



July 3, 2024

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me, O Lord God of hosts; do not let those who seek you be dishonored because of me, O God of Israel."

Psalm 69:6

INFO

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How Evolution Helps Me Face Death

(This is a continuation of last week's Messenger article)

Christian preachers and teachers who proclaim that belief in the Bible means the Genesis account can only be taken as a literal description of how Creation happened have robbed us of so much!¹ The evidence I've seen through science has led me to the insight that the human race is the culmination of a great creative drama begun and overseen by God. I'm a tiny part of it. I have come from dust through millions of years of evolutionary development, and I will return to dust when I die (Genesis 3:19). In between is the great adventure of Life which I experience myself and can observe through the interactions of plants, animals and other humans around me. When I die, my decaying body will be recycled into Life, through the process of decay, involving microbes, plants and animals. Someday a great-great-great grandson of mine may eat a piece of bread that contains a molecule that was once part of my left big toe.

Mary Oliver (1935–2019) was an American poet laureate who was fascinated by this natural phenomenon. In her poem "In Blackwater Woods" she talks about the autumn loss of leaves in a New England forest as a new way of bringing the sun's light to the forest floor:

Look, the trees are turning their own bodies into pillars of light.
From this, she reflects on other aspects of the seasonal changes in nature that give hints that Life is moving forward, progressing, even when parts of it are always dying.²

Oliver ends her poem with a very personal challenge to the average individual who realizes that most of their life is behind them and their own death is just around the corner:

*To live in this world you must be able to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it against your bones knowing your own life depends on
it;
and, when the time comes to let it go, let it go.*

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(Continued from other side)

We've been going through a lot of loss at ABC. Some of us know first-hand what it means to *"love what is mortal,"* to watch someone you really care about wasting away. Yet, you've bonded to them even more as they've weakened. You've tried to *"hold them against your bones knowing [that somehow] your own life depends on it."* But *"when the time comes to let them go, you've let them go."*

You and I have had to let others go; soon our loved ones will have to let us go. Personally, I'm comforted to know that I'll be released, not to death, **but to Life**. By the study of science (with the help of Henri Bergson) and of nature (with the help of Mary Oliver),³ I've come to believe that I will, in some mysterious way that I can't even imagine, be reconnected to Life itself, to the wonderful force God spoke into being in Creation, which has flourished and blossomed in thousands of living species over millions of years. I have been and will continue to be part of that wonder, through life and through death.

Then, as a surprise bonus, God has promised still another dimension of glory in an impossible-to-imagine future:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

When this perishable body puts on imperishability and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

(1 Corinthians 15:52-54)

That's the Christian Gospel!

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ I would be glad to discuss various interpretations of the Genesis Creation Account: literal six-day, age/day, literary style, etc. I believe people can vary on these interpretations and still respect the Bible's authority.

² You can read the full poem at: <https://allpoetry.com/poem/15374219-In-Blackwater-woods-by-Mary-J-Oliver>

³ In reading about their very different lives, I discovered that Henri Bergson and Mary Oliver had this in common: they didn't grow up in church-connected homes where they were taught about the Bible, yet both in later life came more and more to belief in a Creator God who is behind science and nature.