



November 2021

Dear listener,

Every year, I sit down to write a letter to encourage our listeners to make a year-end donation to support our work. I have always violated the conventional practices for such letters. The fund-raising consultants prescribe “skimmable” paragraphs, with many sentences beginning with the pronoun “you.” The letters are to be written so any self-absorbed 8th-grader could easily get through them.

My alternative strategy has always been to present in these letters something like a case in point of what readers are being asked to support. **MARS HILL AUDIO** produces programs that are unashamedly intellectually stimulating, so I don’t feel right addressing our listeners as if they hadn’t finished high school. The need to encourage support for our work is no excuse to abandon the manner and manners of speech evident *within* the work.

These letters are not just *about* the mission of our organization; they are *a part of* the mission. They are an occasion to remind our listeners that the challenges Christians face in modern societies require (among other things) more extensive theological resources than most of us have acquired or maintained.

Since these letters arrive near Christmas, I have often incorporated theological themes drawn from the events commemorated in this season, especially the Incarnation. Modernity has encouraged a tendency to disparage the meaningfulness of the body, so the reality of the Word made flesh — and humble, weak flesh at that — is a rebuke to the modern mentality.

But before Christmas, there is the season of Advent, four weeks in which the attention of believers is drawn to other theological emphases. While other feasts and seasons in the Church calendar *commemorate* events in the past of redemptive history, Advent *anticipates* the Great Event of the world’s story. Advent is a rebuke to therapeutic and moralistic religion, in which timeless abstractions and values are preserved. Christian faith is *time-ful*. It possesses a historical consciousness, an awareness that all that has happened, is happening, and will happen leads to a great and wonderful denouement, a final transformation in which the effects of our sin are overturned and God’s promises are fulfilled.

In an essay titled “The Great Transformation,” Robert W. Jenson wrote: “What God creates is not a timeless cosmos, which thereafter acquires a history. What God creates is a history, which is a creation, a whole, because it is brought to a completion. . . . [T]here is a completion, and one that does not just start everything up again. That is, there is what theology has called an ‘eschaton.’”

The prospect of that completion is celebrated throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. The whole earth is to be glad — even the trees should rejoice — since the Lord “cometh to judge the earth and with righteousness to judge the world, and the people with his truth” (Psalm 96).

How can this Last Judgment be an occasion of joy? Unfortunately, we tend to think of the Last Judgment *only* as an act of sentencing. But Jenson warned us to remember that, “In Scripture, judgment is intervention to restore righteousness, that is, to set the community right. . . . The primary reality of what we may await is the establishing of universal and perfect justice, which on the biblical understanding of justice is the same as the establishing of universal and perfect love.” That love is the end for which we — and all things — were created, an end which can only be realized by union with the One who is Love, the One who has come in the flesh and will come again in glory.

There have been hundreds of cartoons (most famously in *The New Yorker*) featuring a bearded, haunted man in a prophet’s toga, carrying a placard reading “The End is near.” The warning is treated within the cartoon (and by its readers) as absurd, if not insane. And insofar as The End imagined is regarded simply as a Cosmic Termination and a Final Sentencing, Christians should recognize the hollowness of such warnings. But we should also be alive with the conviction that the prospect of The End is both real and much more consequential. Seas and fields and (most of all) his people sing in anticipation.

Perhaps modern societies have no sense of a shared end for human beings — a *telos* established within our nature — in part because the Church has neglected to announce confidently to her neighbors the joyful implications of The End. More harmful than an alleged “war against Christmas” is the unilateral failure to share with our neighbors the full meaning of Advent. The End *is* near — the Kingdom of God is at hand — and that’s a superlative reason for hope.

As many **MARS HILL AUDIO** interviews have discussed, modern culture is the result of bad or inadequate theology. So we need to spend less time worrying about how to market our message and more time reflecting on its neglected aspects and consequences. (Reading C. S. Lewis’s essay “The World’s Last Night” alerted me to the logic of modern society’s aversion to belief in the Second Coming.) I hope you will forgive my failure to observe the niceties of conventional fund-raising letters and consider making a generous gift in support of our rather unconventional effort to nurture such reflection. And I hope our efforts serve to encourage you, as we see the Day drawing near.

With gratitude and Advent anticipation,



Ken Myers
Host and Producer