

FACULTY ESSAY



REFLECTIONS ON GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND ACTIVITY IN HISTORY

Introduction

This essay seeks to set forth some reflections on how God acts in our lives and, on a much larger scale, in human history. For this, it is necessary to cover a series of theological areas, such as: the nature of God; the nature of the universe and of the events that occur therein; the nature of God's activities; the nature of our salvation; and, finally, the nature of our discernment and judgments regarding those activities.

The Nature of God

God is "spirit," and, as such, only knowable by us analogically, that is, we can only imagine or conceive how God is and acts by reference to what we have perceived in the natural world. We believe that God exists, that "He" is an all-powerful, all-knowing and loving Being. But we have progressively, in our human history, divested God of anthropomorphisms. No longer do we speak of him as taking an afternoon walk in the Garden of Eden or as baring his arm or fuming at the nose or uprooting cedars with his majestic voice. But we continue to believe that He acts in our lives and in the universe. How is this to be understood, in regards now to the nature of God?

The simple answer is that we really do not know. It is important to realize this "apophatic" fact. We know a great deal—not everything, by any

means—about how the universe operates. It is accessible in ever-greater measure to our scientific investigation. As we plunge deeper into the subatomic world, or venture farther out into space, we are often surprised by the depth of the secrets of nature, by how vast and virtually unfathomable it is, and we are often surprised by new discoveries and ways of understanding natural phenomena. We cannot say that there has been a qualitative change in the possibilities of scientific research in the last few centuries, that is, we know more, we do science differently, but we have not a qualitatively different capacity to learn the secrets of the universe than Galileo or Newton or Einstein had. Their theories were revised, proven wrong in some respects. What we know today may seem quite quaint in some years.

We do not know how spirit acts upon matter. We believe that God created the world. He may have set off the Big Bang. How He created matter *ex nihilo* we cannot imagine. How He maintains it, we do not know. St. Augustine, in his *De Trinitate*, and perhaps others before him, spoke of God's utter simplicity in knowing, acting, loving, etc.¹ He does not discourse, his love is not different from his knowledge, etc. This makes sense, and seems to be "a good start." But we should emphasize that even this puristic image is just that, a human attempt to understand the nature of God. In the end, we must resign ourselves to trying to speak about God according to what Holy Scripture and the Church teach, and what theologians have reflected upon based on our experience, and to systematize all this so as to present a valuable picture of God and his activity (the two cannot be separated). But, analogously to our natural inquiry, and even much more so, there are many things about God we do not and cannot know.

In nature, we are just beginning, I think, to realize that thought and communication are mysterious, so that what has been termed telepathy may exist, and there may be forms of communication, of intuition, of knowledge, that defy natural laws as we understand them in a pure "materialistic" fashion. In the field of medicine, we are just beginning to synthesize our conceptions of the interrelation between mind and body. The East has a body of knowledge regarding this, the West has cultivated "modern" medicine. Contemporaries such as Deepak Chopra, with a command of both, are expounding this interrelation in new ways. Eastern mystics have long astounded us with demonstrations of the possibilities of "mind over matter," holding their breath or slowing down at will their metabolism, etc. So even in the material world, and the universe, so "thoroughly" studied by us moderns, there are ever-awaiting surprises.

¹ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* [*The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. 5], Edmund Hill, trans. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991): Book VII:2; Book XV:7, 22.

In regards to God, there are ever-present questions, such as “Why doesn't God stop innocent suffering,” which begs the question, “Can He?” And why does God sometimes perform a miracle and at other times does not, under circumstances indistinguishable to us? Does our prayer affect God, does it change what He intended to do? Does God punish acts in this life? Does He reward? If He wills that we be saved, what practical effect does this willing have on His acts, and on us, and on our freewill?

Process theologians have at times spoken of God as a “fellow-sufferer.” This may be part of a conception of God as being “in process,” at least in so far as we are concerned, that is, “God” is an idea we have that refers more to what we are and think than to any reality outside of us. Does it make sense to speak of God as “in process?” The question behind this is really, what is God like, what is the nature of God?

Our Christian faith absolutely speaks of God as omnipotent. But we put limits on this omnipotence: God cannot make a circle square. We could then say, God can do anything that is *logically* possible, thereby in some way qualifying his omnipotence. We say, God tends to respect natural laws, and does not directly (“miraculously”) intervene except in certain circumstances: to show his mercy, as a salvific sign, to convert a particularly destined individual, etc. This type of thinking has the advantage of leaving quite undetermined and unpredictable what God does or will do in any given case; but I flaw it as proceeding from an all-too cozy and assuming stance of believing we understand how God acts *most* of the time. I uphold the Christian belief that God is omnipotent, which means He can do all things, “anything He wants.” But I prefer to make of this assertion, dogma and belief something which more pertains to us, to our way of life and faith, than to the actual, unknowable nature of God. That is, we should believe that God can do all things, and we should have absolute trust in his ability to save us. But it is irrelevant, academic and asinine, to speak of God doing some weird or extravagant act as a manifestation of his omnipotence. We will never, I do not think, see God do some real showy magic trick. I do not know whether the sun as danced in Fatima or Medjugorje, or whether rosaries have turned yellow in this place. I can truly believe God has healed, through the Virgin Mary's intercession, someone from cancer, or has caused a financial disaster to turn out alright. But the “strange” thing is how “natural” everything was in what occurred at Fatima; it may be unexplainable, but it never happened before anyone's eyes or in a way that really precluded faith (although there are cases where it strongly induces it). Even if the sun has “danced,” it is susceptible of some natural explanation, or otherwise limited in its import; otherwise, the whole world would be converted. No, what we have in these cases are special moments which are particularly susceptible to the interpretation of faith: “the finger of God was there.”

If I believe that God created the universe out of nothing, and maintains it by "his Word," then I believe He is capable of doing with it what He wants. I will believe that He is behind everything that happens, mysteriously "respecting" natural laws and even more mysteriously arranging them so as to lead and guide us along in our salvation path. The big variable is our faith and discernment: what someone who meditates on God and his providence and activity in his or her life will "discover" is quite different from what someone who does not will not discover. And what is "discovered" may vary from one individual to another and within one individual from time to time, and may not correspond very well to what God has actually "done." But that meditating individual does well to attend to the "possible" activity of God in his life and world, because then he exercises his faith in the God of salvation history, the Biblical God, the Father of Jesus. The important thing then is how this belief in the God who acts to save affects the believer, not how accurately the belief may correspond to the "actual" nature and activity of God. So what, then, are we left with, in this regard?

Certain prototypical salvation-deeds narrated in the Bible are virtually defined elements of our faith: Noah's saving ark, the crossing of the Red Sea, perhaps certain battles in Israel's history and the return from the exile, certainly Jesus' death on the cross, a truly historical event, but what was "miraculous" about that?² Then there is his resurrection, but it is not "historical" in the sense of being public. It required faith, and in any case, is of the non-showy type of "miracle" through which perhaps some were strongly induced to belief, but again, it could not of itself convert the world. It is another hidden activity of the hidden God.

Our traditional faith also speaks of God as letting certain things stand as they are, or changing others, in accordance with what is best for us, for our salvation. We are to hope for the best, for cures, success, etc. (some do not even advocate this), but resign ourselves to God's ultimate will. Jesus prayed thus, in Gethsemane. It is clear that we humans, even Jesus, cringe at the thought of suffering, and want good things, sometimes most especially for loved ones, little children, a terminally-ill parent who is needed, etc. In these cases, we pray that God change the foreseeably tragic outcome. What does this say about the nature of God?

Very little. It does say we shun suffering and want success, and that at times we respectively get it or avoid it after prayer (which we know can

² It is not "miraculous" because, strictly speaking, it is not a natural wonder, an unexplainable exception to nature's usual course, although the manner of Jesus' death was surprising and convincing to the centurion (cf. also Gal 3:1), and the Letter to the Hebrews (9:14) attributes Jesus' self-offering to the "Eternal Spirit."

mightily affect how we feel and act and heal, etc.). It also indicates that God, with or without our prayer, can at times be quite discernible as a result of a miraculous healing or a sudden turn of events. But I think this, again, refers more to us than to God. We perceive God more clearly, being better disposed as we are then. Has God acted any differently? I do not think we know, and it would be just as baseless to say we know He has than to say we know He has not. St. John of the Cross would probably say, focus on the eternal God, forget about his miracles, just have that dark, raw faith, without supports. This may seem extreme or inhuman—Jesus did not seem to have read *The Dark Night of the Soul*—and “exaggerated,” as someone once remarked after reading this mystic’s deep works. But it does correspond to the *ultimate essence* or our faith: what matters is our salvation, we will all die and possibly suffer much beforehand. What we should pray for is to be always near to God, and if relief from suffering helps us in this, we can be sure God will relieve our suffering. But we should not expect to cause a change in God; this I feel is presumptuous, and an act of irreverence. Or is it, since Jesus himself asked God to “remove” the cup of the Passion? Well, it was not presumptuous in Jesus’ case: he did not seek to change God, he expressed that he balked at the terrifying prospect of what awaited him, but God’s will was paramount. It is fine to express our desires; it is another to put them above God’s plan. And we should attune ourselves to discovering what God’s plan is and to obey it gladly, not to try to change what may be God’s plan. The realization of this causes and works a real difference in our attitude to life’s events and to God. We place him first, in and of himself, not as provider or miracle-worker, but as savior. Savior from what? This is the topic of the next section.

In summary, we can say very little about the nature of God from his “acts” in history beyond the fact that He created the universe and presumably can do whatever He wills. It will now be evident that focusing on God as savior will be more fruitful in our endeavor to discover how God “works” in our lives and in history.

The Nature of Our Salvation

God’s acts, as far as we are concerned or aware of them, have to do with our salvation: they seek to further it. What is meant by “salvation?” We come into the world—our existence is the presupposition for our salvation—and we die, terminating our earthly “gestation” (in the sense not only of development but of our “gesture,” that is, our activity). Our salvation consists, theologically and teleologically, in its simplest, essential terms, in being with God. We are saved if we abide with God in eternity. Eternal life is defined in the Fourth Gospel (John 17:3) as ‘knowing the only true God and the one He has sent, Jesus Christ.’ To “know,” in the Biblical sense, means to

be intimately familiar with someone. Ethically, and ontologically, what does it mean to “know” God and Jesus Christ? It means to respond adequately to them, that is, to accept their invitation to be on familiar and intimate terms with them. This can only take place, of course, in proportion to what our knowledge and capacity enable us to achieve in this regard. We are created in the image of God. This means that we are free to love or not to love; love, by definition and essentially, is a free act, or it is not love. Salvation therefore becomes an ability to give an adequate response of love, or can be defined as that state or condition in which such a response can be adequately given. Without this “cooperation” on our part, without this our response, however finite and humble, to God's invitation, we cannot enter into that relationship of Biblical knowledge with him which is the constituent of our salvation. The invitation does not automatically operate an acceptance; the acceptance must be free, that is, it must be a human act of response to the invitation to have this relationship. Only in those cases where no response is possible (extreme imbecility or in the case of newborns, etc.), will it be dispensed with. We then face the issue of what experience of God, what relationship with God, these persons can have, and must answer that in the “regeneration” (cf. Matt 19:28), who knows what wonders God will bring about?

Our growth, then, in this capacity to offer a loving response to God — and, inseparably, to our “neighbor”—is the “working out, accomplishing, bringing about” (in Greek, *katergázomai*) of our salvation which St. Paul speaks about in Philippians 2:12. Our life is a journey in this growth, as we become transformed more and more into the image—the “glory”—of God, who is Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). Such is the intrinsic impulse, the *télos*, toward which we by nature tend—at least, nature reborn in baptism. We are able to frustrate this tendency, whose fulfillment is desired but not forced by God. God's providence, and other activities (if there are such!) are oriented toward enabling this loving response on our part, which saves us (= brings us into intimate relationship with God).

The Nature of God's Providence

One might think that I have said that everything that occurs in the world is the result of God's providence, and in a broad way it is, but only in a sense in which the word itself is thus divested of any particularity. It would be more proper to speak of God's “maintenance” of the world and its course. We speak of something as being “providential” when we recognize in it a special instance of God's caring intervention. The prototypical example is Abraham's finding of the ram needed for the sacrifice which was to have been his son Isaac. Abraham had trusted that God would “provide” the animal for the sacrifice (cf. Gen 22). The Hebrew word is that for “to see, look to;” “provide” comes from the Latin “to see ahead.” And sure enough, there just

happened to be a ram caught by its horns when the angel stopped Abraham from offering up his son, and Abraham named the mountain "The Lord will provide."

God's providence must be seen, and can really only be recognized, in the context of a faith that seeks to discern a divine plan for our life. We are born, we will die, God wants us to be saved by knowing him and finding in him hope, strength and love. We are given life, some amount of health and human companionship and nurturing, education, and a variety of experiences that form who we are as persons. The end result of this, when we have had the opportunity to review, understand and assimilate it, is a certain self-knowledge of our talents, limitations and inclinations. We must discern what we should do with our lives. The opportunities which present themselves may be few or many, or may require creativity, foresight, imagination and courage, to invent. It is appropriate to state that everyone has some sort of vocation. It may not be work-related, or this, only tangentially; few would so glorify the job of a street-cleaner as a vocation, but it can be: one can do it with pride, but more probably and importantly, one will view it in the larger context of doing a useful, remunerative service in order to provide for a family, or for oneself, in order to fulfill other roles and perform other activities. Our general, universal vocation—"calling"—is to God. How we get there, to him, takes many different forms.

As humans, we envision where we want to go. For the Christian, this must be in accordance with—really, in *response to*—God's plan. This vision is the result of our assessment of our situation and condition, with its possibilities and limitations, but most importantly, with some inner drive toward a state, a work and an activity. If we feel called to marriage, we need to find a partner. If we feel called to the priestly state or religious life, we need to discern and find the right opportunities; if we feel called to realize some work, we need to be able to develop the skills necessary, etc. It is in the context of this vision, with all its component parts, that we can discern God's providence. Sometimes, we may see God's providence precisely in his pointing out what kind of vision we should have. The question remains, how do we discern it is God's providence?

In Abraham's case, it was simple (he found the ram, and knew what to do with it, and to attribute its presence to God), though his situation was devastating. He had been ready to sacrifice his only beloved son, the son of the promise, and the angel had stopped him. Afterwards, it was easy to see God's hand in providing a ram just when it was needed. The person of faith likewise has an eye always alert to the hand of God. He lives in the hope of being saved, of fulfilling the plan and mission for which he or she was created. He sets out to do it, as best he can. He makes decisions, sometimes based just on faith and inner conviction, not on some cold calculation of human possibilities. As he tries to effectuate his (divine) plan, he runs into

snags. He prays that God will remove obstacles, will smooth the way and make possible what 'for humans is impossible.' In these moments, he will recognize God's providence, and it will of course be intimately and inextricably related to the fulfillment of his plan of salvation.

The concept of God's providence thus makes no sense and is irrelevant outside of a conception of salvation history personal and universal. "All things" will then be seen as "working together" (*synergéō*) "for those who love God, who are called according to his *próthesis* (Rom 8:28). This last word is literally "what is put before," and means "plan, purpose, resolve, will." Our vision of his plan guides our discernment of his providence, and instances of his providence as perceived or believed by us in turn may rearrange and modify our vision of his plan. And thus it was in Biblical history.

The early Israelite conception of what constituted a good life was to possess the land in peace, live a long life and leave descendants behind. Their experiences with other peoples, as they became settled, led them to want a king, not without rumblings from prophetic voices. To conceive of one's nation as a kingdom entailed quite a few factors which boded ominously: a court, taxation, conquest, war, defeat, etc. Thus we have Israel's history of seemingly constant threat, ending in the destruction and disappearance of the Northern Kingdom and the Babylonian Exile for the Kingdom of Judah. What returned were a small and poor people, that "remnant" of which Zephaniah 3:12-13 (among others) spoke, whose only support was in the name of the Lord. Their experiences led to the transformation of many other notions, until the cruel persecution under the Seleucids led to the elaboration of the belief in the resurrection of the dead and a final, universal judgment. Toward the turn of the eras, religious people such as the "Essenes" had gone to the desert to "prepare the way of the Lord," living a life of great sacrifice and piety. Things had come a long way from the days of Abraham, Moses and David.

What was happening here? Being with God was considered to be of the utmost importance, albeit still with "worldly" hopes: the Essenes, and really, earliest Christianity, conceived of the Kingdom of God in concrete, almost "materialistic" terms. But the images belie what is ultimately the one essential: as the visionary prophet John sees "the new heaven and the new earth," Revelation 21, what is important is that God is with his people (no doubt, this will entail the wiping away of every tear). What we have is that union, "mixture," if you will, of spirit and flesh which God created in the beginning. We remain humans, needing to imagine even spiritual things in earthly terms, but capable of cherishing the hope of true communion with God. It is toward this goal "of all creation" (cf. Romans 8) that God's providence is oriented. We discover it as we pray in the Spirit for the grace to be able to faithfully, wisely and courageously respond to God's plan.

At this point, then, we can define God's providence as the special gifts He gives us to enable us to fulfill our specific vocation or mission in life. They are clear signs of his loving and omnipotent presence, and fulfill the all-important function of proving to us his love. Our experience of his love is the single most important saving factor and gift which God gives us. As a person in love can readily discern and detect when his loved one has left behind a sign of her love and concern—at times, only imagining it as such—thus can the faithful discern God's ubiquitous presence. He may even think of it in terms of guardian angels. This experience of God's care and power to help us fulfill his plan is also a forceful psychological "resource" to enable us to succeed.

The Nature of God's Activity in the World

We are now in a more prepared position to take up once more the question of the nature of God's activity in the world; specifically, whether He performs "miracles," and how these may be described and explained. We stated previously that, according to constant Judeo-Christian belief, God as creator can do "anything He wants." But why does He seem always to act in ways which are subject to an unbelieving interpretation? The clear answer is that God does not deign to "perform" or put on a show for anyone, but remains always a "hidden God."³ The devil tried to get Jesus to thus put God to the test (cf. Matt 4:5-7). Jesus himself thought the Father could send "more than twelve legions of angels" to stop his arrest and passion (cf. Matt 26:53). We can at least then state that God probably never performs an "ostentatious" miracle.

What about "non-ostentatious" miracles? Christian faith and tradition is of course full of them. The Gospels attribute many to Jesus. Was not the raising of Lazarus, after being dead four days, quite "obvious," if not "ostentatious?" Well, it does stretch the limits of our imagination, but still, it is the kind of event that perhaps even when it occurred was susceptible to non-faith interpretations. Otherwise, would not the Pharisees, etc., all have believed? By "non-ostentatious," we mean "requiring faith because it does not constitute absolute proof."

We must think of God's activity as taking place within the natural confines of the universe He has created. Our creaturely state is never suspended. We are made to undergo the sufferings and limitations of our material and human nature. The desire to be supra-human, to escape these limitations, is precisely what resulted in humanity's first sin, that disobedient pride which wanted to be like God. The holy author presents the picture of a

³ Cf. Isa 45:15: "Truly you are a God who hides himself, the God of Israel, the Savior."

human origin in which things were not so bad, in fact, were paradisiacal, but still with that boundary which must not be crossed. It is as if he were saying, humans were given a chance to live in peace and well-being, if only they would remember their human limitations and obeyed God. Once they disobeyed, then all the "punishments" would serve to constantly remind them that they were not gods. As God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden, He must have been ironically chuckling, as He said, "Behold, man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:24).⁴ On God's attitude toward miracles, St. John of the Cross says that He does them as if forced, very reluctantly and as if it were a great imposition on him.

So God, for the most part, would have us proceed as if we must govern ourselves according to the unchanging laws of the universe. This is itself according to our God-given rational nature. But God also wants us to know He is always with us; we can count on him for everything we need for our salvation. This is a "dogma" of faith. However, for us Christians, God is with us—"Immanuel"—in the person of Jesus Christ. He is that One whom Isaiah predicted would be born of the Virgin (cf. Matt 1:22-23), and who promised to be with his disciples "always, until the end of the world" (Matt 28:20). It is in Jesus, in his story, passion, death and resurrection, that we must find the light with which to attempt to discern how God's providence works, or, more specifically, how God involves himself in our world and history.

The twelve legions of angels did not come to save Jesus. He had to undergo a terrible passion. It was the passion of a good, just human being, made of flesh and blood, victim of political and religious forces, of envy or hatred or whatever else motivates humans to prey on their fellows. Due to our sinfulness, this is a given of our creaturely status. Jesus saves us, in part, by his example (cf. 1 Pet 2:21). The correct path we must walk in this life is right behind Jesus—see Matt 10:38 [*opisō mou*], and 16:23, where Jesus, after his first prediction of his passion literally tells the scandalized Peter to "get behind me." This is the path sanctioned by God for us to take. It is one which is full of the saving presence of God, symbolized by the messianic imagery of the eschatological banquet and "the works of the Messiah" (cf. Matt 11:2): healings, exorcisms, feeding of multitudes, raising the dead. Faith works great things, for it truly believes God can do anything. But we are to *first* seek the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt 6:33 etc.), and everything else that we need for our salvation shall be given to us in addition (*kai tauta tanta prostetēsetai hymín* = and all these things shall be added/granted to you).

This "addition" originally represents the wonder at God's surpassingly solicitous care for us; God is *semper maior*, He will surprise us continually with

⁴ Cf. commentary *ad locum* by Richard J. Clifford, S.J., in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990).

his saving love. But all this takes place only in the context of our creaturely status: all too often, this life will weigh us down, and we, like St. Paul, will have to praise the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who comforts (*parakaléo*) us in our tribulations so that we may comfort one other” (cf. 2 Cor 1:3-11). In this letter, the Apostle clearly refers to the abundant sufferings we endure—sufferings he qualifies as those “of Christ in us”—so that “through Christ” our “consolation or comforting” may also abound, and all this, in the context of close human and Christian solidarity, in good and bad. Paul further reports that he was so tried, he *despaired* of being able to continue to live. He found a purpose in this: so that “*we* (a royal, or perhaps apostolic, plural that serves to include us in all this) may not place our trust in ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.” This really summarizes the whole of Pauline doctrine on the significance of suffering and weakness, and, really, the whole of the Biblical and theological faith.

I do not want to be overly sanguine about our lot on earth; I always keep in mind those who are desperately suffering, who are living in countries where there is famine and horrible warfare. Theological reflection must take them into account, and firstly, by recalling that solidarity which the Apostle has mentioned, and mentions in so many places—see especially that requisite “discernment of the Body” in 1 Cor 11:17-34 for proper “communion” with the Lord: it has been rightly interpreted as awareness of and giving heed to the needs of the suffering members of the Body of Christ. But with or without solidarity, I believe that even the most desperate sufferer, if he or she wills, can discern the loving hand of God, even if only at the last moment, when death is greeted as that reward given to Lazarus, who “automatically” was received into the bosom of Abraham for having received evils in this life. This, of course, in no way minimizes the awaited punishment of those who will be judged as described in Matt 25; their saying “Lord” there will not serve them, nor will their miracles and prophecies (cf. Matt 7:21ff.). The point I am trying to make is, that God shows himself as loving, saving and “provident” even to those whom we have most awfully neglected in this life. The Biblical judgment, both as vindication and punishment, stands.

Conclusion

“The righteous person shall live by *emunah*” (= faithfulness, steadfastness; traditionally rendered “faith”).⁵ We find our way on earth by faith, walking in relative darkness—though Christ is a great light, we do not allow him to shine as He might—and relying every bit of the way on God. In this exercise, we perfect ourselves, even as we allow God to work wonders in us. We do not know what can be attributed to “positive thinking,” to a healthy

⁵ Hab 2:4; cf. Rom 1:17: “The just one shall live by faith.”

effect on the body, to paranormal forces we can only presently suspect are "out there;" I prefer to see God behind everything, behind every event, but not in a trivial fashion, that is, it is a bit inane to think that God got you that parking space, but it is not unimportant to see even such small events in the context of God's all-pervading providential care. (The danger is to deflect attention from the really important life-events where He should be taken into account.)

Ultimately, the important thing is to develop a sense of God's presence in one's life, a presence that will be seen as caring, loving, healing and saving, and which of course will be a great help—a saving help—in life. This faith attitude will even extend to very difficult moments, trials, in which that Johannine "pruning" will be excruciatingly felt.⁶ As a Carmelite once told me, after the dark night, the light will surely come: this is the essence of the Judeo-Christian faith. The light may come even after this life, for who knows what is experienced at the moment of death? But it is the essence of our faith that it will surely come, that God will prevail if we let him. As Prof. Bruna Costacurta has said in her course on the Psalms at the Gregorian University, Israel's hopes, which began with material yearnings and went through various purifications, becoming eschatological and other-worldly, were finally fulfilled, for the Christian, in the symbol of an empty tomb. This is a thought that St. John of the Cross would be pleased with: no images or crutches to rely on, except an emptiness, which only God can fill.

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⁶ John 15:2.