

FAITH AND REASON – A FRESH LOOK  
HEBREWS 2:14-15, 2:1

By Allan J. McNicol

We are still in the process of settling in for the year of study. After the hot summer the discipline of school life comes as a shock to the system – not only to students – but also to teachers, I may add.

In the course of all this activity you may not have caught the report in the newspaper a few days ago of an address Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) gave to a German university – although it seems to have made an impact in some quarters! Ratzinger was focusing on the ever-widening gulf between the West and the world of Islam. Basically, he claimed a fundamental problem goes mainly unnoticed. Intellectuals in the West have so disconnected issues of faith from the central elements of life, that they are incapable of understanding anyone who asserts that this dimension is crucial, not only for personal decisions, but the entire structure of life.

On this score I believe Ratzinger has a point. More and more we encounter those who take a stance based on practical atheism. No one is in control. It is a dog-eat-dog world and mere survival is the name of the game. But if there is a choice, who would want to inhabit a world like that?

The writer to the Hebrews would agree. In our text today we discover a very different vision. Like a painter taking a brush and making massive sweeps across a canvas, he produces a series of images designed to provide clear insight into another way.

He gives us the big picture. In 1:5-14 he speaks about an eternal Son greater than any created being. And, now in 2:5-18, he argues that this Son became human, in every sense, to accomplish an amazing achievement. Fully in flesh and blood, the Son engaged the realm of death, which he sees is controlled by the devil. But not yielding to the weakness of flesh,

through his consecrated life, his prayer to be saved “out of death” was heard (Heb. 5:7). He vanquished death. In the words of Tom Wright, “He passed through death and came out the other side.” Now the Son has become the progenitor of a renewed family who share the benefits of his accomplishments. As the true children of Abraham, we, his family, are now in line to attain the glory and honor that the Creator intended originally for the human: the crown jewel of his creation.

And so, this morning, we come back not only to Ratzinger, but also to this assembly. We are a school. Our trade of commerce is reason. But if it is, as for so many today, only reason or scholarship, we have missed the point. I love the comment of Robert Wilken when speaking about worship. He says that the visitor in a Christian assembly should come to understand that there is a “double church.” Or to put it another way, there ought to be something seen and something unseen in the Christian assembly. There is the ordinary; but there is also something that is going on beyond the ordinary. That should be what we are about here: reason – but reason cradled with faith.

It is that combination of the two that we have inherited. The writer to the Hebrews was well aware of this. His readers could only see the visual world – small assemblies of discouraged Christians and so he sought to encourage his readers with fresh images of what was “really real” in that unseen world. We have been entrusted with this legacy as well.

Therefore, we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

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