



November 2023

Dear listener,

In *The Two Cities*, Andrew Willard Jones writes: “The Incarnation is the center of all history. Everything that happened before the Incarnation was leading up to it, and everything that has happened since can only be understood through it. The Incarnation is what history is about.”

Since this is true, then the birth celebrated at Christmas is a *definitive and universal* event, not an *illustrative and sectarian* one. The Incarnation is not an idea or a metaphor — one instance of a theme found in all religions — but a decisive, transformative fact. The presence of God in a humble stable is not a case in point of some larger and more general (and more vague) “religious truth.” In one of his early books, Joseph Ratzinger wrote: “Christ is not the cultic deity of some private religious association, but the true imperator of all the world.” By using a term from the history of the Roman political setting in which Jesus was born, Ratzinger reminds us that the Nativity is not situated in some parallel “religious” history, a time-line that might be recognized by some but safely ignored by all others.

The cosmic scope of the Incarnation is signaled by the one Gospel that doesn’t narrate the story of the Nativity. When Jesus appears in St. John’s narrative, it is as the eternal *Logos*. That Greek word is translated as “Word” in English, which suggests that Christ is the *declaration* of God, a *verbal* event. But *Logos* has a much more extensive range of referents. In a lecture on the Platonic tradition, Peter Kreeft explained that there are at least three layers of meaning vibrating in that word, layers he designates as metaphysical, psychological, and linguistic.

Logos means, first of all, realness, authenticity, truth, intelligibility, meaning, essence, form, order, structure, purpose, point, relationship, unity, principal, or universal. . . . It means also, in the second place, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, sagacity, intelligence, thought, explanation, reason, or logic: the human psychological internalization of the first *Logos*, the metaphysical *Logos*. Finally it also means word or words: language, speech, communication, revelation, expression, manifestation, argument, discourse, testimony, witness, or explanation. *Logos* #3 is a mind’s externalization of *Logos* #2, as *Logos* #2 is a mind’s internalization of *Logos* #1.

The claim of Jesus to be the way, truth, and life is not thus an optional “religious” perspective. The cosmic consequences of the birth of this baby in Bethlehem should be obvious from the declaration in the Gospel of John that *all* things were made through him, and that in him was life, and the life was the light of men. There would simply be no history — no world to have a history — apart from the *Logos*. So when — *in history* — the *Logos* became flesh, it is much more than the arrival of a great religious teacher or spiritual guide.

Since we began operation, the mission of Mars Hill Audio has always been “to produce creative audio resources that encourage Christians to grow in obedient wisdom concerning the cultural consequences of our duty to love God and neighbor.” Because the Incarnation and

the sequence of events it launches have cosmic significance, they must have cultural consequences. But modern Christians (like their non-believing neighbors) are typically accustomed to think about culture — and act within cultural settings — as if the Incarnation was substantively irrelevant (if, for some, it is still piously motivational).

Modern people — even, I think, most modern Christians — aren't accustomed to thinking about social, cultural, and political matters in a rich theological framework. That is a central attribute of being modern. But in our efforts to see what has gone wrong in our society (and most people seem to believe that something *has* gone wrong), if we persist in avoiding a distinctively Christian angle of vision, we will not see that our era's troubled condition is due to a failure to acknowledge the light of the *Logos*.

When I launched Mars Hill Audio in the early 1990s, I believed that the work of honest social scientists and clever critics in the arts and humanities could provide all the wisdom necessary to fulfill our mission, that we could safely bracket questions about the Trinity or the Incarnation or the Ascension in the process of developing an adequate cultural diagnosis. I no longer believe that to be the case. If the radical secularization of what was once Christendom is evidence of — in C. S. Lewis's term — an *unchristening*, then it is a process with deep, inescapable theological characteristics.

Obedient wisdom requires intellectual virtues and deliberate work. As Oliver O'Donovan warns, "There is plenty to show that those who do not make an effort to read their times in a disciplined way read them all the same, but with narrow and parochial prejudice." My staff and I have always worked to encourage the sorts of disciplines O'Donovan has in mind. And I often ask whether the way we are presenting the content of our work is the best way to nurture the obedient wisdom central to our mission.

Last month, we sent an e-mail to listeners letting them know that in the next few months, we will be making some big changes in how we distribute our audio content to subscribers. (If you've not yet seen it, you can watch the explanatory video at marshillaudio.org/plans.) A new website and mobile app will enable our transition to this new media model, and many have already made contributions to cover some of the costs of these new tools.

There are several reasons for these changes, but the most important are the ever more evident signs of fragmentation and disorder in modern societies. The fault lines within the logic of modern institutions are becoming more and more obvious. Because the challenges we face — personally and communally — are more intense, we need a broader and richer array of resources to equip us to face the challenges with faith, hope, love, and wisdom. That's what we hope to provide in our new "system." Your year-end contribution will assist us to better equip our listeners for the tasks of discernment we face. Thank you!

Gratefully,

Ken Myers
Host and producer