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Time and Eternity

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Note: These few words are your invitation to consider ideas about spiritual mystery that may be new to you. These ideas aren't weighed down by the craziness and absurdity of the scrupulous mind. Rather, they reflect the grace and loving presence of God at work in our world. I encourage you to be patient as you read.

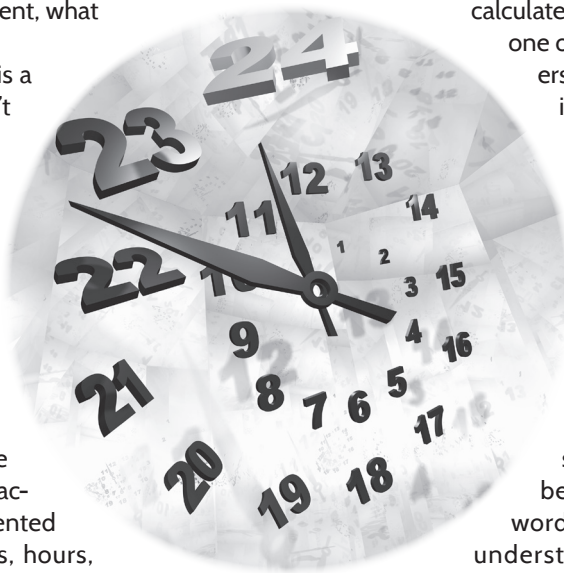
Is eternity measurable? When we talk of eternal life, what does it mean? The flip side is the question the scrupulous may ponder: When we talk about eternal punishment, what does it mean?

The answer to all three is a simple confession: We don't know. We humans have no way of comprehending, no dependable or comprehensible measurement, no way of explaining what eternity means.

One reason for this dilemma—our inability to explain the eternal—is that we measure our lives. We exist within a measurable accumulation of human-invented tools of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. Those tools help us put our life, the lives of others, and our experiences into perspective. In short, the concept of time helps us weave the fabric of our lives into a whole. But people invented the tools of time, God did not. While helpful, the tools are limited inventions.

While humans invented the tools to measure time, we didn't create time. God did. Time is a dimension, a way of measuring the universe, a way to calculate distance, the placement of one object in relationship to others. Our understanding of time is also relatively new, a perspective that is minuscule when contrasted with the reality of the universe, thousands of years in contrast with billions of years.

It might help to note that our concept of eternity has evolved. At one time, eternity was understood as the experience of being outside time. In other words, the older tradition and understanding was that eternity resisted measurement and could not be quantified. We began to understand eternity in the manner that we reference it today in the sixteenth century. At that time, concerns about quantifying and placing into systems all things Catholic came into vogue in partial response to Protestant reforms.



If your brain is not aching at this point, consider this. What do we mean when we say God is eternal, God is timeless, or when Scripture observes that “a thousand years in [God’s] eyes are merely a day gone by” (Psalm 90)?

Scripture pretty much suggests that the human way of counting and measuring time is not the experience of God. It suggests that God exists in an entirely different place of perception and experience. We can’t know or comprehend the perception and experience of God. Thus we’re reduced to a position where we must admit that we don’t understand and can’t explain what eternity is and how it can be understood and quantified.

Stepping back from attempts to answer what is unknowable, we’re left with a question. If we assert that we’re living and anticipating the experience of eternity—eternal life as creed and dogma—what do we really mean? An example might help answer that question and get to the heart of this reflection.

Imagine you have an unwelcome, powerful, impure sexual thought. Imagine it happens as you stand in line for holy Communion, which makes it worse in your mind. From start to finish, the whole imaginary experience lasts a second. Now imagine you believe that—as a result of this one-second, unwanted, powerfully sexual thought—you have some-

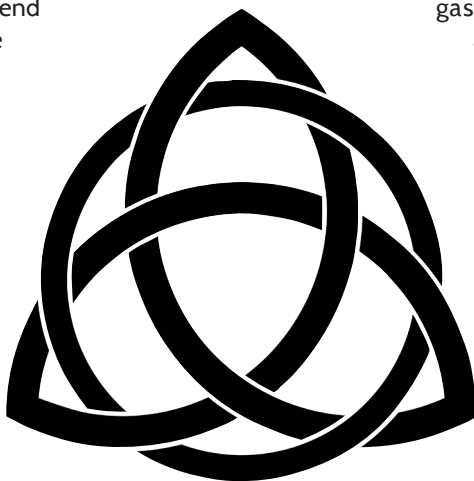
how committed a mortal sin that you must confess or God will sentence you to an eternity in hell. This equation of a one-second sin resulting in an eternity in hell is absurd.

The example illustrates a person taking a personal experience from one second of his history and then concluding that God will give him an unmeasurable, horrible consequence. This erroneous conclusion, fueled by anxiety and fear, is flabbergasting to say the least. It’s also arrogant, pretentious, and not at all reflective of God’s order. We can’t wrench God out of his experience of eternity into our small experience of a moment in time. In other words, we can’t force an eternal God into our human experience of time. God’s time is not our time.

I invite and challenge scrupulous people, and in fact everyone, to resist the temptation to make the mystery of God and the mystery of eternity too small and too constrained.

If we do that as a result of fear and anxiety, we don’t change reality, but we do fuel the emotion that is necessary to feed the scrupulous condition.

Try to embrace an attitude of awe and wonder, mystery and grace. Such attitudes are much better choices, and they will pay dividends by removing a trigger that deprives scrupulous people of peace and blessing. ✨



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MARY, PRAY FOR US



JUNE 27 IS THE FEAST DAY OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

Please offer your prayer intentions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help on the enclosed form and return it in the envelope provided.

Facts About Jesus

What are the historical facts of Christ's existence?

Apart from the historical content of the Gospels, Roman and Jewish texts record the activities of Christ and his followers.

Two well-known Roman writers—Pliny (writing in the year 112) and Tacitus (second century)—both mention Christians and clearly regarded them as troublemakers.

The Jewish historian Josephus writes at some length about Jesus Christ as the “miracle worker.”

He describes his life and death, and then writes about the “awe-inspiring signs” following the crucifixion.

Josephus was born a Jew and worked for many years for the Romans as a politician, soldier, and historian. He had no association with Christianity.

His identity and writings are absolutely authentic, and he provides an unbiased record of the reality of Christ's life and death.

What's the point of following someone who died 2,000 years ago?

Christians don't view Jesus as a dead historical character—similar to someone like Benjamin Franklin or Napoleon.

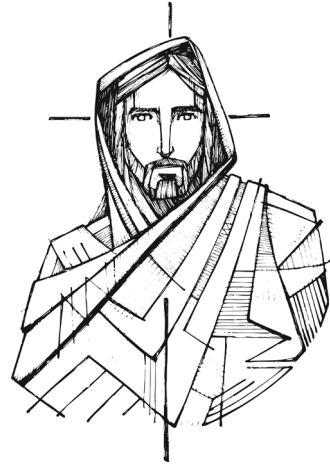
The central belief of Christians is that, after his death by crucifixion, Jesus was raised to life by God, his Father.

So it's inaccurate to say that Christians follow someone who died 2,000 years ago. Christians believe Jesus is alive now and through his Spirit still has an influence on the lives of his friends and followers.

Over the last 2,000 years, millions of people have experienced the living presence of Jesus, and they have discovered the point of following him by experiencing the difference he makes in their lives.

How can anyone believe that Jesus Christ came back to life after dying on the cross?

You may be surprised to learn that Christians don't believe Jesus came back to life.

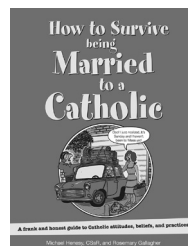


BERNARDO RAMON/FAUN/SHUTTERSTOCK

They believe God, his Father, raised Jesus to a new kind of life—a life that's eternal and which death can no longer touch. If Jesus had come back to life, he would still be subject to death, because death is an inevitable part of our human life. But Christians believe that the risen body of Jesus can never die again. He has conquered death. That's why Christians say Jesus is alive now.

The foundation for belief in the resurrection rests on the witness of the first disciples of Jesus. They saw him after his resurrection and ate and drank with him. This experience of meeting the risen Lord transformed them. They became his witnesses—proclaiming that Jesus who was crucified had been raised to life. Many of those first witnesses were put to death for their belief.

The resurrection of Jesus is a unique event. We can't describe it or say how it happened. Nor can it be proved scientifically. We can only say it did happen. For 2,000 years, Christians have proclaimed their faith in the resurrection of Jesus because they experience his abiding presence in their lives. ✨



Source: *How to Survive Being Married to a Catholic* (828157), Third Revised Edition, 2019, Michael Henesy, CSsR, and Rosemary Gallagher.

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Q. *I just do not know why I do the things I do. I just feel like I do not know who I am, and I am the worst monster. I have to discover some joy in my life!*

A. Remember that, at its root, scrupulosity is an emotional disorder. It exaggerates the bad and conveniently explains away the good. As a result, any little error seems to be catastrophic and any good feeling just one more sign of what you think is your unworthiness. This is a disorder, a sickness. It reflects only a small part of your life. Remember, there is also joy even in the midst of great suffering. I urge you to train yourself to pay attention to happiness and the good. Don't give all your energy to the sorrow and the difficult. You can do it, one day at a time.

Q. *At work I had some brown clay and put it on my desk so that it looked like poop. I removed it almost as quickly as I put it there but now, when I remember it, I wonder if I committed a grave sin.*

A. You didn't commit a sin of any kind. Your action may have been adolescent, but at least some of your coworkers might have thought it was funny. I suggest you see what you did as inappropriate humor, not a sin. I fear you think your action was sinful not because it's adolescent or inappropriate but because you formed the clay to look like poop, which emerges from the body. Your difficulty seems to come from your belief that any sexual or off-color human action must somehow be sinful.



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