

O SACRED MEMORY!

Philippians 4:4-9, Luke 22:10, Deuteronomy, 8:2

Israel set great store by the word "Remember". It occurs in the old testament so many times in so many different forms, I found it uncountable. King David even had an official "Remembrance". "Remember the covenant, remember the council, remember the anniversary, etc, etc, etc." You should set great store by your memory. It gives you your life. In a sense, your memory is your life. In the old testament what is recalled, becomes present reality and controls the will.

Only living things have memory. Rocks do not recall their volcanic past, and cannot anticipate their future. their breaking in earthquake, or their crumbling in cold and heat, or their polishing in stream beds, or their running to the sea in silt, or their dusting of the (...) wind. Rocks have no "recollection" and no "anticipation", for they have no sacred memory.

Sometimes, I suppose, we wish we could be like the rocks, have no memory; for without it, they have no anguish. They have their stone-like place; and, as a matter of fact a part of us is very much like the rocks. Biblical man was aware of his partial kinship to the rocks—"dust to dust, we are, ashes to ashes." A part of us is just on loan from nature, and nature will very, very soon resume control. We like the rocks will shortly be running to the sea in silt, and dusting the wind. "So be it".

But we have this other part to us, not shared with the rocks, this most precious, most sacred part called "memory". It is the chief characteristic of living things. It gives us our life. Therefore, we call it "holy"; and it is a mystery.

1.) There is in the first place genetic memory, the strangest memory of all. We share this memory with all that is animate, with every living cell of every living creature. Your body, for example, remembers in great precision, in exact detail an infinitely complex life chemistry, that you yourself never know, and mankind is only very slowly, like a groping child, catching on to. (This used to occur to me when I was struggling through chemistry exams in college, It used to irritate me to feel my thumping pulse, and realize that my blasted bloodstream, could recall and use more chemistry than I could ever hope to learn!) (Well, you see what I'm talking about, don't you?) While you sleep, in forgetfulness, your heart remembers, from some ancient time (...), long lost to you, how to beat.

Biblical man was well aware of this genetic memory that distinguished him from the rocks, that gave his life a strange sanctity. He knew he lived in monstrous genetic memories, far,

far beyond his own; for said the old psalmist, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made". The mere thought that I am a sort of laboratory on legs, (God's walking pharmacy shop), as miraculous as that may be, does not exactly make me jump for joy. In a way it gives me the "willies"--it's rather "spooky" that God has made my body so much smarter than I am; that while I am struggling just to remember your name, my bloodstream is easily, swiftly, smoothly, recalling infinite formulae. I am grateful, you understand, awed before this mystery, know that when the biological memory fails, I die; but I need more memories than this to want to live the life I have.

2.) In the second place, therefore, for man, there is another, a higher sort of memory that distinguishes him from his other primal cousins, and makes him, as the Bible says, "a living soul". This is our "cultural memory". It is shared by the whole race. It is the result of mankind's cumulative experience of civilization over the millenia. It too is most precious, to be most carefully preserved. It too is holy. Though we may not live by it, mankind does remember, out of long and hard experience, that creative labor is better than sloven idleness, that courage is better than cowardice, that truth is better than lies, that peace is better than war, love better than hate, friends better than enemies, kindness better than greed. These are a part of our cultural memory. They raise us above the beasts--these memories do. We forget them always to our detriment, our peril. These are to be found in the ten commandments, the (...) of Jesus.

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To watch a man or woman, a nation, a civilization, forget them, is to watch them descend to a lower life level. To forget them is a horror to behold. It is to watch what could have been a full human being, (...) with the "imago Dei", the image of God, generous and good and kind, transformed into what? The old beast again. Have you never felt that in facing some people you are facing some sort of pre-historic monster--for the creature standing there has no cultural memory, has lost it, even though he may be powerful and prominent and (...). He has lost his cultural memory--and is crude and cruel. So "O do remember".

You see? Genetic memory makes life possible. Cultural memory makes it livable. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee".

3.) There is a third sort of memory, most holy. It is not genetic memory, which makes life possible. It is not cultural memory, which makes life human. It is one's own personal memory that makes one one's self. You are your collected memories. If I only remembered your memories, I would understand you. And if you understood my memories, you would understand me.

This is one reason we have such difficulty understanding each other--for all do not know

what memories have made us what we are. If we only knew.

So tread carefully when someone you love is sensitive, or afraid, or guilty, or hostile--until you know what memories have made them so.

And then--never forget that as you live with people--you yourself are helping to make their memories--for the sake of the good God, give them some sweet and pleasant memories to look back on. You will not be with them forever; so give them the best memories that you possibly can while you can; so that when they think of kindness in years to come, they think of you. When they try to grasp faith and hope and love--it will be your face they see. Like our Lord, so live that you will not be ashamed to say to your family and friends, "Remember me". What a tragedy to so live that you must hang your head and say to those dearest to you "Try to forget me, if you can".

And never forget that you are also creating your own memories. These are the days, these are the years you are going to look back on . You are now in the process of collecting a past--make it a good one. Don't make bad memories for yourself. Choose carefully, for they will be with you always.

Some day, if you are fortunate enough to grow old, you will pass the hours reminiscing of the time gone by. It is true, as the poet put it, that only for an instant does God lend us youth, the youthful active life, with its "tall shivering trees", its "running streams", its "deep blue sky", "our hopes and dreams", "our loves", and then he withdraws it; and with hearts "just touched by frost", we are left with nothing at all, for all eternity, except our memories.

Give yourself some very sacred ones--sacred enough to go on--to hold to forever, thoughts of some kind loves, some useful labors, some pure laughters, thoughts of family, of friends, thoughts of God. For your own sake, give yourself some very special memories. You are going to need them and through it all, remember God as God remembers you. Remember the old Negro spiritual: "Oh do Lord, Oh do Lord, Oh do remember me."