

Come Union

Dedicated to Larry Frank: my friend, mentor, and overall wise guy.

I. The Architecture of the Temple

This body is a temple.
Even more than that,
It is the prototype and unrivaled pinnacle
Of all architectural feats.

Inside of it
Is an entire ecosystem,
A bustling metropolis of cells
Pulsing and racing and working
For the good of the whole.

I recall a time
In some distant past
When there were no “bodies” anywhere,
Only microorganisms
Swimming around from here to there
(probably not so different from you and I.)
Eventually, they got organized:
First into plants —
feeding on the rain, the soil, and the light of the sun;
And into animals —
feeding on the plants and on one another;
Then finally into us.
(And yet, from where I stand now,
All of that seems almost like a dream
And a fantastically elaborate but incidental backstory,
When in reality, this moment that I occupy is merely a blink of time
In comparison with what life has gone through to get here...)

Yes, to be anything at all
Is an immense work of organic engineering;
A work so concise, harmonious, and elegant
That it also stands as the masterwork
Of all artistic creations.

Something disturbs me, though,
As I look closer at this temple:
Where did the building blocks for such a structure
Come from anyway?

Haven't they always come
From the bodies of life itself,
From consuming other masterworks of God?
— Simpler works maybe, but no less inspiring
In their uncanny inventiveness.

Yes, their becoming was cut short
And their structures were broken up
To construct this creation.

And nothing that grows
Has ever grown any other way.

I touch my mouth:
These jaws are the jaws of hell
To everything that is swallowed in death;
For this temple to remain standing,
A sacrifice must continually be made
Or destruction soon comes for me instead
When, "he not busy being born is busy dying."

So this — *this* is the price
of my continual becoming and growing.

How terribly beautiful and painful:
Life building upon itself with itself,
Governing and unifying itself
Into ever renewed creations through the endless procession
Of decomposition and recomposition.
Unity and sacrifice —
These two themes appear inseparable,
And here I see the heart of Christ
Embedded and at work in life
Wherever it grows.

II. The Beauty of the Sanctuary

It's difficult not to admire
The architecture of a temple
So mysteriously astounding
As the human body, but —
In the inner chamber
Of the upper room of this same temple
Lies an even greater wonder.

Yes, inside this temple
There is a place of almost unspeakable beauty,
And to speak of it at all
Requires a language foreign to many:
The language of poetry and metaphor.

In this sanctuary,
A river of light streams
Through the stained glass windows of the soul,
And the mind is tinted and washed
In the flood of stories and images
That come pouring through them
Endlessly, moment after moment.

Look up to the ceiling
And see the faces and figures of those you've known
(Whether in fiction or in religion or in reality):
Heroes, villains, family, friends, enemies, deities, teachers, dearest lovers—
See them all present in the great panorama
Painted across the inner walls of the great dome
That encapsulates this sanctuary.

Look around you,
And see the halls of your memory
Carved with every character
That has ever made a deep and lasting impression on you—
And see the sharpest and most penetrating words they have spoken
Chiseled in stone above the doorways.

We are what we eat

And in this room

The soul hungers for love and for knowledge—

For truth, for beauty, and for purpose—

It hungers for the fullness of life.

And a steady diet of any food for thought

Or any stream of consciousness

Is bound to shape us in drastic ways.

But where does this river come from

That both creates and colors
my mind, memory, and spirit?

These characters

That have formed, informed, and inspired me—

I did not create them.

No, I merely opened my eyes

And received them

The same as anyone has—

And from them I received their love, words, and actions

Poured out for me in their time and their energy.

(Yes, I know that not only their energy,

But their time, too,

Is very much a limited commodity.

And yet, so often they have chosen

To spend it no where else

But with me

And so I must say, “Thank you.”)

Yes, this river that streams into the temple windows

Flows for the perpetual sacrifices of others

And makes us who we are:

It is the clay we sculpt with
and the blueprint we imitate.

Every good martyr, soldier, mother, father,
Servant, laborer, friend, teacher, beloved—

They all daily reveal to us a glimpse
of the sacrificial heart of Christ.

But we are the ones who receive this gift of ourselves
Both in our daily bread and from the selfless offerings of others,
And choose to repay this debt of gratitude
By pouring ourselves out again and again for one another
As a living sacrifice and an expression of love.

How many
have poured their time and energies into me
And made me who I am!

But each of them, too,
are who *they* have become
Because of those who have been
Impressed upon them
for good or for ill.

And so,
When every face impressed in me
And etched into the chamber of my heart
Is likewise, made up of multitudes,
Then each of us must be

A temple of temples—
A mosaic of mosaics—
Yes,
If every face is a puzzle
Then each and every piece within it is,
just as well, another face
And another puzzle, complete.

III. The Anthem

Now, open your ears
And hear the anthem ringing through the sanctuary—
Hear the organ pipes bellow
And their notes cascading through the air—
Trains upon trains of tones in concert,
Rushing like whitewater all around you;

Hear the voices roaring out a song
From every mural in every corner of this room—
Voices of those still living, those who have died, and those only imagined
Thundering as one
As they chant the Great Theme
That unifies this creation
Under one purpose and one Heavenly vision:

That dream of salvation
That justifies all striving—
That heavenly destination
That inspires every step of our pilgrimage—
That highest good hoped for
That sets our sights and tells us, each moment,
Whether we are closer or farther away.

They chant the anthem to the prized ideal
That propels this creation forward
Through all confusion and all hardship
Along the way of becoming.

Some are drawn toward dreams of luxury,
Others to reputation or glory, others simply to quiet solitude;
And they gauge their every move
Based on how much closer or farther
They are to or from this dream of Heaven.

But I have found that all other pictured paradises
Fail ultimately to deliver the one thing the soul most desires,
Which is only and has always been — the fullness of life;
All else fails except for the exhaustless ideal and goodness
Of the love of God
And the spotless vision of His people
Rich in peace and flourishing as the united Body of Christ.

And this unifying theme,
Which I love to sing with all of my soul,
Has given me the gift of all gifts:
A purpose eternal and an unspeakable joy.

IV. "...That They May Be One In Us..."

Now, when I look out and see
Life growing and striving all around me,
Both in the city and in the open country,
I am sometimes subtly and secretly astonished
When I think of life's immense history—
Building endlessly through time
Into groups of bodies and bodies of groups,
Into mosaics of mosaics of mosaics...
Always into greater and greater communities of cells
To construct the many vessels of God.

And I am beginning to see
The vast sea of faces
That lives within everyone
And that lives within me —
The faces of people who received the gifts of life
And poured them out again and again for others—
The faces of those that have laid down their lives
Both dramatically and habitually for their loved ones.

And I see glimpses
Of the work of salvation,
And the hope of Heaven
That inspires the worship within each of us
And gives us the direction, strength, and inspiration
To grow day after day.

All of these:
The journey of organic life processing through time,
The impressions of many that live within us,
And the hope of Heaven that we cling to—
All of these currents carry and define each of us.
Each person contains within them
An ecosystem and a metropolis;
A testament, and an iconography;
A hope and a luminous dream of the future.
Who could ever fully know the depths that live in any one single person?

But we know that while we may contain worlds within us,
We, too, live as a creature within a greater ecosystem —
As a cell within a larger body.
It should come as no surprise then, that
Just as the cells within us work together to form one creation,
So, too, are we drawn together in unity throughout our world.

All of life is given the same idea
Towards a single-minded pursuit of unity,
Whether that life be within us or whether it be us ourselves.
So we are the ones who inherit
This great unifying work of life
And undertake it in the world around us.

Why else would we be
incessantly huddling together,
Networking and nation building
All over creation?
It's in our DNA,
Imbedded on our conscience,
And flowing in our blood —
To seek to be part of a greater wholeness.
And so we naturally form families, friend circles, churches, and communities;
And work to build up commerce, cities, nations, and make global alliances.

We hear the call of unity and answer it in the world abroad
As we design, engineer, and build:
Systems of government and energy grids,
Along with vast transportation, trading, and communication networks
That span the entire planet.

And we answer the call to unity within
As we congregate in our temples and in our churches,
In every time and culture, under the grand hope
That the greatest themes of our personal testaments
And our spirits truest visions of Heaven are ultimately
Synonymous with one another's — sharing one heart.
And why shouldn't they be? We all inherited them
From One Creator and one shared creation.

To be united as one body
That is the whole aim of life.

Whether it be in the biological forms of this world,
Or in the sanctuary of our souls,
Or in our communities and our nations—
Life looks to and longs for this one and only destiny.
In the heart of our Creator
And in the code of His creation,
Which streams from His imagination
and is given shape and breath with His power,
The movement towards unity refrains
Again and again and again.

And a unified body must also be of one mind—
Must feed on the same life-giving truth
and drink from the same life-giving wellspring—
And this water, bread, and wine of life that we partake in
Is offered to us by the Lord of creation
So that we may eat, drink, and become One people in Him.
Then, when the highest worship that takes place in the hidden sanctuary of our hearts
Is aligned with the hearts of our brothers and sisters
And this inner synchronicity is boldly expressed outwardly with one another—
Then, then we come to share one Heavenly dream and vision—then
We become one body with one mind under One name.
The Great Communion that we anticipate
Is the final union of the Lamb and His bride, our world,
When we and all of creation partake in and join
The united body of Christ.

And so, as we share in His eternal body and blood, let us pray with glad and confident hearts,
“Come union. Come unity. Amen and Amen.”

On the night before His death, Christ said these parting words to His disciples and friends: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” John 17:20-23

V. Prayer of Thanksgiving

I am not my own.

My body has been nourished and grown
Thanks to the continued sacrifices
Of a great many living things,
Things that thrived and grew
Just as I do.

Oh Lord,
Teach me to say grace
With a humble heart,
Full of genuine thankfulness
For Your ceaseless provision.
And lead me to honor You with my life,
Knowing well the cost of my flourishing.

My perspective and thoughts,
Which I hold so dear to me,
Are equally not my own.
I have been fed on the vision, guidance, and insights
of so many others and from the Spirit of truth—
They are the soil that all my thoughts sprout from.
Their invaluable lessons and charity
Have shaped me inside and out.

Oh Lord,
If I were to live simply for my own sake
I would have no purpose to live for
That would not inevitably lead to futility, emptiness, or misery.
But you have given me purpose and joy abundant
Because You have shared with me Your Spirit
And given me a strong family, good mentors, and dear friends
To show me Your heart and feed me
with their time, gifts, and energy.
And so my soul has come to know You and now joins in singing
The only anthem worthy of everlasting repetition.

Christ, my teacher and dear friend,
Teach me to see you everywhere—
Everywhere that life sacrifices itself for others,
Everywhere that life blooms and flourishes and grows,
Everywhere that life strives toward harmony and unity.
In You is the courage and compassion that lays down one life for another,
In You is the peace and forgiveness that leads to wholeness and unity,
In You we are created and ever sustained.
Christ, in You we drink from the river and water of life,
And in You we are given the bread and blood of your passion
That joins our hearts and minds together
As we partake in Holy Communion with You
And with all who belong to Your body.

Teach my heart
To always sing a song of thankfulness to You
For the many sacrifices that have been given to me,
And that continue to be given to me even today,
For they have made me who I am.
Without these gifts which you have given,
I know now that nothing of myself
Would be at all.
Let humility be my foundation
And give me the strength to repay
This deep debt of gratitude
With joy and love in all that I do and say
From this day forth and forevermore.
Amen.