

The Great Divorce - Chapters 1-2

Quiz: True or False: Napoleon lives in the Grey Town? Answer: True.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you think of the reading?
- Did anything stand out to you as especially helpful/good?
- Who or what do you think the driver of the bus is? (Angel?)
- What do you think of the Intelligent Man's plans?

Church Teaching: *Discord and Charity – Quarrels break out in Grey Town and People move farther away from each other; Fight on the Bus*

- On the contrary, Dissensions, that is, discords, are reckoned among the works of the flesh (Gal 5:20), of which it is said afterwards (Gal 5:21) that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God. Now nothing, save mortal sin, excludes man from the kingdom of God. Therefore discord is a mortal sin. (*ST*, II-II, q. 37, a. 1)
- I answer that, Discord is opposed to concord. Now, as stated above (Q. 29, AA. 1, 3) concord results from charity, inasmuch as charity directs many hearts together to one thing, which is chiefly the Divine good, secondarily, the good of our neighbor. Wherefore discord is a sin, insofar as it is opposed to this concord. (*ST*, II-II, q. 37, a. 1)
- In our world today, there is so much discord, such great division. We are all “connected,” yet find ourselves disconnected from one another, anesthetized by indifference and overwhelmed by solitude. So many wars, so many conflicts: It seems incredible the evil of which we are capable! Yet in fact, fueling our hostilities is the spirit of division, the devil, whose very name means “divider.” Yes, preceding and exceeding our own evil, our own divisions, there is the evil spirit who is “the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev 12:9). He rejoices in conflict, injustice, slander; that is his joy. To counter the evil of discord, our efforts to create harmony are not sufficient. Hence, the Lord, at the culmination of his Passover from death to life, at the culmination of salvation, pours out upon the created world his good Spirit: the Holy Spirit, who opposes the spirit of division because he is harmony, the Spirit of unity, the bringer of peace. Let us invoke the Spirit daily upon our whole world, upon our lives and upon any kind of division! (Pope Francis, Homily for Pentecost, May 28, 2023)
- Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience makes itself felt in the relationships between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely, and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances of cultures, eras, and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character. (*CCC*, 1606)
- According to faith the disorder we notice so painfully does not stem from the nature of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from sin. As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. (*CCC*, 1607)

The Great Divorce - Chapters 3-4

Quiz: True or False: things are soft to the touch for the phantoms? Answer: False

Discussion Questions:

- What did you think of the reading?
- Did anything stand out to you as especially helpful/good?
- Will we be surprised by who we see in Heaven?

Church Teaching: *Presumption, Justice, Charity and Mercy – Big Ghost wants “his rights” without charity or mercy – presumes his innocence and presumes guilt of others.*

- There are two kinds of presumption. Either man presumes upon his own capacities, (hoping to be able to save himself without help from on high), or he presumes upon God's almighty power or his mercy (hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit). (CCC, 2092)
- It is not every presumption that is accounted a sin against the Holy Spirit, but that by which one contemns the Divine justice through inordinate confidence in the Divine mercy. The latter kind of presumption, by reason of its matter, inasmuch, to wit, as it implies contempt of something Divine, is opposed to charity, or rather to the gift of fear, whereby we revere God. (*ST*, II-II, q. 130, a. 2)
- Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. (CCC, 1822) Christ died out of love for us, while we were still "enemies." The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself. The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: "charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1825)
- God acts mercifully, not indeed by going against His justice, but by doing something more than justice; thus a man who pays another two hundred pieces of money, though owing him only one hundred, does nothing against justice, but acts liberally or mercifully. The case is the same with one who pardons an offense committed against him, for in remitting it he may be said to bestow a gift. Hence the Apostle calls remission a forgiving: Forgive one another, as Christ has forgiven you (Eph 4:32). Hence it is clear that mercy does not destroy justice, but in a sense is the fullness thereof. And thus it is said: Mercy exalteth itself above judgment (Jas 2:13). (*ST*, I, q. 21, a. 3)
- Certain works are attributed to justice, and certain others to mercy, because in some justice appears more forcibly and in others mercy. Even in the damnation of the reprobate mercy is seen, which, though it does not totally remit, yet somewhat alleviates, in punishing short of what is deserved. In the justification of the ungodly, justice is seen, when God remits sins on account of love, though He Himself has mercifully infused that love. So we read of Magdalen: Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much (Luke 7:47). (*ST*, I, q. 21, a. 4)

The Great Divorce - Chapters 5-6

Quiz: Does the Episcopal Bishop believe that heaven or Hell exist? Answer: No.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you think of the reading?
- Did anything stand out to you as especially helpful/good?
- Why do you think there is no room for the golden apples in Hell?
- Why do you think things are so heavy and hard for the phantoms?

Church Teaching: *The Last Things: 3 Options – Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory and the Resurrection*

- Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven through a purification or immediately, or immediate and everlasting damnation. (CCC, 1022)
- Heaven: Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face: By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints . . . and other faithful who died after receiving Christ's holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died, . . . or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death, . . .) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment - and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven - have been, are and will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature. (CCC, 1023)
- Purgatory: All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. (CCC, 1030)
- Hell: We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: "He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren. To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."
- We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this day he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus." The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross: Christ is risen from the dead! Dying, he conquered death; To the dead, he has given life. (CCC, 638)

The Great Divorce - Chapters 7-8

Quiz: What mythical animals appear at the end of chapter 8? Answer: unicorns.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you think of the reading?
- Did anything stand out to you as especially helpful/good?
- Why do you think the Hard Bitten Ghost thinks that someone would grow more solid in this land?
- Why do you think the woman ghost doesn't want to be seen the way she is?

Church Teaching: *Agnosticism, Vanity, Spiritual Warfare – Hard Bitten ghost is an Agnostic and woman ghost is vain.*

- Definition of Vanity: Or vainglory, an inordinate desire to manifest one's own excellence. It differs from pride, which is the uncontrolled desire for self-esteem, in that vanity primarily seeks to show others what a person has or has achieved. A vain person looks for praise from others and may go to great lengths to obtain it. More commonly, vanity is associated with an exaggerated importance attached to multiple details, especially external appearances, which in no way contain the value attributed to them. It is ostentation in fashion, wealth, or power regarded as an occasion of empty pride. Thus where pride, though sinful, may have some foundation in fact for whatever one prides oneself on being or having done, vanity is the idle effort to obtain recognition or respect for what a person does not have a rightful claim to. Vanity is attributed to shams, which lack substance and are deceitful (like human praise); or to things without solidity and permanence (such as physical beauty); or to means that fail in their purpose (such as vaunting one's own reputation). It is an inflated pride and, as such, is venially sinful. (Fr. Hardon, MCD)
- Virtue opposed to Vanity is Magnanimity: "Greatness of soul. It looks especially to honor and seeks to perform noble deeds. Its object is to perform actions that faith tells a person are great in the eyes of God, no matter what people may think of one's conduct." (Fr. Hardon, MCD)
- Definition of Agnosticism: The theory that either knowledge or certitude about ultimates is impossible. In practice, it stresses uncertainty about the nature or substance of things, the existence of an immortal soul, the origin of the universe, life after death, and the existence and perfections of a personal God. (Fr. Hardon, MCD)
- Agnosticism assumes a number of forms. In certain cases the agnostic refrains from denying God; instead he postulates the existence of a transcendent being which is incapable of revealing itself, and about which nothing can be said. In other cases, the agnostic makes no judgment about God's existence, declaring it impossible to prove, or even to affirm or deny. (CCC, 2127)
- Agnosticism can sometimes include a certain search for God, but it can equally express indifferentism, a flight from the ultimate question of existence, and a sluggish moral conscience. Agnosticism is all too often equivalent to practical atheism. (CCC, 2128)
- "For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens." (Ephesians 6:12)

The Great Divorce - Chapters 9-10

Quiz: True or False: The Ghost in chapter 10 only wishes to see her husband again to tell him she is sorry for the way she treated him in life? False: She only wants to see him in order to control him.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you think of the reading?
- Did anything stand out to you as especially helpful/good?
- What do you think of some of George MacDonald's statements in light of Church Teaching regarding Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory?

Church Teaching: *Finality of Judgment at Death, Selfishness in Marriage, Substituting the Creature for Creator*

- Particular Judgment: "The individual judgment of each human being immediately after death. It is a judgment in the sense that God irrevocably determines a person's lot for eternity, depending on his or her co-operation with grace during the stay on earth." (Fr. Hardon, MCD)
- The Artist Ghost: All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. The manifold perfections of creatures - their truth, their goodness, their beauty all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently we can name God by taking his creatures' perfections as our starting point, "for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator". (CCC, 41)
- Ghost Wishing to see her husband: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. (Ephesians 5:21-28)
- Such a relationship, [between husband and wife] however, is not one of one-sided domination. Marriage, according to the Letter to the Ephesians, excludes that element of the pact which was a burden and at times, does not cease to be a burden on this institution. The husband and the wife are in fact "subject to one another", and are mutually subordinated to one another. The source of this mutual subjection is to be found in Christian pietas, and its expression is love. The author of the letter underlines this love in a special way, in addressing himself to husbands. He writes: "You husbands love your wives...", and by expressing himself in this way, he removes any fear that might have arisen (given the modern sensitivity) from the previous phrase: "Wives, be subject to your husbands". Love excludes every kind of subjection whereby the wife [or in the case of Lewis' Great Divorce, the husband] might become a servant or a slave of the husband, an object of unilateral domination. Love makes the husband simultaneously subject to the wife, and thereby subject to the Lord himself, just as the wife to the husband. (St. John Paul II, Wednesday Catechesis on Ephesians 5:21-28, August 11, 1982)
- Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It

requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life. But, at the same time, every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of "reconciliation," that is, communion reestablished, unity restored. In particular, participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation and in the banquet of the one Body of Christ offers to the Christian family the grace and the responsibility of overcoming every division and of moving towards the fullness of communion willed by God, responding in this way to the ardent desire of the Lord: "that they may be one." (St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, #21)

The Great Divorce - Chapters 11-12

Quiz: What does the little red lizard in chapter 11 become? Answer: a stallion.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you think of the reading?
- Did anything stand out to you as especially helpful/good?
- Why would Pam love her son Michael more if she truly loved God first?
- Why do you think the Dwarf used the Tragedian as a mouthpiece?
- Do you think we can be happy with God in Heaven without our loved ones being there? (Like Lady in chapter 12?)

Church Teaching: *Love of God, Lust and Chastity, Happiness Fulfilled in God*

- “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:37)
- Hence, he who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me, because he himself is God. Now, God is to be loved before all; I will not accept the person of man, and I will not level God with man (Job 32:21). For God is goodness itself; therefore he is to be loved more. Therefore, he who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. (Aquinas, Commentary on Matthew, #890)
- Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes. (CCC, 2451)
- Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift. (CCC, 2337)
- Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. "Man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end." (CCC, 2339)
- Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence. To make this clear, two points must be observed. First, that man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek: second, that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object. (*ST*, I-II, q. 3, a. 8)

The Great Divorce - Chapters 13-14

Quiz: What has the gulf that the bus came through at the beginning of the book turned out to be?
Answer: a tiny crack in the ground.

Discussion Questions:

- What did you think of the reading?
- Did anything stand out to you as especially helpful/good?
- Where do you think the phantoms go when they disappear?

Church Teaching: *Pity, Universalism, Predestination*

- *Doctrine of Universalism:* The theory that hell is essentially a kind of purgatory in which sins are expiated, so that eventually everyone will be saved. Also called apokatastasis, it was condemned by the church in A.D. 543, against the Origenists, who claimed that "the punishment of devils and wicked men is temporary and will eventually cease, that is to say, that devils or the ungodly will be completely restored to their original state" (Denzinger 411). (Fr. Hardon, MCD)
- *Predestination:* In the widest sense it is every eternal decision of God; in a narrower sense it is the supernatural final destination of rational creatures; and in the strictest sense it is God's eternal decision to assume certain rational creatures into heavenly glory. Predestination implies an act of the divine intellect and of the divine will. The first is foreknowledge, the second is predestination.

According to its efficacy in time, predestination is distinguished as incomplete or complete depending on whether it is to grace only or also to glory. Complete predestination is the divine preparation of grace in the present life and of glory in the life to come.

This doctrine is proposed by the ordinary and universal teaching of the Church as a truth of revelation. The reality of predestination is clearly attested by St. Paul: "They are the ones he chose especially long ago and intended to become true images of the Son, so that his Son, might be the eldest of many brothers. He called those he intended for this; those he called he justified and with those he justified he shared his glory." (Romans 8:29-30). All elements of complete predestination are given: the activity of God's mind and will, and the principal stages of its realization in time.

The main difficulty in the doctrine of predestination is whether God's eternal decision has been taken with or without consideration of human freedom. Catholic teaching holds that predestination by God does not deny the human free will. Numerous theories have been offered on how to reconcile the two, but all admit with St. Paul (Romans 11:33) that predestination is an unfathomable mystery. (Fr. Hardon, MCD)

- *Pity:* Grief or pain aroused by the suffering or misfortune of another. Pity is less than sympathy, which shares in the experience of another. It is a form of condescending sympathy. (Fr. Hardon, MCD)
- *Sympathy:* The quality of being affected by the experience of another, especially in sorrow or trial, with similar feelings in oneself. Kinship in suffering is true sympathy. (Fr. Hardon, MCD)
- *Compassion:* Pity at another person's sorrow or misfortune, with the desire to alleviate or, on occasion, even to suffer in the other's stead. (Fr. Hardon, MCD)