a reminder: we must remember that everything we have said so far concerning the city was of biblical origin, which means that it is an appeal to a decision of faith. Either we believe that the Bible expresses the revelation of God centered in Jesus Christ and that therefore what we have understood concerning the city has an element of truth, or else we do not believe it. We must not confuse the two positions: asserting that since God pardons in the end we have nothing to worry about and thus can obey our every whim, is taking the attitude of one who does not believe in revelation. It is exhibiting a complete disregard for the death of Jesus Christ. It is making a misuse of pardon, and simply

shows that such a person has not received that pardon. Therefore, whoever reasons in this way does not truly believe in Jesus Christ. But in that case, all that we have written concerning the city has no truth for him, and for that reason he has no right to use it for his own purposes.

As for the believer, the fact that he considers this pardon as final, that he has understood God's attitude toward man's work (summed up in the city) as God has revealed, puts him on an entirely different track for the present life. And this is what we must declare. Because God forgives, Christians must realize that the words of Ecclesiastes are true: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going." Life is given us in order that we accomplish these works and make scientific progress. And we are asked to have a share in all of the human life, in all of man's research, to build with men their works. To the extent that in Jesus Christ the city is not devilish, to the extent that it is destined to be transfigured, we must not pass judgement on the works of others, but must work along with the others in the construction of the city. Under these conditions we are not working with other men in the construction of a Babel. It is here that the discernment of the Spirit must be active. However, neither are we working in the completely spiritual construction of the new Jerusalem: that is God's work and not ours. So our work is in the city of stone and iron, which may be an environment for man, but not necessarily a good one. The only standard for us to act by is that of God's pardon. And this pardon teaches us, much better than any historical considerations, the vanity and the relativity of man's work, since everything depends on forgiveness. God's pardon will make the city of man into the new Jerusalem; that is, its precise goal is to keep her from disappearing into nothingness. So not only man's spiritual destiny is connected with God's forgiveness, but also the destiny of his work and the very materiality of history, which rests exclusively on this act of God — rests on that infinitely thin line, that razor blade which separates decisively between the work destined to vanish and the work that will be transformed into a creation of God for all eternity. With this in mind we are obviously able to put all our irony into the contemplation of man's efforts to build — but at the same time we participate in them.

In another respect, however, we cannot misuse God's pardon, if we really believe in it. And then there arises the problem of our participation in all of man's works. Since we are

working without moral criteria because they do not cover the city, and since the problem of the city is clearly a spiritual affair and therefore when we work with builders we become a weapon of their revolt, must we Christians also march in man's struggle against God? Stated in such extreme terms, the question appears scandalous. However, are we not in the world? Are we not in the place where the revolt is taking place? And we cannot, and must not, be anywhere else. But we do have a function in man's work which narrowly limits our participation. First, we must be able to inject humor into the situation. Where we are working we absolutely must not take our action seriously, neither ours nor that of our companions. That is why we must not accept the term "tragic optimism," in opposition to "active pessimism," as an expression of the Christian life. The idea of tragic optimism corresponds to the Thomist heresy of Christianity and opens the doors for every betrayal of God's forgiveness. It could be accepted only by deforming ridiculously, and perhaps not very honestly, the traditional Reformational notion of active pessimism modified by Christian catastrophism. For the Thomist heresy leads in this respect to discarding a good deal of the Book of Revelation as well as the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew.

What keeps us from transforming our active pessimism into a sterile catastrophism is the humor I mentioned, a form of Christian liberty in our participation in man's work. And this humor is one limit on our participation, for it must not be kept within us, a secret, but rather lived out and made known. Now there is a big difference between the work we can accomplish with this attitude, and the work that requires idolatry and unbelief. And two camps form among workers, according to whether they accept or refuse the irony of faith. We must keep in mind that, "Where your love is, there will your heart be also." So we must put our heart into the city, but keep it ours by humor. But then the question arises, will the men building Babel accept working with us if we refuse to bury our heart there?

Moreover, a second limitation appears immediately. For we have our job to do in the city. We have seen that down through history God's answer to the construction of man's closed world was to move in just the same. And if he is there by his hidden presence, he is also there by those whom he sends. Our task is therefore to represent him in the heart of the city. But then again, will the city accept

us there? Will men accept our task of testifying to the very opposite of their great enterprise? How long will they put up with it? There can be no doubt that they will not become acclimatized, or at home with the flaming seraphim. And if they leave us in peace, it must be because we are neglecting our task as faithful witnesses to God's work. Realizing that the new Jerusalem is not a work of our hands, we must also realize that when peace reigns, when it seems to us that the world has accepted God's word, we are allowing ourselves to be trapped by Satan's pranks.

The whole affair will boil down to our rejection by the city. We will be expelled from the city, unless, as Jesus promised, we are thrown into the very heart of the city, into prison. Then our collaboration with the builders must stop. But we may be inducted voluntarily to leave the city, to break off our cooperation, to take a position of refusal. We have already seen the biblical basis for such a position. This takes place when every means is blocked for the Christian to fulfill the sole destiny of man and his work, to give glory to God. When there is no longer any means of turning man's work to the glory of his Creator, when there is no longer possible in Babel any mark of the revelation of God's character in Jesus Christ, then life is no longer possible for the Christian. He must flee, cut himself off from the city. Obviously, when I speak of a mark of revelation, I am not referring simply to religious ceremonies and the like, but also to the "secular" acts of laymen and especially a certain state of mind among men. A time comes in the periodic renewal of man's passion for the city when the Christian must pronounce the *non possumus*. Every moment in history is not the same. One day we must say Yes, the next No, to the very same thing. As concerns the city, we must not forget that Abraham once went to rescue the king of Sodom, and was blessed for it by Melchizedek, whereas soon after this, Lot had to flee Sodom because it had incurred the Lord's temporal wrath.