

MARS HILL GRADUATE SCHOOL

FRIDAY, SATURDAY, SUNDAY: THE PARTICULARITY OF THE TRIDUUM
AND ITS RHYTHM FOR HUMANITY

AN INTEGRATIVE PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY PROGRAM
IN PARTIAL COMPLETION OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF DIVINITY

BY JOSHUA LONGBRAKE

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

MARCH, 2010

For Paul, Jay, Jeff, Ben & Phil

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
PART I. GOOD FRIDAY	3
PART II. HOLY SATURDAY	7
PART III. EASTER SUNDAY	11
PART IV. RHYTHMS FOR TODAY	13
CONCLUSION	14
BIBLIOGRAPHY	15

ABSTRACT

In much of Protestantism, Good Friday and Holy Saturday have either been ignored or merely viewed as lead-ins to Easter Sunday, seen through a lens of resurrection. This integrative project argues that each day of the Triduum holds its own significant meaning and must be viewed both as individual days and as a whole event. Part I examines Good Friday as a day of death. Part II examines Holy Saturday as a day of grief where God is in the grave. Part III examines Easter Sunday as a day of resurrection and of new life. Lastly, Part IV examines the entire rhythm of death, grief, and new life, both in the context of the first century and in the twenty-first century. As a two-part project, this paper functions as support for a larger theological work wherein the themes of death, grief, and new life are expressed through the medium of photography.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine reading a novel, but not a standard novel with a typical narrative structure. In this novel, the final chapter, the end of the story, comes at the beginning. The reader receives the conclusion immediately, before ever glancing at the beginning or middle of the story. With knowledge of how the story ends, the reader reads differently and interacts with the text in ways that drastically affect how the story plays out, even though words themselves remain unchanged.

Similarly, in a play, Act III follows Act II, which follows Act I. Placing Act III before Act I changes the play, even though the scenes in Act I are not altered nor are the scenes in Acts II or III. Or imagine that not only has Act III been written as the beginning, but what if Act II is left out entirely? If that is the case then not only do we have an altered narrative, but more importantly, an incomplete narrative.

The Triduum of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday as a singular narrative often falls victim to the above scenarios. Holy Saturday is given little to no attention at all in the gospels or throughout the history of Protestantism.¹ Readers of the story of the Messiah, his life incarnate, death, day in the grave, and resurrection, approach the plot with foreknowledge of Easter Sunday, thus unknowingly (and unintentionally) stripping each day of the Triduum of its own unique power. Alan Lewis

¹ Alan Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 34. Alan Lewis gives a good bit of attention to this, saying, "Even the New Testament, it seems, does not always pause to allow the finality of the cross to sink in before moving on to the Easter reversal of Christ's deadly and disastrous fate. Indeed, the Gospel of John, with whose telling of the narrative we began, and whom we saw passing over the interval between the evening of Jesus' burial and the morning of Mary's visit with the utmost brevity, reinterprets the finality of the cross and gives it a new, 'resurrection' meaning. For when, at death, Jesus cries out 'it is finished' (Jn. 19:30), John unquestionably understands that not as a cry of defeat and termination, but as a victorious affirmation of what has been done, accomplished, and achieved."

says, “Inevitably, and properly, this knowledge of the end drastically reinterprets everything that has gone before in the story of those days. Christian faith is not that Jesus was crucified, but that Christ crucified was raised; and that throws wholly new light on what his death meant in the first place.”²

To fully embrace the Triduum narrative is to see its mystical uniqueness as well as find application of its intrinsic rhythm in our personal lives. In Friday exists death. Saturday holds deep grief, emptiness, and failure. Sunday is a day of imagination; it is a day of resurrection and hope, which is the capacity to imagine otherwise.³ Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Holy Week happened once in history, but they provide a pattern for human existence. The resurrection of Christ was a one-time event and it is a daily event. This paper will argue that proper attention be given to each day of the Triduum, in sequence, and that in this rhythm we engage our own stories of life, death, and resurrection.

² Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 32.

³ Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, “Ambiguous Vision: Hope, Imagination and Rhetoric of the Unsayable” in *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 72.

GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday is both aptly and ironically named. Yes, it is *good*, because through the cross salvation came to all through Jesus Christ. The word *good*, in this case, doesn't quite do justice to the act. Likewise, the irony exists in that the Messiah died a tragic death, the death of all deaths⁴, and yet it is now called *good* because of the knowledge of the resurrection and, no less important, the work that was done on the cross by Christ on our behalf. Still, it is doubtful that any of Jesus' followers or disciples would have called Friday *good* on Saturday. Contextually, Good Friday is actually the last day, the end of the story of Jesus.⁵ It is called the first day of the Triduum only because we know what follows: resurrection comes on Sunday. But if the crucifixion is looked at solely through the lens of the resurrection then it loses some of its significance and power. Does the resurrection of Christ restrict us from viewing the cross as it was before Easter Sunday?⁶ If we say it does not, then we must view the cross through two different lenses at the same time, both with knowledge of the resurrection and as "one whose ending is discovered only as it happens."⁷

⁴ Douglas Davies, *The Theology of Death* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2008), 23. Douglas Davies does a lot of work around death, what it meant for Christ and what it means for us. He says, in regards to Jesus dying the 'death of all deaths', "Doubtless, there have been deaths involving more pain, much longer suffering, even greater indignity than even crucifixion, but that is not the point. The death of Jesus stands as the death of all deaths; it is the prime symbol of all deaths, totally participating in what it represents."

⁵ Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 31

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*

To attempt to view the cross apart from the resurrection, it is helpful to look at how various cultures treat death in the 21st century. Jewish and Islamic traditions bury their dead rapidly, within a 24 hour period. Hindus and Sikhs cremate their deceased also within 24 hours.⁸ In the West there is a similar rush to bury, but it is interrupted by a period of time wherein there is an attempt to preserve those who have died using cosmetics, even just for a few days, making them appear as if they were filled with life. While we try to preserve the look of life in the body, there is still a rush to bury, not only for the sake of the decomposing body, but also for the sake of those who have survived and must face the absence.

There is a similar rush to get from the cross to the resurrection. The Protestant church barely pauses for Good Friday, instead moving quickly over the narrative of the cross in order to lift up the seemingly more important narrative of the resurrection.⁹ When we rush to the resurrection and, with subtlety, glance past the cross to gaze upon the empty grave, not only do we avoid the fact that at that moment God is dead¹⁰, but we also lose the contrast to the power of the resurrection.

Jürgen Moltmann, in his book *The Crucified God*, speaks to the centrality of the cross to Christian theology, as opposed to the cross & *the resurrection*. He says,

The death of Jesus on the cross is the *centre* of all Christian theology. It is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth. All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point on the crucified Christ. All

⁸ Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 33.

⁹ Marcus J. Borg, John Dominic Crossan, "Collision Course: Jesus' Final Week" in *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 2006), 27.

¹⁰ For more on the phrase "the death of God" and its differentiation from "death in God", see Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, page 207.

Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ. The multiplicity of the New Testament comes together in the event of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus and flows out again from it. It is one event and one person. The addition of ‘cross and resurrection’ represents only the inevitable temporality which is a part of the language; it is not a sequence of facts. For cross and resurrection are not facts on the same level; the first expression denotes a historical happening to Jesus, the second an eschatological event. Thus the centre is occupied not by ‘cross and resurrection’, but by *the resurrection of the crucified Christ*, which qualifies his death as something that has happened for us, and *the cross of the risen Christ*, which reveals and makes accessible to those who are dying his resurrection from the dead.¹¹

Moltmann makes a point to separate the events within the event, giving each its significance, though his claim that the cross is the center of Christian theology is misleading. The resurrection is the center of Christian theology, and it is the resurrection itself that makes the cross-resurrection event an eschatological event.¹² If there is no resurrection then death wins and there is no redemption.

The cross of Christ and the resurrection of Christ must remain as separate events, each maintaining their own significance. When we observe Good Friday for what it is, apart from Saturday and Sunday, we get a glimpse into the absurdity of the death of God. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 says that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, *was buried*, and was raised again on the third day. As Paul saw it, the resurrection was not permitted to intrude on the cross, instantaneously converting death to life, still less to trespass death’s boundaries and therefore indentify the cross with glory. Rather, death is given its own time and space, in emptiness and starkness.¹³

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974), 204.

¹² The difference between the cross being central and the resurrection being central was pointed out to me by Dr. Jo-Ann Badley.

¹³ Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 37.

The cross, as it stands alone, confronts us with death and hopelessness. An abandoned Christ, betrayed and alone, hangs on a cross, and in the final moments, God asks God *Why have you betrayed me?*¹⁴ Death, however, is not the end of the story, but in order for death to move to life, it must first move through the empty space of grief in Holy Saturday.

¹⁴ This is documented only in Matthew and Mark and not in Luke, John, or the writings of Paul. It appears that the authors themselves placed significance on varying parts of the narrative, leaving out some parts of the story and including others.

HOLY SATURDAY

Holy Saturday has traditionally been a day of grief and mourning in high-church communities, but in low-church Protestantism the Triduum has all but lost one of its key components. It is difficult for Christians to sit in the reality of the cross, to let death exist in its fullness. It is far more difficult to grieve that loss, because true grief is entered into only when one engages the reality of death. Thus, Holy Saturday has been lost in those communities. Is it possible that evangelicalism doesn't pay attention to grieving and emptiness because it is difficult to admit to the reality of death? What is wanted is resurrection, even if we must skip days to get there.

The common ignoring of Holy Saturday is subtle. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Meditations on the Cross*, writes, "In Jesus Christ we believe in the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected God. In the incarnation we recognize God's love for God's creation, in the crucifixion God's judgment over all flesh, and in the resurrection God's will to the new world. Nothing would be more distorted than to tear these three pieces apart."¹⁵ What Bonhoeffer ignores is the day of absence, Holy Saturday, the day of emptiness and grief. The Triduum becomes distorted when an entire day is glazed over or skipped entirely, and yet this distortion is common.

But, as is the case with Good Friday, Holy Saturday must be not only acknowledged but also addressed as its own significant member of the Triduum, and like Good Friday, we must examine it sequentially. The Sabbath when Christ was in the grave

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditations on the Cross*, ed. Manfred Weber, trans. by Douglas W. Stott (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996), 76.

was not simply a day in-between death and resurrection; it was not a day of waiting.¹⁶ For Jesus' friends and companions, there was no light on the horizon. Jesus was dead. He did not take himself off of the cross. He did not fight back. He lost. The hours of Holy Saturday were empty, anonymous hours.¹⁷

Von Balthasar is quite adamant that readers should be aware of the hazards of bringing premature meaning to Holy Saturday based on the knowledge that Easter is coming:

The danger is very real that we, as spectators of a drama beyond our powers of comprehension, will simply wait until the scene changes... The apostles wait in the emptiness, or at least in the non-comprehension that there is a Resurrection and what it can be. The Magdalene can only seek the one she loves – naturally, as a dead man – at the hollow tomb, weeping from vacant eyes, groping after him with empty words. Filmed over with an infinite weariness unto death, no stirring of a living, hoping faith is to be found... If one asks about the 'work' of Christ in Hades... we must guard against that theological busyness and religious impatience which insist on anticipating the moment of fruiting of the eternal redemption through the temporal passion – on dragging forward that moment from Easter to Holy Saturday.¹⁸

Saturday was not a day of waiting for Jesus' followers because there was nothing to wait for. Everything in which they put their hope, the coming Messiah and the restoration of Israel as a kingdom of dominance, died on a cross. God died on a cross. It was more than simply a day of grief; it was a day of failure. Jesus hung on the cross, alone, and then was buried in a cold, dark tomb. To every onlooker, Jesus of Nazareth and his "brand of

¹⁶ Sabbaths, in and of themselves outside of the Triduum, are not days of waiting. To keep the Sabbath well is to prepare beforehand, work hard during the week, and then rest and play. To keep the Sabbath does not mean to merely wait. It is an active process.

¹⁷ Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 31.

¹⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1990), 50-51, 179.

nonresistance” had failed.¹⁹ Had he been deceiving everyone around him? Was he himself deceived? Was his faith in his father found wanting? The narrative forces us to ask these questions when Saturday is viewed as its own individual day.

Holy Saturday is a day to grieve abandonment. The disciples abandoned Jesus. Jesus abandoned his followers. God the Father abandoned Christ the Son. These are the things we are left to face the day after Calvary. With no insight into what is to come on the next morning, it becomes a hopeless Sabbath, a day of atheism. The word made flesh has fallen silent.

When we enter into times of grief, when we have the space to emotionally engage the deaths that have happened, the same questions arise that must have been present at Calvary. How are we to trust this all-loving God if God allowed such torture and pain? If Christ is now lying in a grave, rejected and betrayed by God, what reason does the world have to believe that even on the best of days God is with us, compassionate and caring for the lonely, fighting injustice and comforting those in pain? What hope is there in tomorrow? Where is hope if God is in the grave?

Observing Holy Saturday in its true context, with no glimpse of Easter, leaves us with questions, space, silence, anger and tears. Donald MacKinnon says that if we are to genuinely hear the gospel story as it unfolds, we must do everything we can to postpone all triumphal, redemptive language and ideas which would alter the original, void, accusatory final verdict of the second day. On Holy Saturday Jesus is not a hero. He has

¹⁹ Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 50.

died and left, having been put on trial, found guilty, and killed by the religious leaders and the government, and his cause died with him.²⁰

On Holy Saturday there is no rush to redemption because there is no foreseeable redemption. Friday and Saturday are the darkest days. The bread which was sweet has now become harsh. The cup was light but now is heavy, full of despair. And on Holy Saturday, why even partake of the bread and the cup? Is it foolishness? On the day after Calvary, yes, it would have been foolish to eat the bread and drink the wine. There was no resurrection to complete the Triduum. But today, as days of grief and emptiness occur, it is on these days that the bread is harsh and the cup is heavy, if we are even able to partake of them in faith.

Do the stories of Friday and Saturday hold significance without Sunday? No. Without resurrection then they hold no significance individually, because if they did then death would have been the end of the story, and *death is not the end of the story*. But, simply because Friday and Saturday do not hold meaning without resurrection does not mean that they do not hold meaning as their own individual days. Likewise, Sunday holds no significance without Friday and Saturday. To have resurrection we must have both death and grief. The three are both separable and inseparable.

²⁰ D.M. MacKinnon, *Creating, Christ, and Culture* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1976) 103.

EASTER SUNDAY

If meaninglessness was (seemingly) the essences of Friday and Saturday, then meaning is truly birthed on Sunday, the day of resurrection. Where failure loomed and hopelessness abounded, triumph now reigns. The death and grief that came out of Friday and Saturday make the life, redemption, and restoration of Easter Sunday all the more poignant and rich. The resurrection of Christ is not simply a triumph over death, where the inanimate became animated. Far more, it is the break of a perpetual cycle, a conquering of evil. Lewis says that, “God’s indignant, powerful resistance to the evil which destroys humanity, and to the evil by which humanity destroys itself, has secured a decisive victory on Easter morning by giving new life to someone who had tasted the last, most hellish drops of human misery and demonic evil.”²¹

The cycle that existed was this: death was always the victor. Our lives eventually cease to be and we leave everything behind. Death wins. This is why the resurrection of Christ, Israel’s Messiah, is so striking and so combative to the prevailing structures. Death, in the context of 1st century Israel, was not just a singular event in which one’s life ended. It was also a metaphor of general decay. Everything that is, that exists, is continually breaking down. Metals rust. Bodies decompose. Plants die in the winter. Thus the resurrection of Jesus is, like no other singular event in his life, a breaking of the orderliness. It breaks the cycles of sin and death.²²

Resurrection, then and now, was not about a state of being or a place. It has always been about a *person*. Resurrection today, Easter playing itself out in our lives, is

²¹ Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 65.

²² Bauckham and Hart, “Ambiguous Vision: Hope, Imagination and Rhetoric of the Unsayable” in *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*, 103.

not getting to some place after we die. It is not a final state of being or an eschatological locality outside of here and now. Rather, resurrection takes place here on earth, just as Jesus was resurrected and stayed here, with us. Being a people of the resurrection is being a people of the here and now. We break our bodies and pour out our blood for others, and in our giving we are renewed. The cycle that was in Jesus is the cycle that is in us.

Matthew's gospel illustrates this in its beginning and conclusion. In chapter 1:22-23, the apostle wrote, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, God with us.'" Similarly, at the end of the gospel, the final words of Jesus are "and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, NIV). Matthew does not end with the ascension, but leaves Christ here, with us, just as he began with Immanuel.

How are we to live into the resurrection today? Common assumptions amongst Evangelicals are that resurrection means some sort of ascension into heaven after we die.²³ But if this is the case, then what are we doing here? What is the point? Much more than the future, the resurrection is about the present. As followers of the resurrected Christ, we are a resurrected people, a people of today.

²³ The *Left Behind* series written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins tells a fictitious narrative that gives an account of a fairly traditional Evangelical eschatology. This is most definitely not the only place to read about that particular theology, but it is widely read and therefore, assumedly, widely held.

RHYTHMS FOR TODAY

The rhythm of the Triduum is both singularly unique and also applicable for today, although Alan Lewis says that it is dangerous to assume that it might be a regular occurrence.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the gospel story, that the Jesus whom Jerusalem murdered God raised from the dead, is the well-intentioned effort of preachers and theologians to make these scandalous, mysterious happenings comprehensible by suggesting that they mirror the familiar. In particular, illuminating analogies are frequently adduced from the phenomenon of the cyclic: the rhythms of sleep and waking, death and birth, which we experience night and morning and observe through all of nature's seasons, as well as in our own passages from infancy to parenthood to death. Above all, the Easter victory over death is domesticated as the supreme instance of *generic* immortality – the inherent capacity of human beings, or more usually of the human soul or spirit, to survive the grave and achieve eternal unity with our transcendent source. All these attempts to treat the events of Good Friday to Easter Day as particularizing a familiar universal, either anthropological or cosmological, disregard the very narrative which presents them as *history* – as new, unique happenings, involving a particular, unsubstitutable person at an unrepeatably point in time and space.²⁴

But if this metanarrative does not mirror the familiar, then what are we to do with it? Is it simply an *event* of great significance to which we cannot relate? Does it affect us without our choice or without our participation? I disagree with Lewis because I believe that the Triduum can be both particular and universal at the same time. It is completely other, not relatable, in the fact that God died, God was buried, and God was resurrected from the grave, both mystically human and God at the same time. It is its own event like no other, and that full event, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, is the event that redeems the world.

²⁴ Lewis, *Between Cross & Resurrection*, 59-60.

But mystically and miraculously, the Triduum is relatable. The rhythm shows up in very human ways in the day to day. We go through seasons of life, death, grief, and resurrection as individuals. We experience loss, we experience grief, and we experience hope and new life. But if we make it relatable simply by placing it in the categories of life after death or eternal locality then I believe we strip it of its power for us as a people that believe that the kingdom is now. Death, grief, and new life play out here, right now, in our midst. We experience these rhythms as we live, not when we die.

I believe in and have experienced the Triduum. I believe that Jesus was fully human and fully God. I believe in his death, his day in the grave, and his resurrection as historical and cosmic events. I believe in the particularity of these events, that they are uniquely of God. I can say that I have experienced these events because I have known death, grief, and new life, and the only reason I can know them in that rhythm is because God knows them, has lived them, and has made them available to me. I have felt the sting of death as close as a mother to a son. Friday has been a reality. I have grieved and mourned, become angry at times, felt abandonment, and raised my fist to God in confusion and rage. Saturday has been a reality. But death is not the end of the story.

I have experienced the resurrection. I have felt it through the faces of others. My community has held me, comforted me, and has allowed me to truly feel every emotion without guilt or accusation. Those friends have been kindness and love, walking with me and showing me that the Triduum happened and continues to happen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bauckham, Richard and Trevor Hart. "Ambiguous Vision: Hope, Imagination and Rhetoric of the Unsayable" in *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium*, 72. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Meditations on the Cross*, edited by Manfred Weber, translated by Douglas W. Stott. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996.
- Borg, Marcus J. and John Dominic Crossan. "Collision Course: Jesus' Final Week" in *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach about Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem*, 27. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 2006.
- Davies, Douglas. *The Theology of Death*. New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2008.
- Lewis, Allen. *Between Cross & Resurrection*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001.
- MacKinnon, D. M. *Creating, Christ, and Culture*. Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1976.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974.
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Mysterium Paschale*. New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1990.