

“I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

St John 11.25-26.

Sermon for the Requiem of Dr Jane Veronica Curran
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Resurrection was first proclaimed as certain hope by a Jewish mother two centuries before our Lord Jesus identified himself as “the resurrection and the life.” She, “marvellous above all and worthy of honourable memory,”¹ encouraging her seven sons to a martyrdom she would share, articulated and linked two of the great doctrines emerging from the blending of Judaism and Hellenism: resurrection from death and creation from nothing. She had faith that the same God who created everything from what-is-not would recreate: “The Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will, in his mercy, give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.”² She told her youngest, the last to face the tortures of the tyrant: “look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God made them out of what did not exist.” The ancient blending of Hellenism and Judaism produced these and other essential teachings and practices common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: “If today the West and Islam believe in resurrection, the idea is one which Maccabean Judaism took over from Hellenism, and then passed on to Christianity and Islam.”³

There are many reasons to recall this crucial intellectual and religious turning point, and that Jewish mother, here, in this university Chapel, as we offer the Holy Sacrifice for the repose of the soul of a Bachelor, and twice Master (in Classics and in German), of this University, a Doctor of Philosophy, and the holder of a distinguished professorial Chair. Wedded in this place thirty-five years ago, Jane gave herself faithfully, serenely, and beautifully to her husband and family, to our Chapel, our College, and to this University. Among us she was first a brilliant student, then a long suffering but elegant College Dean, a distinguished scholar, an innovative and generous teacher, a wise and determined university administrator.

¹ 2 Maccabees 7.20.

² “The Creator of the world, [LXX: ο του κοσμου κτιστης; Vulgate: *Creator mundi*] who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, [LXX: παλιν αποδιδωσιν; Vulgate: *spiritum vobis iterum... reddit et vitam*] since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.” 2 Maccabees 7.23. “I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God made them out of what did not exist [LXX: οτι ουκ εξ οντων εποιησεν αυτα θεος; Vulgate: *ex nihilo fecit illa Deus*].” 2 Maccabees 7.28.

³ Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees, Foundations of Post-Biblical Judaism*, translated by Moses Hadas (New York, Schocken Books, 1962), 182. See also idem, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 270–279 and the *Jerusalem Bible* (1966), note 7 a on 2 Maccabees.

One reason for reminding ourselves now of the intellectual ground and history of the doctrine of the resurrection must be that we sang Requiem for her teacher and Tom's, here eight months ago. Robert Crouse dedicated his scholarly life to rethinking what he called the "blending" of Greek and Hebrew for the renewing of mind and of true religion now, and because only on its basis can the Western tradition be understood.⁴ Although hers was another field than his, Jane gave herself to the common work.

Jane, Tom, and Robert laboured to maintain the Patristic reading of Scripture in the *Book of Common Prayer*, because it preserved the structures of that old blending essential to Christianity. So, this last Sunday, many of us, mourning Jane's passing, heard these words read at the Eucharist; we thought of her and felt the comfort of a special providence:

KNOW ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life....Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁵

St Paul brings out what Jesus proclaimed: resurrection overcoming death is confined neither to the past nor yet to the future, but is the substance of the present, a present which is both eternal and ours. Resurrection is. Death and resurrection are realities of our everyday existence, and of the sacraments. Those great mysteries are manifestations of hidden immortal life; they give us the strength to endure death and to overcome it.

Jesus' self-assertion, whose power opens this Office, belongs to the "I am" declarations of St John's Gospel: I am the bread come down from heaven, I am the light of the world, I am the door to the sheepfold, and the shepherd as well, I am the resurrection into immortality, I am the way, the truth, and the life, I am the vine by which you bear much fruit.⁶ Why these assertions "at the top of his piercing voice about himself and his own unequalled importance"⁷? Our Lord is taking us back to Exodus, and the appearance of the Unnamed God to Moses at the burning bush. There holy Scripture and Greek metaphysics came together for our salvation.⁸ In God's "I am what I am" the Unknown disclosed itself as eternal

⁴ Robert D. Crouse, "The Augustinian Background of St. Anselm's Concept of *Justitia*," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 4 (1958): 111-119 at 115.

⁵ The Epistle for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, Romans 6.3.

⁶ John 6.35, 8.12, 10.7, 10.11, 11.25, 14.6, 15.1.

⁷ Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove. A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 3.

⁸ As the double form of a single theology, see Robert D. Crouse, 'St. Thomas, St. Albert, Aristotle: *Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae*', *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso nel suo settimo centenario*, i (Naples: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975), 181-185; idem, "*Philosophia Ancilla*

being. By his “I am” declarations, Jesus declares his identity with the eternal being of God the Father and sets himself to communicate immortal divinity to us. Every assertion of what he is, every “I am”, exhibits the terrible cost of his gift of resurrected life: it is none other than his own death. He is the bread of heaven broken and eaten, the light shining in darkness, the door of passage, the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep, the resurrection from death he endured, the truth standing against the lie, the vine whose grapes are trampled underfoot so that their blood fills the cup he must drink.⁹ His death is our resurrection: dying, but identifying our deaths with his, we share the immortality of the eternal “I am.” “So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

For Jews, Christians, and Moslems, resurrection exists on the edge between what Plato and Aristotle demonstrate, the immortality of soul and mind, and what faith knows, life renewed by a radical act of recreation from what-is-not. Rational demonstrations must be rethought, what faith believes must be handed on. The first is the work of the university; the second is handled by the religious community. In our traditions the two sides blend, but they are not reduced to one another.

The mother, who stands at the beginning of a handing on continued more than two millennia, perceived that the being her sons had received in her womb was not from herself. She saw that they were now forgetting themselves for the sake of the Law of their Maker. That Law, lived out in Judea, both revealed God’s justice and made righteousness the substance of her own daily existence. Because mercy and justice were God’s, and also qualities He caused in her,¹⁰ she possessed a sure hope that God must restore the lives of her seven sons. She was certain that the God who created everything from nothing could and would resurrect them. Her faith is handed on in scripture and in the life of the family and religious community.

St John tells us that what Christian faith knows is also communicated in this tangible way. He writes in his first Epistle:

Theologiae: Some texts from Aristotle’s *Metaphysica* in the Interpretation of Albertus Magnus,” *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Filosofia Medieval*, 2 vols (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1979) i, 657–661.

⁹ The Johannine Gospel, letters and Apocalypse, dependent on Philo the great Jewish theologian of Alexandria, come together on this. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture. The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), 3–4 and idem, *What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

¹⁰ For this as the fundamental two-sidedness of justice from the beginning among Hellenes and Jews and in the union of the two see Crouse, “The Augustinian Background”: 115.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.¹¹

The necessity of tangible passage explains why resurrection faith is handed on to so many of us by our mothers.

So we come to the handing on here and now. During Jane's terrible illness, and for long before, we saw the resurrected life in her. A friend, whom Tom and I came to know more than forty years ago, when we were students together in Toronto, now a priest in Texas, wrote to assure us that he would remember Jane at the altar and went on: "May she rest in peace and be raised in glory as she enters fully into that larger life which already seemed to break forth from her anyway, steadfastly if sometimes wryly, in the mixed world of the here and now."¹²

Though it cost us tears mixed with our joy, we must recollect how that resurrection faith was celebrated and handed on "in the mixed world of the here and now" by her, and by you, and by us just a month ago at the wedding of Emma and Martin, for that too signified and communicated to us "the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church."¹³ Into that mystical union we enter again now in this sacrament, pleading, for Jane and for ourselves, the sacrifice of Him who, weeping at the grave of his friend, declared: "I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

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¹¹ 1 John 1.1-3.

¹² Fr William McKeachie.

¹³ The Solemnization of Matrimony, *Book of Common Prayer* (Canada, 1962), 564.