

We hope you enjoy these sample pages. For ordering information, visit Liguori.org.

FOLLOW HIM

AND RECLAIM THE WORLD

Dennis J. Billy, CSsR



Imprimi Potest:

Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, the Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

Copyright © 2016 Dennis J. Billy

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Billy, Dennis Joseph, author.

Follow him : called to redeem the world / Fr. Dennis J. Billy, CSsR. — First edition.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7648-2650-4

1. Jesus Christ—Person and offices. 2. Catholic Church—Doctrines. I. Title.
BT203.B5354 2015
232—dc23

2015030927

p ISBN 978-0-7648-2650-4

e ISBN 978-0-7648-7082-8

Excerpts from English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*; English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—*Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists.
To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America
20 19 18 17 16 / 5 4 3 2 1
First Edition

Contents

Foreword	9
Introduction	11
Chapter One: Our Broken World	17
Chapter Two: He Entered Our World	37
Chapter Three: He Gave of Himself Completely	57
Chapter Four: He Became Our Nourishment	79
Chapter Five: He Became Our Source of Hope	97
Conclusion	119
Endnotes	125
About the Author	128



Chapter One

Our Broken World

This is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens—there was no field shrub on earth and no grass of the field had sprouted, for the LORD God had sent no rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the ground, but a stream was welling up out of the earth and watering all the surface of the ground—then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:4–9

Key Themes

- Original sin is responsible for our belief in creation's inherent limitations.
- God created the world with a fundamental goodness.
- After the Fall we are left with a bleeding vulnerability and hidden hope for redemption.

Questions about the nature of the world—its origin, makeup, scope, and destiny—have captivated curious minds for all time. Primitive peoples resorted to myth to explain the cosmos and their place in it. Philosophers have used reason to unravel its meaning. Scientists have drawn conclusions about the universe from experiments rooted in empirical observation. Adherents of the world's major religions have relied on faith to fathom its depths and unlock its mysteries.

We have something in common with each of these approaches. We believe the Christian story of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection is "myth become fact."⁶ Having certain basic presuppositions about the relationship between faith and reason, we have drawn some concrete conclusions about the world and humanity's place in it. We have a particular outlook toward the world that is rooted in reason, enhanced by revelation, and increasingly at odds with the values of the present age.

Creation and Fall

Our Christian worldview has its roots in the stories of creation and the Fall. The opening chapters of Genesis actually contain two accounts of creation: one where God makes man and woman on the sixth day before his Sabbath rest (Genesis 1—2:4) and the other where their creation occurs respectively before and after the creation of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:5–25). These two stories complement each other in a way that highlights some of the basic truths of Christian anthropology.

The first account puts humanity at the summit of God's creation, placing us in a position of responsible dominion and lordship over the rest of creation. The second emphasizes that Eden was created for us and that we have been given the responsibility to cultivate and care for it. Each account draws a close link between humanity and the world as manifestations of God's creative power through several key points:

- Each places us in a position of authority over the rest of creation.
- Each highlights our noble origins by stating that God created man and woman in his image and likeness (Genesis 1—2:4) and by presenting man as a living being when God breathes into his nostrils (Genesis 2:5–25).
- Each points to the complementary aspects of the relationship between man and woman: the first, by stressing their fundamental dignity by virtue of their being created in God's image

and likeness (Genesis 1:27); the second, by accentuating their complementary nature with God, giving man a companion who is bone from his bones and flesh from his flesh (Genesis 2:23).

Taken together, these accounts emphasize the goodness of creation, our basic human dignity, and the harmony of our relationships with God, each other, and all creation. They make major contributions to the Christian worldview and form the backdrop of the drama of creation, sin, and redemption that lies at the heart of the Gospel message.

The stories of the Fall (Genesis 3) and the subsequent downward spiral of hatred and violence that has plagued us since the dawn of time (Genesis 4—11) introduce another important element into the mix: the presence of evil. These accounts counter the paradisaical view of the creation stories with the story of humanity's fall from grace. According to this view, evil enters the world through the cunning of a snake, a creature generally associated with Satan and the powers of darkness. Adam and Eve converse with this evil creature and disobey God's command against eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thinking the action will make them "be like gods" (Genesis 3:5). As a result, humanity senses its nakedness, tries to hide its shame, and is cast out of Eden once God surmises what it has done.

Because of our sin, our willful "missing the mark" or falling out of step with God, we suffer from physical hardships, death, and broken, dysfunctional relationships for the rest of our earthy sojourn. The accounts in Genesis that follow—those of

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1–16), the patriarchs before the Flood, (Genesis 5:1–32), Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6:5—9:28), the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) the patriarchs after the Flood (Genesis 11:10–26), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–29)—chart the violent downward spiral of hatred, violence, sin, and destruction that we struggle with to this day.

These stories of creation and the Fall tell us that, while sin entered the world through our cooperation with the powers of darkness, evil obscures but does not completely overcome the fundamental goodness of God’s creation. In exchange for the knowledge of good and evil, we have lost our intimate relationship with God, creation, and ourselves, and replaced it with a life of toil, hardship, and endless struggle.

From these realities, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) developed his doctrine of original sin, which described Adam’s Fall as a sin of pride affecting all human nature, passing from one generation to the next through sexual intercourse, resulting in a cataclysmic fall from grace, and making human beings incapable of meritorious action.⁷ A few centuries earlier, Irenaeus of Lyons (*circa* 180) interpreted the Fall as the stumbling first steps of an infant humanity, an event that would pale in comparison with all things that would eventually be wrought by Christ’s divinizing transformation of humanity.⁸ Under either interpretation, our fall from grace results in our living with deep wounds in a broken world that, except for some dramatic divine intervention, would make us incapable of virtuous living, let alone an elevation to heights never before

imagined. Today the Church teaches that the account of the Fall “uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man.” “Revelation,” it goes on to say, “gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents.”⁹

Our Christian Worldview

Together these creation stories affirm the goodness of creation, the presence of evil in the world, the reality of sin (original, personal, or otherwise), and our need for redemption. They set the stage for the drama of Christ’s Incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. These Christian doctrines only make sense because the world we live in is finite and in drastic need of repair. God believed in humanity even when humanity had lost faith in itself, and our Christian story affirms that. It says that God dramatically intervened in the world to save us from ourselves.

All mature theological reflection involves the interplay of three key concepts: God, humanity, and the world.¹⁰ We are not isolated actors on the world stage, but intimately bound up with the world around us. We are a part of the world, and our actions affect it for better or for worse. Our destiny and that of the world are closely intertwined. Where we go the world goes—and vice versa. What takes place within our human souls has repercussions far beyond its borders. Our good actions have a positive effect on the world; our sinful actions are detrimental to it. We can work to preserve the world or pollute it; tend it

or tear it down; be its caretakers or its undertakers. The choice was, is, and will be ours to make.

Our actions affect not only the world around us but also our own selves. Every human action, every deliberated action of reason and will, has consequences both for us and our world. It also matters to God. When seen in this light, the sin of Adam has serious ramifications for the human heart and the entire cosmos. Because humanity is intimately tied up with the world, the sin of human origins is also the sin of the world's origins. At some point in our collective existence, we decided to turn from God and go our own way. The biblical accounts of sin spiral from the pride of Adam, to the fratricide of Cain, to the ruins of Babel, to the decadence of Sodom and Gomorrah, and continue to this day. We acknowledge that something has gone terribly wrong in the world and that we, by choosing to follow our own will, have somehow caused it, become victims of it, and cannot make it right on our own. We place our hope not in humanity, but in the intervention of divine love in human affairs. This Christian view of the world centers on a loving and compassionate God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies. We hope in a God who promises to make all things new by transforming the old order and carrying it to the threshold of the divine.

Real-World View: A Story of Faith

*"The wise have eyes in their head,
but fools walk in darkness" (Ecclesiastes 2:14).*

Dorothy is a single, middle-aged woman with a deep wound in her heart. She got pregnant when she was a senior in high school and her boyfriend pressured her into having an abortion. She felt the abortion was wrong, but agreed with her boyfriend's argument that they were too young. They had their whole lives ahead of them. A child would limit them. They'd be trapped with no real way to provide for the baby. They weren't prepared for this.

She thought about having the child and putting him up for adoption, but she was scared of telling her parents about the pregnancy. *What would they think of her? How would they react? What would they say?* So she and her boyfriend kept the pregnancy a secret. She had the abortion at an out-of-town clinic so as few people as possible would know.

She knew about it though. And she carried that guilt deep in her heart ever since. Dorothy and her boyfriend broke up about a year later and she lost touch as he moved on to build a life with someone else. She has carried the guilt of ending the pregnancy around with her for a long time, and it has made her very unhappy, even angry—at her boyfriend, her family, at the world, and especially at herself. She feels broken inside and doesn't know what to do about it. She's afraid to enter into another romantic relationship

because she doesn't want to let anyone that close again. She doesn't want to be let down again.

She feels estranged from God and has even convinced herself he doesn't exist. Deep down she knows she's rationalizing his existence away, just as she rationalized away the death of her child. She puts up a good front, but inside it feels as though she is a broken woman living in a broken world. She was raised in a devout Catholic family but tells herself that she has outgrown the faith of her childhood. She has convinced her mind; now if only she could convince her heart.

Her life has turned out very different from the way she thought it would. She has buried herself in her work, has few friends, and feels burdened by the secret she has been carrying all these years. She needs to tell someone but is afraid of trying. She doesn't even know where to begin. She escapes from her guilt by self-medicating with alcohol and prescription drugs.

One year at the office Christmas party she had one too many. That was the day Jim entered her life.

Reflect



- How would you describe Dorothy's world?
- Where does her pain come from?
- Have you ever felt the way she does? What are positive ways to deal with this kind of pain?

Taking a Deeper Look: Sin

By looking closer at sin and its consequences we see the Fall as a more complex event than just two people not following a rule. Through this deeper understanding we see how sin and the Fall touched God, humanity, and the world as well as why we needed redemption and still suffer and sin today.

Our fall from grace has disrupted our friendship with God.

That God would create us in his image and likeness implies that he has a unique fondness for us and our ancestors. Rather than projecting human qualities onto God, when we study human nature we see the reflection of God himself. We were created to be an icon of the divine which, when prayerfully contemplated, would reveal something of God's mystery and majesty to the world. By studying the noblest qualities of our nature, we can assume that God is spiritual, social, rational, willful, virtuous, loving, and capable of intimate friendship. We could also conclude that God created us in his image and likeness so that he could enter into relationship with us and with all creation. Original sin not only tarnished God's image and likeness in us but also broke the bonds of friendship God had forged with us. Rather than communing with God, we were set on a course of increasing isolation. This spilled over into all our other relationships and turned what was meant to be a garden paradise into what many deemed a living hell.

Our fall from grace has also had repercussions for all creation.

Evil already existed in the spiritual realm of the demonic powers, but when it crept into our human hearts it wreaked havoc not only in our inner world but also in the visible world we inhabited. Our fall from grace had a ripple effect on the entire universe. When Adam sinned, the whole created order fell with him. The goodness of creation, while never completely compromised, became tarnished and bent out of shape. All creation shared in our rebellion against the created order of things and became a willful, if unwitting, accomplice to our sinfulness. When the harmonious order of creation was broken in our failed attempt to usurp the role of the divine, the resulting disorder in our hearts filtered down to all other levels of the visible world. "Everything is connected," the saying goes. After the Fall, all that was left in our memory was a vague recollection that paradise was lost and that we had played a decisive role in losing it.

Our fall from grace has wounded, not completely destroyed, our human nature.

Experience tells us that despite our vast shortcomings we remain essentially good. Our wounds can be healed and we can be made whole, just not on our own. As with the rest of creation, human nature is not evil or totally corrupted. We are fundamentally good. We are still created in the image and likeness of God, even though that image has been tarnished by sin. Original sin means that we have collectively fallen short of the mark laid out for us by God. These shortcomings have taken root

deep in our unconscious and filled us with fear and anxiety, but we can be redeemed, and redemption is our deepest longing and enduring hope.

Our fall from grace has heightened
our experience of suffering.

This shift in our nature also brought changes in our awareness of pain and our interpretation of its meaning. What was formerly understood as an integral and necessary part of life was now perceived as an existential threat to be avoided at all costs. Suffering became valueless and meaningless. It was thought to penetrate every aspect of human experience—the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, the social, and even the spiritual—and was viewed as part of the daily, inescapable drudgery of human existence. Suffering was often seen as a result of being out of communion with God. Suffering was even inflicted on others to bend their wills and used as a threat to force others to conform to the designs of the powerful. We came to believe there was no escape and that suffering on earth was nothing but a harbinger of the ultimate suffering of the separation of body and soul at death.

Our fall from grace has made us fearful of death
and traumatized us about the end of life.

It is commonly thought that death entered the world as a result of Adam's sin. While this may well be true, it is also possible that it was the *fear* of death, and the hidden suspicion that it marked the end of our existence, that traumatized us after our fall from grace. Prior to that time, death was viewed merely

as a natural stage of life that would lead to a higher form of existence; however, as our relationship with God became severely damaged it led to a fundamental distrust of the natural course of things. As a result, death was perceived as a great upheaval within the person. Rather than leading us to a higher state of life, the separation of the body from the soul signaled a lonely end to a doomed existence.

Our fall from grace has led to a weakening
of our capacity to reason.

Prior to the Fall, we shared an intimate fellowship with God. One sign of this fellowship was our capacity to think with God and anticipate his action in our lives. This deep sharing in his life meant that we were able to think clearly about our relationship to him, the ties we share with each other, and our place in the universe. After the Fall this intimate fellowship with God was deeply marred. Our reasoning power shrank to a mere shadow of its former self. Our intuitive knowledge of what was right and wrong was gravely damaged. The once blazing fire within our hearts dwindled to a mere spark, and this tiny spark of conscience could be covered by the darkness of sin. Truth itself began to be perceived as fragmented and split apart. We began wondering if reason itself was nothing more than a thin veneer that disguised irrational appetites. Even when we *did* exalt reason during the course of history, we could never recover our intimate participation in the wisdom of God we had lost at the dawn of our existence.

Deepening Our Awareness

- What do you believe about the world you inhabit? Is it finite or eternal, good or evil, unfinished, a work in progress, broken beyond repair, deserving of salvation, chaotic or created?
- Is your view of the world similar to similar to Dorothy's? Why or why not?
- Where do your beliefs about the world come from? (Home, religion, peers, education?)
- What role has society played in your views about the world and your place in it?
- Do you continuously evaluate your beliefs either in your own mind or in conversations with others?
- Do your beliefs change often or are you rigid in them? Do they hold a place in both your head and your heart? What would your life be like without them?
- What about the Christian worldview to you find attractive? What do you find difficult to accept?

A Disciple's Prayer

Lord, I look around me and see that I live in a broken world desperately in need of healing. I find this brokenness all around me, even deep within my heart. There is so much trouble and unrest. Violence and hatred abound. Ethnic and racial tensions have boiled over. Nations are at war. Religious unrest runs rampant. Freedom has given way to addiction. All of creation seems infected with a deadly contagion. Sometimes it seems as though the world will not make it through another day. Sometimes I even feel the same about myself. Everything around me seems to be unraveling. In the midst of my brokenness, I cry out to you and turn to you as my Creator and Lord. You hold the world in existence and have blessed it with a deep-down goodness that no wound can ever completely erase. I refuse to lose hope. I will not allow darkness to overwhelm me. I turn to you because you are not only the world's creator, but also its Savior. Help me to welcome you into the world this day. Help me to join you in your loving embrace. Help me to find you in the deepest crevices of my heart and the darkest moments of my world. Amen.