

Introduction

Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy was an obscure 20th c. sociologist and philosopher from Germany. Like many intellectuals of the 20th century, Rosenstock-Huessy spent much time thinking about the dilemma of living in the modern world. This dilemma was illustrated most starkly by Friedrich Nietzsche in 1882 in his book *The Joyful Wisdom*. In that book one character named “the madman” runs into the streets of a city and declares,

“God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?”

For all his other faults, Nietzsche understood what many other so-called intellectuals failed to understand. Modern man believes that getting God and religion out of the way will open up the world to new forms of enlightenment that will depend on science and reason and not our religious superstition. That is why many intellectuals who lived at the same time as Nietzsche deemed their era the “Progressive Era”. They believed they were progressing into a new era of human existence.

But much to their dismay, the 20th century did not turn out to be a great century of humanity’s progress. Rather, the it was marked by two world wars that ended after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nietzsche’s question, “How shall we comfort ourselves?” is **the question** and Rosenstock-Huessy set out to try and answer that question. How can modern man find comfort in a world that has rejected God? How can man find comfort in a modern world where life feels so stretched.

In his book entitled *Christian Future* he states, “Life stretches us in opposite directions, tears and rends us, yet through this tearing makes us new.” For Rosenstock-Huessy humans are stretched out on two axes: a horizontal axis and a vertical axis. The horizontal axis represents a stretching between the past and future. The vertical axis represents a stretching between the “inner” and the “outer”.

Rossenstock-Huessy call these axes “The cross of reality” where human life is stretched in these four directions: “backwards to the past, forward into the future, inward among ourselves, and outward against what we must fight or exploit or come to terms with or ignore.”

In many ways, the sermon text this morning mirrors this reality. As we come to the end of Abraham’s life we see these four points of reality. The past, the future, the inner-circle, and the outside world. Abraham and his family was stretched in all four directions and yet, as verse 8 says, “[He] died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.”

As we come to the text, I want to draw two points from it this morning:

1. In verses 1-6, I want to show that God has a plan for the nations.
2. In verses 7-11, I want to show that God has a plan for the next generation.

God Has a Plan for the Nations (vv. 1-6)

[Genesis 25](#) begins with Abraham taking Keturah as a wife after the death of Sarah and giving a genealogy of the following generations that came from Abraham and Keturah.

The genealogical lists in Genesis serve many purposes, but one of the chief purposes is to show God’s faithfulness. In [Gen 17](#) God tells Abraham,

Genesis 17:4-6 ESV

⁴ “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

God promised to make nations come from Abraham, and here, at the very end of Abraham’s life, we see that this is indeed filled. The list of names here represent people that will grow into nations in the coming generations. Moreover, it shows us that these nations are connected to Abraham. The family of Abraham belongs to the greater collection of peoples that Israel lives among. A connection exists between the covenant people of God that came through Abraham, Issac, and Jacob and the other peoples of the land who also descended from Abraham.

And here we see the first hint of the vertical axis that I mentioned in the introduction. There is a tension between the “inner” and the “outer”. While verses 1-4 show how God’s people are connected to the likes of the Midianites, verse 5 shows that God’s covenantal went through Isaac. Again, in verse 6 we see Abraham giving gifts to all his other descendants but, like Ishmael, they are ultimately sent away so that the covenant promises might rest securely with Isaac.

Throughout Israel’s history, whenever they are in conflict with the Midianites, the Ishmaelites, or the Edomites, they are in conflict *with brothers*. There is a tension because they know that God’s covenant is with them, but they also know that they have a connection with these other people.

This is the human experience. This is experienced at the level of the individual, the level of the family, the level of the community, and beyond. As an individual, you experience are stretched between your own desires and the duties you have toward other people. In your family there may be a temptation to be overly insular *or* overly outwardly oriented. *There is a tension and a stretching between the inside and the outside*. The same is true in communities (and in churches). Communities are stretched between the needs and desires of the community and those things outside the community that must be addressed, attended to, or fought off.

As a church community, as families, and as individuals, we must resist the desire to cave into one of these inclinations. We must embrace the way of the cross of reality and feel ourselves stretched between what is inward and outward.

And so, we must not consider Abraham’s sending away of the sons an abandonment. The Hebrew Scriptures are clear that God has a plan for these nations. In [Isaiah 60](#), Isaiah comforts Israel by prophesying of God’s future salvation and he states:

[Isaiah 60:6-7](#) (ESV)

⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of *Midian* and *Ephah*; all those from *Sheba* shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, *the praises of the LORD*. ⁷ All the flocks of *Kedar* shall be gathered to you; the rams of *Nebaioth* shall minister to you; *they shall come up with acceptance on my altar*, and I will beautify my beautiful house.

According to Isaiah, the salvation that God is going to bring to Israel will include even those descendants of Abraham that were not a part of the covenant line.

And the New Testament shows this clearly. In the book of Acts, the gospel of salvation in Christ goes out to the gentiles and the gentiles come streaming in. In [Revelation 21](#), the Apostle John sees a vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem and he states:

Revelation 21:24–26 ESV

²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

God had a plan for the nations in Abraham’s day and this plan is being accomplished in our day as the gospel goes forth to every tribe, tongue, and nation.

God Has a Plan for the Next Generation (vv. 7-11)

But in addition to the vertical axis of the inner and the outer, our passage also presents the horizontal axis between the past and the future.

Verses 7-8 present the death of Abraham at 175 years old. Verse 8 states, “Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.” This is an evaluation of Abraham’s life and it is entirely positive. At the end of his life, looking back over 175 years, Abraham was full and he was gathered to his people.

It’s in verses 9-10 that we get a glimpse of this horizontal axis between the past and future. Isaac and Ishmael come together and bury their father. They bury him in the cave that he bought in [Gen 23](#) next to Sarah who was already buried there.

Grave sites are memorials to the past. If you ever go to a graveyard and look at headstones you can learn much about the past. Family relations, marriages, children, deaths are all there. The burial of Abraham is a moment where the past

and future come together. Isaac and Ishmael represent the next generation and Abraham represents the past.

We live in a culture that despises the past. Rather than honoring and forgiving those who have gone before us many in our day are quick to slander and smear their reputation. There is an old Latin proverb, “*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*” which means “Of the dead nothing but good is to be said” (“Speak no ill of the dead”). The reason is that it is inappropriate to speak ill of someone who cannot defend themselves.

Our problem is not simply a disdain for the past. I believe we are living through a generational crisis. Across our world, the hearts of the fathers have been turned against the children and the hearts of children have been turned against their fathers. The past and the future are at war with one another.

But this is not the way of the Bible. In our passage we see the future generation coming together to honor the past. Isaac and Ishmael work together to give an honorable burial to their father Abraham.

Verse 11 serves as a concluding statement and places the emphasis on the next generation as it will be carried forward in Isaac, “***After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.***”

The Bible teaches that children are to honor their parents and in many ways, this is a call for all of us to honor the past. But the Bible also teaches that parents are to give themselves for their children. When you raise a child, you are giving your life to the child, “my life for yours”. Every good parent knows this is what you are doing. Your time, your wealth, your energy, and your energy are spend away for the next generation. This is why abortion is such an abominable evil. It inverts the entire trajectory. Instead of saying, “my life for yours” the parent says “your life for mine”.

Conclusion

So even though we all feel stretched between the past and the future and between the inner community and the outer world, we can rest assured that God has a plan as we experience the cross of reality.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!