

Divine Participation

By

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“Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.”

-Genesis 41:8

As we study the life of Joseph I thought it would be a good idea to discuss an element in this story that can strike a modern reader as rather strange. A well known part of Joseph’s story is that he possesses a prophetic ability to interpret dreams that allows him to ascend to the highest office in Egypt. Because we know the end of the story, we know that Joseph really was led by God, but if we take a moment to think about the story it becomes obvious just how strange this story is.

The political leader of one of the most wealthy and prosperous nations in the world calls in advisors to explain to him a dream he just had. He then takes the counsel of a random, foreign, prisoner simply because he can explain the dream to Pharaoh. But on that basis, Pharaoh allows Joseph to construct an entire economic program that upsets all tradition in Egypt and heavily taxes the population in preparation for a famine that won’t happen for another seven years with no tangible evidence that this will even happen. Also, on this same basis, Pharaoh concludes that Joseph is favored by God and therefore appoints him above all Egypt.

“So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. “You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck.”

-Genesis 41:37-42

To put this sequence of events in perspective, take the current tariff policy by the Trump administration. It isn’t my intent here to comment on the wisdom or folly of this particular policy, but instead to show that such a transformative policy is causing quite a bit of

consternation on the international stage, primarily because no one really knows that Trump's endgame is with this policy. But imagine for a second, that in the midst of all this turmoil Donald Trump gave a speech where he explained that he was implementing this policy as a response to a bizarre dream that he had in which a series of cows were eating one another. And the person responsible for suggesting this policy was actually a prisoner who was able to tell the dream to Trump and give an explanation. In the explanation he was told that America was headed for an economic disaster, seven years in the future, and the only way to avoid it was to implement this potentially disastrous tariff policy, and as a result Trump decided to make this person the Vice President of the country in order to implement this plan.

If such a thing happened, without question, Trump would be declared insane and forcibly removed from office, and Christians who believe in the truth of this biblical story would be leading the charge. What this thought experiment hopefully shows us is the wide difference between our modern mindset and the mindset of the culture that Joseph was born into.

Since we will eventually reach this story in our study through Genesis, it is not my intent now to break down this event and explain its significance to us. Instead, I want to talk about the ancient worldview that would make such a sequence of events sound rational, even to someone who wasn't Jewish. For in this more ancient mindset I truly believe we can begin to understand many of the troubling societal trends that we see around us and hopefully learn more of what it means to be salt and light in this present moment.

The Role of the Church in Culture

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

-Matthew 5:14-16

It is important to remember that when Jesus established His church, His intent was for us to be a "city on a hill". This does not mean that Christians are separated from society, but it does mean that we are supposed to build an ideal culture that reflects the glory of God in heaven in this world. This is what Jesus means when He says that we are "the salt of the earth." Salt can only act as a preservative if it comes in contact with something prone to decay. The church must be a part of the world, but we must be

careful about absorbing the mistakes and corruption of our present day. This would make us “good for nothing but to be thrown out...”

Depending on the state of the culture that we are a part of is how separated we have to be from our surrounding environment. For the early church, as well as many churches around the world, this means an almost complete separation from their surrounding environment. The culture has become so corrupt that the only way for a Christian to exist in that culture is to renounce their faith. However, over centuries in the west in particular, the church culture became the dominant culture.

While this time was far from perfect, the church can exist during times like this with minimal separation from the culture that they are a part of. But, when a culture shows significant amounts of rot and corruption, the church has to adjust to this new environment lest we get swept away in the same flood of dissipation that is consuming our world. For many centuries in the west, and particularly in America, the church has enjoyed a blissful role within society where they faced no real persecution and where the bulk of our morality was supported by society at large.

In recent decades though, the ascendancy of Christianity in American culture has begun to noticeably decline and things are shifting fairly rapidly beneath our feet. While this is a fascinating topic, I actually don't want to delve into this problem in this paper, because I think that the problems that modern society is facing are actually bigger than whether or not we are a “Christian majority” nation. In C.S. Lewis' interesting book “The Abolition of Man”, written in 1943, Lewis talks about the truly toxic nature of modern philosophy and the dehumanizing effects of modern technology.

In this book Lewis is not speaking primarily as a Christian, instead he is sounding an alarm that modern culture is so oppressive to the human person that it actually threatens to “abolish” the very nature of man from existence. As a Christian he obviously believed that Christianity should be the main belief of his society, but his book wasn't really about the beauty of Christianity, but instead it was about the incredible danger of modern society. A danger that he believed was even greater than the dangers posed by ancient pagan beliefs that Christianity supplanted.

I believe in the last couple years Christians have begun to wake up to the truly terrifying ideas that are destroying our society like gender ideology, but I truly believe that all these damaging ideas that are cropping up in our modern world are responses to something even worse, the modern destruction of meaning. And it is this destruction of meaning, more than the false ideologies of our day, that the church needs to combat within our own culture and hopefully shine a light of hope to the world around us.

Original Participation

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?”

-Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

As we can see from the above passage, modern society certainly didn't invent existential angst and a feeling of meaninglessness. However, what was once a problem only faced by a few intellectuals within a given society has become a widespread phenomenon within our current culture. Take these most recent statistics on teen suicide for an example:

“One in five high school students seriously considered attempting suicide in 2023, according to [data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). This staggering statistic corresponds with a growing rate of youth suicide in the United States, which is [one of the leading causes of death](#) in adolescents and young adults. Suicide deaths among 10- to 24-year-olds [increased by 62% from 2007 to 2021](#). Research released this summer found that suicide is rising dramatically in preteens as young as 8 years old as well, with an [8.2% annual increase from 2008 to 2022](#).”

-Evan Cornman - “Youth Suicide Is on the Rise: Yale Aims to Save Lives”

These statistics are clearly disturbing and demonstrate a terrible trend that affects all of us even if it doesn't manifest in suicidal thoughts. To put it another way, the youth of a given culture are supposed to be the most vibrant and hopeful members of their society. Their lives are laid out in front of them, they are reaching into adulthood and they have limitless potential at their fingertips. It is only in a truly corrupt and dying culture that would have this many of our youth considering suicide. And once again, the statistics on suicide, like the statistics on anxiety, depression, homelessness, drug abuse, divorce, broken families, and so on are merely symptoms of a greater problem. We can, and should, attempt to address each one of these issues, but if we don't touch the underlying problem, nothing will ultimately change.

This all leads us back to the original point of this paper, the mindset of ancient man.

“It is not correct to maintain, as is frequently done, that primitives associate occult powers, magic properties, a kind of soul or vital principle with all the objects which affect their senses or strike the imagination, and that their perceptions are surcharged with animistic beliefs. It is not a question of association. The mystic properties with which things are imbued form an integral part of the idea to the primitive who views it as a synthetic whole. It is at a later stage of social evolution that what we call a natural phenomenon tends to become the sole content of perception to the exclusion of other

elements which then assume the aspect of beliefs, and finally appear superstitions. But as long as this “dissociation” does not take place, perception remains an undifferentiated whole.”

-Levy Bruhl - “How Natives Think”

As the anthropologist Levy Bruhl points out, cultures like the one that Joseph lived in functioned off of an entirely different worldview than the one that we have as modern people, they literally did not think the way that we do. Tribal people groups are at the mercy of nature and their surroundings. The bulk of their lives consists almost entirely of survival. They spend their time gathering food and building up the tribe; they don't really have the time or the resources to ponder the nature of reality itself.

Instead of thinking *about* the world that they live in, they embody their beliefs in rituals and ceremonies. It isn't that different to the mindset of a small child. It isn't that children are unintelligent, it is that their minds haven't grasped the nature of contemplation yet, but this doesn't preclude them from some pretty phenomenal intellectual feats. A child, with no formal training, can become fluent in a language simply by being exposed to it. To contrast this, for an adult to become fluent in a language, though the adult is more intelligent than the child, it takes them intentional effort and understanding. They can't just have exposure, they actually have to think about the language in *comparison* to their native tongue.

But the truly odd thing about children is that since they didn't *learn* language the way an adult does, they also can't *explain* the language to someone else. The knowledge of the language is *embodied*, it isn't *understood*. This is exactly what the tribal mentality is. While they couldn't explain the nuanced workings of their tribal politics, economics, metaphysics, or morality, that doesn't mean that they don't have a working form of all these things. But though they work, they aren't understood, they are instead *embodied* within their culture.

But, also like a child, since this culture has never thought about these things at a deeper level, they don't recognize distinctions very well. For an adult, because we can think about things in a way that a child can't, we can quickly recognize other languages and tell the differences between languages as we learn them. Once again, a child can't really do this. At some level they recognize a difference, but they can't articulate what the difference is. This means that they perceive the world in an almost undifferentiated way.

Think for a second about the way you saw your own childhood when you were young. It doesn't really occur to a child that other children are being raised differently than they

are. They receive their surroundings as *normal* and assume uniformity in the world. It isn't until later in life that we begin to notice differences between ourselves and others. We become self-conscious and therefore we can understand those differences at a conscious level.

This type of mindset gives birth to what anthropologists like Levy Bruhl have called "participation mystique". Everything within the tribe participates with everything else. Society is seen as a collective. While different members of the society have different roles, they all function as a part of the same orientation and goal. It is similar to how the members of a team function. This participation doesn't stop at the physical, it goes all the way up to the mystical and divine. The beliefs aren't really *taught* in the way that we might think, they are experienced and embodied.

"Participation' begins by being an activity, and essentially a communal or social activity. It takes place in rites and initiation ceremonies resulting in:

"Collective states of extreme emotional intensity in which representation is as yet undifferentiated from the movements and actions which make the communion towards which it tends a reality to the group. Their participation in it is so effectively lived that it is not yet properly imagined."

-Owen Barfield - "Saving the Appearances"

These embodied rituals serve as the religious expressions of the culture. Beyond that, the mystical is not absent from the physical world. Ancient man populated their world with ghosts, gins, fairies, nymphs, elves, cyclops, and so on. They didn't see the physical world and the spiritual world, they only saw the world. That's why their stories, their myths, have the structure that they do. In their accounts the mystical and the physical are one, the hero of the story is usually a demi-god of some sort and they perform mystical feats in the physical world.

From this perspective, it hopefully helps us understand why Joseph's culture perceived dreams the way that they did. For them, the dream was not just an event in the unconscious mind, but instead it was a mystical vision that contained a physical reality. Therefore, in a world like theirs, the person who could discern the mystical was the one who could lead the physical, the one blessed and chosen by the divine.

Modern Dualism

However, as cultures develop, they reach a "dualistic" phase. This means that the culture begins to notice that things are distinct from one another. To use a simple example, as the society grows and becomes more urbanized, the people within the

society can't do the same jobs, they need specialists for their given society. And so they develop black smiths, carpenters, farmers, educators, and so on. This also differentiates the leadership. They now have military leaders, religious leaders, political leaders, economic leaders, and so on. During this dualistic phase, the traditions of the past begin to be understood. People can no longer simply practice their faith, they begin to think *about* their faith and seek higher answers. This also leads to a questioning of past traditions and social reform.

This natural progression of a culture could equally be mapped onto a developing person. Once a child reaches a certain age, they become self conscious. They understand that they are different from other people, and these differences can breed insecurities and a drive to "fit in" to a particular group. This also makes a child aware of the differences between their own home, and the home of their friends. This can make a child critical of their home and usually of their parents as they find differentiation between them and their parents.

While this phase is necessary, it is also tumultuous and creates an unstable identity. No one can figure out who they are and where they belong simply by understanding what they are not. There is a necessity for adolescents to learn how they fit into the bigger picture, they need to learn how to integrate with the greater society. This is why this phase is, thankfully, supposed to be very short lived. We transition from child to adult and learn how to integrate our identity into a greater whole, which usually takes the form of joining society in the job force. We will talk more about this integration process later, but for now let's talk about what is lost in this phase of development and by doing so we will hopefully learn more about why modern society is so oppressive to individuals living within it.

Separation

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day."

-Genesis 1:1-8

The interesting thing about this pattern is that it can also be mapped onto the development that we are shown in the first couple chapters of Genesis. God consistently creates things as a cohesive whole, and then draws out a *distinction* or a *separation* within the unity, before integrating these distinct things into the harmony of His good creation. This is the same exact way that He creates man.

“And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

-Genesis 2:18

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.”

-Genesis 2:21-22

God forms *man* as a unity, but calls this absolute unity “not good”, He then draws out a distinction in gender between male and female and then reunifies *man* in the harmonious unity of marriage. This is the pattern, unity to separation, leading to the ultimate goal, integration or synthesis. But something enters into the creation that destroys this newly found integration:

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”

-Genesis 3:1

Satan takes this synthesis and creates disunity. Up until this point Eden had been a picture of perfect unity. God walked with man in the cool of the day showing that the spiritual and the material were perfectly wedded, man and God were perfectly united, man and woman were perfectly united, even man and nature were all perfectly integrated, until Satan caused disunity:

“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman...”

-Genesis 3:15

I believe that singular word *enmity* is the perfect encapsulation of what it means to live in a fallen world. Now there is enmity between man and God, man and woman, woman and her children, man and his work, and man and nature. The unity we enjoyed in

paradise was sacrificed for personal ambition. The reason why I bring this up in our current context is that this is where we are as a culture.

We have long since moved past the mystic participation of tribal life, into the dualism of the Middle Ages, and finally into the synthesis of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. But now, in an attempt to move on, we have instead moved back. We have created “enmity” within our world that is fracturing all previous unities that we have enjoyed. There have been many books like “The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self” by Carl Trueman, “Dominion” by Tom Holland and so on that map this fracturing better than I ever could. So instead of explaining the causes of this fracturing, I will instead explain the consequences of this fracturing that will hopefully help us see a way back.

Man and God

*“Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”
-Genesis 3:9*

*“God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!”
-Friedrich Nietzsche - “The Gay Science”*

This well known statement made by the misguided, albeit brilliant, atheist philosopher pronounces this issue. Notice he doesn't say “there is no God.” He instead proclaims that “God is dead!” and, more importantly “we have killed him!” This means that Nietzsche is not talking about the existence of God but instead he is making a cultural statement that modern man has “killed” God, or to put it another way, western man has alienated themselves from the religious belief that shaped our entire society. As bad as paganism was, at least a society that grew up around a paganistic belief would be stable. What is worse when the very foundation on which a society was built would be ripped out from under the feet of the society itself.

Even though Nietzsche was an atheist, he understood how radically destructive this would be to the society he lived in and he stated that if they couldn't find a suitable replacement, the consequences would be dire. What we should pay particular attention to in this pronouncement though is the time in which Nietzsche said this. He didn't say this when atheism was the norm in Germany, far from it, instead his criticism was primarily leveled against the elite of his own society.

In other words, what had happened in Germany is that, while the average German was religious, those ruling the society had become atheists. All of the institutions had turned away from the faith that founded them and they naively believed this would have no

consequences. This was the first and greatest separation that occurred in Germany almost two hundred years ago, but is less than a hundred years old for us. And all the major modern issues that we are facing stem from this first “original sin”.

The Meaning Crisis

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

-John 1:1-5

Instead of running through the litany of societal problems that this separation has caused us in all of our major institutions, let’s instead focus on what I believe to be the biggest problem, our separation from higher meaning. When the apostle John introduces his gospel, he identifies Christ as the divine “Word” of God. While this term might have limited meaning for us, for John’s audience this term would have almost infinite meaning. The word “word” in Greek is “logos”, from which we get our modern term “logic”. For the Greek world, the most important thing in the universe was purpose or meaning. For it is only when you learn what something’s purpose is that you can find its potential as well as its abuses. I like how C.S. Lewis put this point:

“The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used. After that has been discovered the temperance reformer may decide that the corkscrew was made for a bad purpose, and the communist may think the same about the cathedral. But such questions come later. The first thing is to understand the object before you: as long as you think the corkscrew was meant for opening tins or the cathedral for entertaining tourists you can say nothing to the purpose about them.”

-C.S. Lewis - “A Preface to Paradise Lost”

If I don’t know what a corkscrew was meant to do, if I don’t know what its purpose is, I can’t begin to judge whether a corkscrew is “good” or “bad”. In the same way, if I don’t know the purpose of human life, I can’t tell what makes for a “good” life or a “bad” life, nor can I judge a human action as “good” or “bad”. When John declares that Jesus was the divine “Word”, he is declaring that knowing Christ is the center of human existence, it is this that gives us meaning, and all of western society has been built around this presupposition.

Literally everything from our school systems, to our economy, to our political structure, and so on, were all built with the express purpose of knowing God. However, not every

culture has been built on this belief, after all the Greek society that John was writing to had a very different answer for what the “logos” of life was. However, while there is disagreement about what the “logos” is, every society has to structure itself around this fundamental question. Even the ancient societies that I have mentioned, although they couldn’t articulate what their “logos” was, they certainly had one that was lived out and embodied in their various rituals and ceremonies. So while societies can disagree about the nature of the “logos” no society can function without an answer to that fundamental question.

“What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.”

-Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

It turns out that what we need more than anything is not prosperity, pleasure, security, or prestige, but meaning. God has placed “eternity in” our hearts and therefore no amount of finite goods can ever satisfy the longing of our hearts. We need something transcendent and perfect that allows for us to find meaning in everything else that we do.

I don’t believe anyone understood this better than the psychologist Viktor Frankl. Frankl survived multiple concentration camps in the midst of the Holocaust and was deeply impacted by his observations of people striving to survive in the midst of hell on earth. He then contrasted this with people in the west, living in luxury and prosperity struggling with depression and anxiety, and even committing suicide. At the end of all of his inquiry, he came away with this simple, yet profound, truth:

“Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose.”

-Viktor E. Frankl

The prime need of the human soul is in fact meaning, and not just transient or temporary meaning, but divine and eternal meaning. It is this very meaning that was woven into all of our original institutions through Christianity. To put it more simply, when Christianity was more prominent in the west, all of these institutions believed that they existed not as a secular institution apart from the church, but as institutions of worship for the church.

That point might sound strange to us today, but that is because we live in this age of separation. Back when our society was functioning as a form of higher participation, there was no question that all things exist for the glorification of God, and therefore everything that benefited society was in fact an act of worship towards God.

However, without this higher connectivity, we have taken all the facets of our lives and we have labeled them as “secular” or having nothing to do with God. We really think that our time at church is our religious life, and all our time outside of church is our secular life, this has led to a lack of meaning, as well as a fragmented identity.

As stated before, in a world of participation, the identity is unified and oriented towards the divine. But in a world of separation, nothing is unified and exists in separate spheres. This is why the most popular genre of movie right now are superhero films. Back in the day the “superhero” genre existed, but it was in the format of myth or folktales, for instance, Hercules or Beowulf. The main difference between our modern superhero stories and the ancient myths or folklore is this element of separated identity. The heroes in these movies have a “secret identity” that is separate from their heroic identity, and the majority of hero movies are about the balance of these two identities.

In ancient myth, this wasn't the case. The “super hero” is always super. They never don a mask and fight crime, they are always in their powers and their gifts. But in our culture, we feel this separation acutely and so we create art that reflects that division. Another popular show that reflects this is “Severance”. In this show, a new procedure is designed that “severs” someone's consciousness and allows them to have a “work self” and a “home self”.

All of these shows and movies point to the same problem. A separated identity struggles to find meaning, we have to have an integrated self in order to enjoy the benefits of a “participation” mindset. Meaning that if you go to work and have a “work self” and then you go home and have a “home self” and then you go to church and have a “church self”, none of these identities are integrated and therefore they become harder and harder to develop meaning from within them.

What Frankl witnessed in the concentration camps was that the people who were living for a higher purpose, who were actually able to integrate their identities fully and live for something above themselves, were the ones who could find meaning even in a concentration camp. Those who couldn't do that, despaired of life and didn't make it. In

the modern world, though we don't live in the dire circumstances of Frankl, we have a similar dilemma.

Ritual and Ceremony

In a tribal community, everything participates with everything else seamlessly. It isn't a challenge to see how your identity is integrated because everything functions together. Whether you are gathering food, raising children, or fighting enemies, you can immediately see the contribution that you are making to the tribe. You don't feel trivial or neglected because you know that you are necessary to the well-being of those around you. This wasn't just understood though, it was ritualized.

Virtually every facet of the tribe contained a ritual or a ceremony that enabled the people to embody their participation. Even something as simple as butchering meat had a ceremony attached to it. This is one of the reasons why books like Leviticus are so hard for the modern reader. Take this one passage as an example:

'When his offering is a sacrifice of a peace offering, if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. 'And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. 'Then he shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire to the LORD. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, 'the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; 'and Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice, which is on the wood that is on the fire, as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.'

-Leviticus 3:1-5

It is important to note here that the sacrifice detailed above was not an offering for sin, the reality was that, in the ancient world, ritual sacrifice was the common way to butcher animals. This is why in Romans 14 Paul makes this strange statement:

"It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."

-Romans 14:21

Why would eating meat be considered a sin? Because in the ancient world meat was only butchered in ritualistic sacrifice, and since the early church were not allowed to use the temple in Jerusalem, they could only buy meat at pagan temples. The reality was, that everything in the ancient world was ritualized because in the rituals were a

conscientious participation with the divine. It was a constant reminder that everything that you do has cosmic implications. That is another thing that modern man doesn't understand. We believe that the ancient ceremonies and rituals have too much pomp and circumstance, that it must be because ancient man was too proud or legalistic. I love how C.S. Lewis addresses this criticism:

“Above all, you must be rid of the hideous idea, fruit of a widespread inferiority complex, that pomp, on the proper occasions, has any connection with vanity or self-conceit. A celebrant approaching the altar, a princess led out by a king to dance a minuet, a general officer on a ceremonial parade, a major-domo preceding the boar's head at a Christmas festal these wear unusual clothes and move with calculated dignity. This does not mean that they are vain, but that they are obedient; they are obeying the hoc age which presides over every solemnity. The modern habit of doing ceremonial things unceremoniously is no proof of humility; rather it proves the offender's inability to forget himself in the rite, and his readiness to spoil for every one else the proper pleasure of ritual.”

-C.S. Lewis - “A Preface to Paradise Lost”

The elaborate and intentional ceremony of the past was not the result of narcissism, but the exact opposite. In this original participation mindset, ceremony was a way of offering up to the highest every element of ourselves. It wasn't a means of self-expression, but obedience to the divine. As such, the elaborate ceremonies of the Old Testament didn't make the Jews arrogant, nor were they a bad thing in themselves. We must not think that Christ came to abolish ritual, but instead to explain the meaning behind the rituals:

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

-Colossians 2:16-17

It is our modern lack of ceremony that is the problem. We think that because Christ has explained the ritual that we can dismiss them. On the contrary, we know that the apostles continued to go to the temple in the book of Acts, and not just to share their faith. They still participated in the Jewish rituals, until they were thrown out of the temple. And the early church developed a plethora of new rituals to celebrate and embody their own faith. The difference is that as the church we are not bound to particular ceremonies like the Jews were, and we also understand that whatever rituals we perform, be it baptism, communion, worship services, and so on, these are expressions of the substance of our faith, Christ, and not the foundation of our faith.

But in the modern world, as we have gotten rid of ceremony and ritual, we have found the meaning crisis deepen. These rituals are what united us to our greater community and helped us embody the truth that all of our actions participate with God.

I want to be careful here, I am not saying that the lack of ritual is what has *caused* our present state of separation, I have already mentioned the higher reason for that, but I am saying that the lack of ceremony is a *product* of our current culture. In other words, we are already a society that is fragmented, so why should it surprise us that we have frighteningly few rituals that unite us together as a culture? However, we continue to perform rituals, but they just aren't communal.

For instance, the most pomp that we see in a modern ritual is probably marriage. The ceremony has become more and more elaborate as the average cost for a modern marriage is around 33,000 dollars, which is an extravagantly massive amount of money for a single ceremony. However, with these prices soaring, weddings have become less communal. Couples invite tons of people, many of which they don't even know and are certainly not a part of their daily community. The ancient view of ceremony was that it allowed for higher levels of integration, but the religious element of the ceremony is cut almost to nothing, the reception is far more extravagant, and the people invited are not a part of the normal community of the married couple.

To put this another way, the ancient ceremonies were a celebration of the act itself with the community there to bear witness and to take part in the oaths that were established through the ritual. So an ancient person didn't celebrate the couple, they celebrated marriage itself. They were there to witness the cosmic significance of the rite and, considering that they were already close to the couple, to commit themselves to helping the couple maintain and strengthen their marriage. Now the ceremony is not about the thing being symbolized, but about the people themselves. This is why we have "pride" parades and holidays celebrating individual people and not the culture as a whole.

Our ability to use the physical to "see" the spiritual is gone. We instead only see the physical and thus have lost all means of celebrating the cosmic.

"It's about why—for many people—war feels better than peace and hardship can turn out to be a great blessing and disasters are sometimes remembered more fondly than weddings or tropical vacations. Humans don't mind hardship, in fact they thrive on it;

what they mind is not feeling necessary. Modern society has perfected the art of making people not feel necessary.”

-Sebastian Junger “Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging”

Man and Nature

Man and Woman

Genesis 3, original participation and the separation and enmity caused by Satan, and synthesis that is accomplished through Christ. Marriage and separation.

“Don't aim at success. The more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to

see that in the long-run—in the long-run, I say!—success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think about it”

-Viktor E. Frankl - “Man’s Search for Meaning”

“In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.”

-Viktor E. Frankl - “Man’s Search for Meaning”

“For instance, in a serious mood it would never occur to us to take the following events as a sequence: in the morning a bird flies into your room, an hour later you witness an accident in the street, in the afternoon a relative dies, in the evening your cook drops the soup tureen, and, on coming home late at night, you find that you have lost your key. Primitive man would not have overlooked a single item in this chain of events, for every new link would have answered to his expectations. And he is right—he is much more nearly right than we are willing to admit. His anxious expectations are justified and serve a purpose. Such a day, he holds, is ill-omened, and on it nothing should be undertaken. In our world this would be reprehensible superstition, but in the world of primitive man it is highly appropriate shrewdness. In that world man is far more exposed to accidents than we in our protected and well-regulated existence. When you are in the wilderness you dare not take too many chances. The European soon comes to appreciate this.”

Jung, Carl Gustav . Modern Man in Search of a Soul (p. 140). (Function). Kindle Edition.