

Psalm 132: 8-10 Arise, O LORD, into your resting-place, you and the ark of your strength.
Let your priests be clothed with righteousness; let your faithful people sing with joy.
For your servant David's sake, do not turn away the face of your Anointed.

Introduction

The Christian life can feel hard to live out in moderation. We are told that we are not of this world but merely resident *in* the world. In the letter to the Romans, Paul exhorts the believers in chapter 12 not to be “conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds,” (v.2a-b). In the book of James, we are told that to be friends with the world causes us to be enemies of God (4:4). 1 John 2:15-17 reads:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

With these rather antagonistic words spoken against the world, what is a material girl to do? How do I, a human being—made of very tangible materials of bone and flesh, living in a world that is made up of other various material—navigate this supposed enmity between that which is spiritual and material? That which is of God and that which is of the world? What does it mean to be here but not *of* here?

Answers tend to range in two binaries: be completely invested in other-worldly, spiritual matters and the non-corporeal or be completely invested in the material and corporeal. The problem with the former is that it makes you too disconnected from the plight of the world and those who are materially sabotaged and held captive by malevolent and prejudicial systems, not to mention the very real tendency to participate in those systems that abuse and consume both the flora and fauna of creation. The latter is problematic because of the tendency to make a religion out of creation, forcing it into a space it’s not supposed to be—forcing the material to be spiritual—thus stealing its mystery and magnificence as it becomes a part of your consumption.

But what if the robustness of our Christian life isn’t in the either/or but in the paradox: in our material existence therein is our spiritual existence, and in our spiritual existence therein is our material existence? What if there is something to the *Ruach* of God mingling with dirt resulting in human form and existence?¹ In other words, what if the incarnation of Christ our King means something for our life in the present realm and not just the ethereal one? What if the other-cosmic-ness of Christ’s kingdom is made most manifest in our earthliness when we, filled with the Spirit press into the love of God and find ourselves at the doorstep of our neighbor, in solidarity with them?

¹ Ref. Gen 2

John 18:33-37

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this cosmos; if my kingdom was of this cosmos, my servants would be striving so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from this place.” Then Pilate said to him, “So then *you, you* are a king?” Jesus answered, “*You, you* say that I am. For this I have been brought forth, and for this I have come into the cosmos, so that I may witness to the truth...” (Jn 18:36-37b)²

John tells us that Jesus is brought before Pilate, deep within the residence of the governor.³ In this scene, Pilate seeks to get answers to questions to retrieve information if Jesus is a king or not. In his questions, Pilate reveals his primary concern: Are you a threat to me and my people and land?⁴ *Are me and mine threatened by your and yours?* Jesus’s answer can be boiled down to a not-so-clear: *yesno*. In other words: Jesus doesn’t deny being a king, but he does deny being *that* type of king, a king of this world. It’s this ambiguous *yesno* that causes Pilate to keep along his line of questioning: *If a king, what type of kingdom, then?*⁵ And Jesus’s answer can be boiled down again to another not-so-clear response: *therehere and some herethere*.

The radical thing about Jesus’s presence before Pilate is that he sees Jesus as merely a man, just a material and corporeal being. Yet Jesus’s replies indicate an otherworldliness to his presence and being.⁶ There’s a collision of the divine and the created, of the infinite and the finite, of the immaterial and the material, of the non-corporeal and the corporeal. If there ever was an intersection of the collision of the otherness and the familiar, it’s here in the incarnation of the Christ the king, a divine ruler of the heavens, before a flesh and bone only human ruler of the earth. Here, Pilate is exposed by Jesus—the ruler of land is exposed by the ruler of notland. Here, the Judge is being judged by the judge who is being judged by the Judge; here, life collides with death, and death with life.⁷

² Translation mine unless otherwise noted

³ Part of the definition of τὸ πραιτώριον, the Praetorium.

⁴ Rudolf Bultmann *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1971. 653. “The significance of the question is determined by the fact that Pilate, i.e. the state, understands the concept of king only in the political sense. Pilate therefore proceeds now in an objective manner in so far as he, despite the mistrust of the accuser voiced in v. 31, investigates conscientiously whether there was occasion for proceedings by the state. Does Jesus claim a political status which the representative of the public authority could not recognize?”

⁵ Bultmann *John* 654-655. “Pilate questions further, because Jesus indeed has indirectly affirmed that he is a king; and now Jesus affirms it directly: Yes, he is a king! But of what sort is his kingdom? Some kind of claim to sovereignty must be his, otherwise his statement would have lost all meaning!”

⁶ Bultmann *John* 654. “That this concerns a claim which goes forth to the world from beyond it is signified by γεννημαι και... ελήλυθα εις τον κόσμον, whereby γεννημαι to a certain extent is orientated to the viewpoint of Pilate, for whom Jesus is first and foremost a man and nothing more: he, this man, has come for this reason... But because in this man one is confronted with a claim other than human, the mythological ελήλυθα εις τον κόσμον is paradoxically bound up with γεν.: the origin—and therefore the being of this man is not from this world, but he has ‘come’ into this world.”

⁷ Bultman *John* 655. “And in truth he has come in order to ‘bear witness’ for the ‘truth,’ i.e. in order to make God’s reality effective over against the world in the great trial between God and the world. He indeed has come into the

Here truth confronts lie. As Jesus tells Pilate that he is here to reveal the truth into this world, Pilate is now in the position to hear it or not. The great *Shema, hear!* entered Pilate's home and spoke to him. If Jesus is the witness to the truth, then Pilate is positioned as the one who witnesses to the lie. He reveals this by his question, "What is truth?" To ask this question exposes Pilate's not heard Jesus's voice, the divine call to truth; Pilate remains outside of it.⁸

Conclusion

Of what is Pilate remaining outside? The reign of God entering the kingdom of humanity to overhaul it: by first taking it down to rubble and then resurrecting God's new kingdom under the reign of Christ and the law of love, mercy and kindness, love and grace, forgiveness and longsuffering, in solidarity and revolution on behalf of the captives. This reign and kingdom do not hover above, to the left, to the right, or just below the earth; it exists in world and on the earth, forcing everything out of the comfort of neutrality to side with either truth or lie.⁹

And that goes for us, too. We who follow Jesus out of the Jordan and into Jerusalem must see that we are not solely of this material world or of a spiritual world, for either extreme renders us as neutral to what is going on. Rather we are to hear the truth that is Christ and feel the claim of Christ the king and his reign.¹⁰ We must see our material life made whole by our spiritual life, and our spiritual life made whole by our material life. Through the presence of the Spirit of God, we must see our profound and deep connection to the very soil beneath our feet. As we do, we will see that the breadth of the heavens, the entire cosmos, this world, this creation, this humanity is united in a profound connection of a material-spiritual existence. For from the soil humanity was created by the divine breath of God; in the essence of our existence, we all share in one *grain of earth*...

The Beginning of the World {Yokuts}

world for judgment (9.39; 3.19), and his witness is at the same time an accusation against the world (7.7). It is in this 'witness' that he lays his claim to sovereignty; he himself is the ἀλήθεια to which he bears testimony (14.6), and he testifies on behalf of himself (8.14, 18). He is the judge, who decides over life and death (5.19ff.). So he stands now also before Pilate, who according to the world's standard is his judge."

⁸ Bultman *John* 656. "... 'What is truth?' i.e. he takes the point of view that the state is not interested in the question about the ἀλήθεια—about the reality of God, or as perhaps it ought to be expressed in Pilate's way of thinking—about reality in the radical sense. He remains on the outside. For the person who represents this standpoint that means that he shuts the door on the claim of the revelation, and in so doing he shows that he is not of the truth—he is of the lie."

⁹ Bultman *John* 657. "For the βασιλεία is not an isolated sphere of pure inwardness over against the world, it is not a private area for the cultivation of religious needs, which could not come into conflict with the world. The word of Jesus unmasks the world as a world of sin, and it challenges it. In order to defend itself against the word it flees to the state, and demands that the latter put itself at its disposal. But then the state is torn out of its neutrality precisely in so far as its firm hold on to neutrality signifies a decision against the world."

¹⁰ Bultmann *John* 654. "The reader knows that if the βασιλεία of Jesus is not 'of this world,' and is not 'from here,' as it is ἄνωθεν, and therefore superior to all worldly dominion (cp. 3.31). He knows also the peculiar claim which this βασιλεία makes on man."

“Everything was water except a small piece of ground. On this were Eagle and Coyote. Then the turtle swam to them. They sent it to dive for the earth at the bottom of the water. The turtle barely succeeded in reaching the bottom and touching it with its foot. When it came up again, all the earth seemed washed out. Coyote looked closely at its nails. At last he found a grain of earth. Then he and the eagle took this and laid it down. From it they made the earth as large as it is. From the earth they also made six men and six women. They sent these out in pairs in different directions and the people separated. After a time the eagle sent Coyote to see what the people were doing. Coyote came back and said: ‘They are doing something bad. They are eating the earth. One side is already gone.’ The eagle said: ‘That is bad. Let us make something for them to eat. Let us send the dove to find something.’ The dove went out. It found a single grain of meal. The eagle and Coyote put this down on the ground. Then the earth became covered with seeds and fruit. Now they told the people to eat these. When the seeds were dry and ripe the people gathered them. Then the people increased and spread all over. But the water is still under the world.”¹¹

¹¹ <https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/The-Beginning-Of-The-World-Wukchamni-Yokut.html>