

October 5, 2014

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings Three Enemies

Following the lead of Holy Scripture, the Church has consistently proclaimed that Christ is victorious over three enemies: Sin, Death, and Satan. All three, alas, pose special difficulties for those outside the Christian faith we are proposing to them.

We Christians understand sin, for instance, in a way nearly incomprehensible to those who suppose a progressive view of human nature and history. Although many of our contemporaries admit the existence of individual *sins*, these same people may have trouble with the singular form of the word in, say, the pronouncement that the Lamb of God “takes away the *sin* of the world” (John 1:29).

Our contemporaries have read—if only through secondary sources—the ideas of men like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson; the consequent blinders prevent their discernment of something profoundly out of kilter in human nature and history. They believe that, if there *is* anything wrong in human existence, it can be corrected by “progress.” Some of them, Marxists in the main, fancy that social problems are produced by unjust politics and can be corrected by political adjustments.

This notion is common in today's systems of primary and secondary education, where in History and Sociology courses the only recognized evils result from sexism, racism, financial inequality, homophobia, and (usually American) imperialism. Although the reality of *sin* is firmly established and deeply explored in our literary heritage, it has been quite some time since familiarity with Macbeth and Othello, or the crew of the *Pequod*, or the Sutpen heirs was expected among our students.

There prevails, rather, a presumption that the problems of humanity can be corrected by a positive attitude and the calibrations of social engineering. That is to say, many of those to whom we preach the Gospel of Redemption suppose that the government already has, or may soon acquire, the answers to man's difficulties

As for our other two enemies—Satan and death—the latter is thought to be adequately explained by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, while the former is identified as a burlesque figure sheathed in a red leotard.

That is to say, none of mankind's three enemies, as they are portrayed in the Bible and the Tradition, is taken very seriously by the people we hope to evangelize. From the perspective of the history of Apologetics, this is a new situation, and, I believe, it calls for a fresh theological examination of our understanding of Sin, Death, and Satan..

Death, according to St. Paul is the “last enemy” (1 Corinthians 15:26). It is “last,” however, not just in the sequence of our enemies' abolition, but also last in the sense of being the *final goal* intended by our *first* enemy, who is Satan. Death is exactly what Satan had in mind when it first occurred to him to employ the services of the garden snake.

Our consideration of this point requires attention to two ideas: the “natural incorruption” of man and the envy of the devil. I use the expression “natural incorruption” to distinguish it from the unique *aphtharsia, incorruptibility*, conferred on believers who share in the grace of Christ's Resurrection. This “natural immortality” should be thought of as something negative; it simply means that man was not, as God created him, obliged to die.

Both this natural incorruption and Satan's envy were affirmed in the Book of Wisdom: “God created man incorruptible (*ep' aphtharsia*), / the image (*eikona*) of His very likeness He made him, / but by the envy of the devil death entered into the cosmos” (Wisdom 2:23-24).

Satan wanted man to die; Satan was determined to murder him. He lied in order to *kill*. Mendacity and murder were two aspects of the same thing. Our Savior was explicit on this point: “Your father is the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a *murderer* from the beginning, and he does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from what pertains to him, for he is a liar and the father of it.”

The lie Satan spoke to Eve had to do with *death*. He directly challenged God's warning, “On the day you eat of it, you will die.” No, answered the Tempter, “Certainly you will not die. For God knows that in the day you

eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

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