

## Life as a Bottom Feeder

Not long ago a fellow I met a fellow whom I don't know well but who always impressed me as having a unique combination of being intelligent and street-wise. He informed me that he has learned to take delight in being a bottom feeder. What struck me was the way he emphasized the words "had learned." Implied is that he wasn't born as such but either had acquired it or had it thrust upon him. It turns out we're all in that situation. More on that later.

The context of that short but enduring conversation had to do with a recent shift in his work. Recently he had made the transition from one brewery to another where despite the expertise acquired over the years, he had to start more or less at the bottom. However, several months ago I heard the good news that he was able to make a quick advancement. Despite his many gifts, this fellow prefers to remain in the background, not putting himself forward. That's what makes him stand out as someone I recall quite well. In sum I'd say he has an inbuilt modesty and humility, rare traits nowadays. Though I don't know the details, I suspect he wants to take time to live life as fully as possible. On the practical level this means having enough money to get by but not much more. In his case an abundance wouldn't mean that much. It's self-evident just by looking at him.

When he described himself as a bottom feeder, right away I thought of an aquarium, the place which such a fish calls home. That can range from either a small household aquarium or the massive, multi-story kind you find in a city by a harbor. Over the years I've heard a bottom feeder described mostly in a derogatory sense. At the same time I never thought of using this type of fish to make a comparison. It was both humorous and repulsive at the same time. In fact I don't think I've ever seen a real bottom feeder nor would recognize one should I come across it. Personally I never took the fellow who brought up this image as falling under such a description. However, the more I think back on my limited interactions with him, it fits perfectly. Even better, in his case there's not the slightest hint of self-denigration nor self pity.

I think the reason he describes himself this way is that he has a way of seeing things clearly and is attempting to disguise it. If he went out and tried to share his insights, people would brush him off. You can tell such people a mile away. They don't have to do anything special to stand out; they just do because they

are so rare. So when this fellow makes no bones about calling himself a bottom feeder, he doesn't do so not with the intent to gross people out nor to express a kind of false humility. He actually believes it and revels in it. The response is quite positive. He is a bottom feeder through and through and people recognize this as a gift. Indeed, you don't see that every day. If it were feigned, people would automatically blow him off as a well-intentioned, harmless fellow bordering on a court jester by reason of his self-deprecating humor. Personally I find in him a refreshing innocence as well as savvy-ness you'd associate with a Cheshire cat's enigmatic grim on his face. More on that later as well if not a separate article.

With the passage of time or when I had lost contact with this fellow I was moved to look for more information on a bottom feeder and surprisingly discovered a lot as it pertains to aquarium-type fish. This was something I didn't expect. Actually I thought of them more along the line of parasites or undesirable inhabitants you wouldn't want hanging around in your tank. Then I came across the following definition from the Internet which seemed as good as any <sup>1</sup>: “In an aquarium, *fish species are typically categorized according to the location that they eat: top, mid-water, and bottom feeders. Top feeders eat their food at the surface of the aquarium as it enters the tank or just starts to sink, mid-water feeders eat their food as it makes its way through the water column, and lastly, but certainly not least, are bottom feeders who typically are the cleanup crew for most aquatic environments.*” Cleanup crew! That sums it up perfectly. As for the italicized words (mine), they have special importance as to what follows.

Keeping with the image of an aquarium or for that matter, one of those super-sized tanks with all sorts of fish as by a city harbor, the first thing you notice when walking in, even from a distance, is that all the fish—from small to large, from “tame” to sharks—are perpetually in motion. This makes you wonder if they every sleep or is sleep purely a mammalian thing? From what I gather, they do rest but in a way different from mammals. After all, fish are of a different species. I'm not sure, but most do it at the same level that suits them and don't veer too much from it. Actually try to imagine spending your entire life is a sort of state of suspension. At first it sounds attractive, but I imagine that quickly we'd tire of it.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.hikariusa.com/wp/blog-post/bottom-feeders/>

In addition to being in perpetual motion, more careful attention to what's going on shows that normally you don't see the fish swimming either up or down. They seem programmed to maintain the level which they currently occupy. This becomes evident from the two angles available to us: looking at the tank straight on and looking up toward the glassy-like surface which forms the borderline of this watery environment. As for the human spectators fascinated by all this, they're right in with the bottom feeders or on their level. It's the first thing you see upon walking into the aquarium. Actually the view from down there gives the impression we're witness to some kind of dance which is not random but coordinated. As for the fish maintaining their respective levels, it's not unlike a hierarchical arrangement. In sum, you could say there are varying degrees of authority until you reach the very bottom where this authority has run its course. Someone has to be on the final receiving end to pick up the loose ends. Enter the bottom feeders.

So here you are confronted with a humongous tank of water with a wide variety of fish from small to large. The aquarium strikes you all at once as a living organism, a world unto itself, alien yet at the same time familiar in that we derive comfort from watching fish suspended in water as they go around in circles. They don't do this in the wild but move as such by reason of their confinement. However, the fish don't seem to be bothered by this as would be the case of animals confined in a zoo. On the other hand, they may be bothered but are so alien to us mammals that we can't detect it.

Let's say that while you're gazing from the bottom of the tank towards the top someone could magically transform you into a fish and put you in a particular spot, which level would you choose? This question can be put in another way. The aquarium is a pretty good representation of life, of how society is arranged. While the hierarchical model isn't in vogue politically speaking, nevertheless it is inescapable. Automatically we arrange ourselves in a pecking order whether we're aware of it or not. It's perfectly natural despite any misgivings we have about it.

Which level is the most advantageous? I guess it depends upon the type of fish you've become. Let's start with the top and work down. Keep in mind I haven't the slightest idea if this is true but for all practical purposes it will do for this article. I'm more interested in the mythic approach which has wider appeal. Those at the top are the ones in charge and by reason of their position are at the

border between water and the outside world. Thus they have the closest contact with a realm wholly other than their own, seeing it as distorted shimmering images.

At the same time those toward the top might enjoy a brighter view of the outside world because the water is magnifying the light in their environment. So they are in a unique position to enjoy both worlds while firmly planted in the one for which they've been made. Let's say for the moment they're endowed with a certain intelligence. That means part of their task is to transmit these distorted yet clear images to the fish below. The further down, the more distorted the images become until they're lost completely at the bottom. There a new reality takes over about which all the fish above don't have the slightest clue.

When these top dogs...rather, top fish...get fed, by reason of their position, they get the best of what's tossed into the tank. They make short shrift of whatever it is, the crumbs or leftovers slowly drifting downward. The next layer below is aware of the frenzied activity just above them and are alerted to be on the look out for what reaches them. Usually these pieces are substantial, so layer #2 makes out all right. Next in line comes the third layer and so forth. The leftovers continue to slowly drift downward and get smaller because the fish of each level consume whatever they can.

Although fish at all levels do a pretty good job at it, enough is left over because it's constantly falling and being replenished for all the fish. Also their continuous circular movement is a big help. They're able to pick up scraps as they make their perpetual rounds. Finally little specks from the food at the very top reach the bottom of the tank. Before it gets there or just before hitting the bottom, the particles are too small. That puts the fish at that level in a constant desperate situation resulting more often than not in cannibalism. And so the bottom feeders which you'd think would be close to starving, often turn out to be the luckiest ones in the aquarium. They get the best of all and then some.

We could say that each level forms its own little world, a microcosm as part of the overall hierarchy. However, all the inhabitants are blind to each other, so they have absolutely no knowledge of the others except if one happens to get in the way. As for the hierarchy, in large part it seems based upon the food provided, the strongest at top and the weakest towards the bottom. This, of

course, doesn't correspond to what precisely goes on in a real aquarium but once again what's presented here is done in a mythic way in order to make a point. The fish in each level form their own reality and they move about in the tank. Always they and their fellows at other levels are restless. That's one of the most important take-aways of this this essay. We could say that the fish at each level represent a way of comportment in life devoid of awareness. In its place is a blind collective of various levels working together even though they don't know it.

Now for those fish at the very bottom of the tank. By reason of their position, they are just as greedy as all the other fish but don't show it as much. Their greed is reflected in their oversized, sometimes grotesque mouths they keep constantly wide open like vacuum cleaners to suck in the particles. The best part is that these particles have been filtered already, so what sinks down to them is ready made. To those fish above such food is repulsive. For this reason the bottom feeders don't have to worry about those in the levels above coming down to steal their food, it being considered worse than second hand.

The environment of the bottom feeders is very different from the other fish. All the others have water both above and below them and live in varying degrees of pressure. Also the water here is the coldest, so you have to be pretty tough dealing with that as well. Furthermore, it's quite murky, an environment from which all the other inhabitants of the aquarium shy away from. Only the bottom feeders are in contact with a different reality, namely, the ground. They neither stand nor sit nor walk around but by reason of the greatest amount of pressure in the tank, they've become flattened out which means their bodies cling to the ground. By reason of this they are incapable of moving upwards to the other levels. They'd require fins like other fish to stay in constant motion, for the ones they have are made for poking around gently on the bottom, not to maneuver up nor down.

Hence the bottom feeders are left alone and don't receive attention, among other things, by reason of their less than attractive appearance. Also their flatness blends in more easily with the bottom itself. If they're taunted too much, all they have to do is invite those pestering them from their presumed exalted levels to come down with them. They are simply afraid because although it's the same watery environment, the pressure down there would crush them. Besides, just being in close proximity to such an alien place clearly

would freak them out. My guess is that even if the bottom feeders could, they wouldn't exchange their position for any other. Everything they receive is for free and without effort, including the need to constantly be swimming about. That makes them virtually indecipherable to the other fish. In fact, if asked, they wouldn't consider them as living in the same place.

Does this talk about bottom feeders suggest you're either born into a life style like them or you have chosen it? That gets back to that fellow who in many ways without knowing it got this article off the ground. He seems to have brought on his life situation both inadvertently and by accepting circumstances that were in some ways less than favorable. I'd say that for the most part he had been born into a situation he wouldn't other wise choose. Then again, it's hard to tell. On the surface level this is true, but deep down you're aware of having been guided by some force greater than yourself.

However, after an initial period of struggling to come to grips with his limitations he woke up one day and said something to himself like hey. Compared with most people I've got it pretty good. I know for sure in his case this has nothing to do with external circumstances such as wealth or the like. He discovered that being at the lowest rung offers a freedom he wouldn't have otherwise. Using the aquarium model and bottom feeder, it consists in not having to constantly swim in circles. He has found his niche at the very bottom and is more than content with it.

There's the potential for disturbing this arrangement. That boils down to how handle humiliations. They are essential to transforming oneself into a bottom feeder. The danger? Over a fairly extended period of time you can experience humiliations. They don't arise so much from outside influences but stem from your own behavior. That's put in a rather vague way because it's hard to put your finger on. Therefore we'll leave it as such. So you go along in life, one embarrassment after another, until they accumulate into one giant heap and push you down. Now you've gotten into a rut. In other words, you start to mope around, even looking for a chance to bring on another humiliation. Such is the default condition you've gotten used to and strange to say, you want it to continue. And so you end up having grown accustomed to living constantly pressed down and see no way out.

One day you wake up to the futility of all this and just want to break out.

However, the question remains, how do you do it? First cultivate an awareness that something else is governing your life. It can dawn on you gradually or all at once. While you know this is operative in your life, at the same time it can be terribly hard to put your hands upon. You wish to objectify the state in which you find yourself and get it out there for a better look, that only being the natural thing to do. At this point circumstances out of the clear blue come to your rescue. How it does is anyone's guess but truly does so. It dawns on you that you're in a situation by no means peculiar to yourself but one which is endemic to everyone on this planet. No exceptions are allowed. So instead of feeling trapped, you realize that you have plenty of company.

The situation just mentioned results in feeling frustrated in that you've been taken over by someone or something. In sum, you know now what it means to have been commandeered. Generally the feeling is that you're living some kind of illusion, that you're not yourself, for someone-something-at-sometime has pulled the wool over your eyes. Hijacking comes on you so quickly and unexpectedly that you have no time to respond. That's essential to the battle plan of those who are responsible for devising it. Once you've been commandeered it can be difficult to extricate yourself. Unfortunately that's where most people end up and look for solutions in places that are dead ends.

Being hijacked produces a common perception which has been codified one way or another in philosophical and theological thinking. Essentially that consists in being trapped...imprisoned...and that you have to escape it. Again referring to the aquarium, that would be the fish in their respective levels swimming round and around. Both disciplines present all sorts of fixes, a genuine smorgasbord of them. When you get older, you realize most don't satisfy which has the potential of creating an inescapable tinge of loneliness and sometimes regret. You've missed something somewhere along the way. However, it doesn't have to be as such. One of the best solutions, one that's tried and true, is to access perhaps the earliest and most detailed way of dealing with all this. The language is different, of course, but the solution is the same. For example, check out some of the **Dialogues** of Plato and see how Socrates handles similar matters. They're just as pertinent now as then.

So what do you do practically speaking in order to handle being hijacked? Abstract. By that I mean do it in the literal sense of drawing (*traho*) out or from (*ab*). You become aware of a given situation which means you externalize it by,

for example, injecting an element of humor. It isn't the type you get all boisterous about but one when you switch an unpleasant, I'd-rather-be-anywhere-than-here situation onto another plane. You don't know about what lies in other plane, only that you've discovered it's necessary to make the switch. Then it pops right out before you, obvious as could be. Now you find yourself in a completely different place while remaining in the same one, physically speaking. For effect we could call it a kind of bi-location. Looking back, it's all magic, very much so.

What comes next? You discover that something outside yourself or not part of your character was responsible for having caused the hijacking. I'm not sure if the term is correct, but let's call it an archetype. So by externalizing what had happened to you, you give it free reign to rub up against the other archetype that happens to be annoying you. Next you stand back and allow the two to slug it out while you sit back and watch. It sounds a bit crazy but in truth does work flawlessly.

A concrete example. Let's say you're having a conversation with someone and along comes another person who takes over...hijacks...the conversation. This person is someone by reason of his interference you have an automatic dislike. Suddenly you find yourself ignored, squeezed out and unable to jump back into the conversation. You may try getting back in, but it's impossible. You simply no longer exist. The intruder, if you will, may give you a quick acknowledgment but clearly you're not welcomed. This is the time when normally you go off and pout over the fact that the hijacker has hijacked not only you but the person with whom you had started the conversation. As for you in your hijacked state, the person who had interrupted you is clueless as to why you're pouting. The absurdity of the situation is so obvious you'd think everyone would see it. However the answer almost always is in the negative.

Indeed, pouting is more difficult to walk away from than at first glance though what a relief when we do. Just walking away from it is a victory in and by itself. The two persons with whom you had been engaged may be clueless as to what had happened right before their eyes, but that's entirely incidental. What counts is that now you, the one who had been hijacked, leave it behind and discover a freedom smack in the midst of a situation you had deemed as hostile. Putting yourself in the place of the bottom feeders, you have discovered the solution to getting out from under being hijacked. You've done this by allowing



the archetype operative within you to fight the archetype operating in someone else who pisses you off. Time now to sit back and watch the show all for free. This is what the bottom feeders do with regard to the fish above. Ask them if they knew this, and all you'd get would be a blank stare. Best for them to leave them alone swimming around in circles.

This transformation of something bothersome is so unusual at first glance that you'd almost think magic was involved or at least some kind of alchemical transformation. Partly true because we're talking about the injection of a presence so different yet with everyday circumstances it comes across as alien. However, a closer look reveals something else is operative, something better.

In a previous article I developed a phrase that has continued to offer help if not inspiration to move along with this writing. That phrase is "sliver of awareness." The second word represents that which precisely makes us human, for never can it perish. Try it out, for a moment, no hardship is involved. Shut down everything in and around yourself and see what happens. This is coming as close to death as humanly possible and in a very real way, represents having gone to a "place" after death. This place turns out to be the same as the one in which you are right now, that is, when you're physically alive. Actually physical life is secondary to this whole enterprise. To be blunt, you can't get rid of this awareness, even if you commit suicide. This awareness is you and you are it. You simply don't have a choice in the matter.

As for the first word, sliver evokes something long and slender with a sharp point. That represents awareness as narrowed down and applied to a given situation. It's narrowed down in order to fit in with how we live day to day. Suggested is that upon death, this sliver will expand; how much I don't know, but that seems to be the case. Trying to figure out such things is incidental once we get a taste of this sliver. As for the contrast a sliver of awareness introduces into our lives, it seems vast and wholly other (which it is), but keep in mind we're dealing with something not of the temporal or spacial order. Still, the image of a sliver holds.

The beauty of a sliver is that it can penetrate anywhere, anytime as well as come and go as it pleases. Is it personal or impersonal? In a way, an unfair question because neither apply. Worrying over which isn't even worth it. The sliver of awareness works at a voltage adapted for us humans, let's say, 110 volts

as is the case in the United States. The voltage can be increased a bit but not by much, else we'll undergo a short-circuit. The same applies with decreasing the voltage. In that instance you'd simply be limping along, again, where most people reside. So we live in a privileged Goldilocks range not unlike that phrase applicable to finding life as we know it on other planets.

When you're going through life, being hijacked is a normal condition, so normal that barely we avert to it. It's something that's bothersome, but unfortunately we don't give it much attention. There are degrees, for example, small instances as well as big ones. For this article I'm not concerned as to the size, just the mechanism involved. If you understand the general principle, it has universal application. Obviously when it gets intense, we can't help but not take notice. We become all-consumed. A temptation now presents itself. We might attempt to willingly conjure up that sliver of awareness if we're overwhelmed, in an attempt to alleviate our distress. In other words, we're trying to have the two operative at the same time. If we did this, quickly we'd go nuts. The sliver represents our default state of mind or perhaps better, our actual being-as-such whereas the hijacking is alien to it.

Despite the suddenness of being assaulted, we have to admit that whatever amount of awareness we've cultivated to date, it's blown away completely. This is disconcerting because of the painful series of alternations now put into motion: hijacking→sliver of awareness→highjacking→sliver of awareness *ad infinitum*. The lesson in all this? The sliver is teaching us that awareness is completely transcendent from ourselves despite its presence within us. It sounds harsh at first but experience shows that often we try to bottle some of this awareness for a rainy day. That's putting it a bit awkwardly but is true. It doesn't work like that. If we discover this, we have, if I may be put as such, one up on how God deals with us. Then and only then we can call his bluff. This might sound strange but is precisely what he truly relishes.

God will insert and then withdraw these slivers of awareness interspersed with hijackings because, strange to say, he gets a kick doing it. Why not go along with the ride? That's something he doesn't expect but once it happens, he welcomes us on board. In a way, this is as close to God as we can get, one-to-one. To us this may come across as rather perverse but from his vantage point, what we think is irrelevant. God is standing back providing these hijackings with the intent to elicit from us the question, What is the precise point of being

hijacked? If we discover this, we discover how to be un-hijacked. To actually put this into practice is in a word, miraculous.

For it to be miraculous the practice or doing is not a doing in the conventional sense. Rather, it's a way of disposing ourselves so as not to be hijacked which means, of course, we've had the experience and know the ropes. So how does that work? I can appeal to one traditional way, the twelve steps of humility in the **Rule** of St. Benedict. At first glance, nothing special. However, you have to read them in the broader context of the scriptural references in which they are couched, fleshing them out to grasp their meaning. If you follow through on this, you discover that after having a few humiliations under your belt or when you've been hijacked (St. Benedict would have loved this word), you can set the stage not so much for blocking more of them but for protecting yourself. You take care to insert memory of these hijackings/humiliations into your brain and let them reside there.

This insertion is how *anamnesis* or recollection actually works which is far more than recalling past events. The beauty of *anamnesis* is that it creates a kind of space between everything being rosy at the moment and the sudden springing of the trap as with a hijacking. While it occurs—and let's not forget, it does so within a nanosecond—we're enabled to slow down even this briefest measure of time to something that's manageable. Expressing the process this way can give the appearance that we're the ones doing the work. Partially true. In actuality we're disposing ourselves. The act of *anamnesis* doesn't come from us but is a transcendent reality of which we become aware. We're not passive instruments but something more. When it comes to describing such a situation, we're literally at a loss for words and appeal to experience. Thus *anamnesis* is memory-in-action as well as transcendence-in-action. The two are inseparable and in a way, interchangeable.

Reading all this has nothing to do with describing some kind of magic bullet. Nothing will make us immune to being hijacked which needs to be kept in mind at all times. The major difference now is that the interval between them and recovery narrows down more and more. We could say too that the sliver of awareness expands ever so much. To ask for anything more is presumptuous. Indeed, there's a reason for this permanent hiatus. The Lord who is fully transcendent wants to keep it that way. He's very jealous of his transcendence which gives him an upper edge at all times. That means the Lord won't tolerate

any attempts to usurp it. To see and declare this to him is, strange to say, precisely what he's looking for. If we could ask him in the utmost privacy why, he'd respond that despite my divinity and the benefits I enjoy, I'm in dire need of a wake-up call. That's why to the unopened eye the hijackings we experience can be so painful but necessary.

One of the most common expressions the Lord uses to protect his prerogative is when he says—and loves to do so with great frequency—“Thus says the Lord.” Translation? Keep your place. Don't dare overstep where you belong. In a way, knowing this as a cry for help is akin to pulling a fast one on the Lord. If we become aware of this ploy on the Lord's part, that he's trying to hid something, we have the ability to teach him something valuable, something he truly lacks. That lack may be described in a certain dim awareness which isn't in conflict with him being all-powerful and the like. Four examples come to mind, the first being a missed opportunity but one from which we can learn something valuable. That's in the Book of Genesis when the Lord was out for his evening stroll in the cool...*ruach*...wind/spirit of the evening.

One evening turned out to be fateful for mankind. The details of this are examined in the article entitled **Reverse Redemption** also posted on this homepage, so please go there if you wish. A brief recap follows as such: the man and woman hid themselves literally in the midst (*betok*) of the tree, tree being singular. While there, the two bickered how to deal with the Lord when they heard his voice or *qol*. Although the text doesn't say it explicitly, dollars to donuts the bickering is so loud that easily it reaches his ears. It is this voice that does the walking or *halak* and detecting the bickering, not the Lord physically as a person. Very strange, a walking voice. The man decides to step outside the tree when the Lord asks where he was. The reason for this call is that each evening the Lord would meet him and his wife, exchange a few pleasantries and then move on. However, this evening was different.

If the man decided to stand his ground and face the voice of the Lord, that is, remain there unflinching in all his nakedness and summoning the woman to do the same instead of remaining in the tree, history would have turned out differently. They would have used that opportunity of having committed a trespass to teach the Lord what he was in desperate need of. That actually is what he craves more than anything to happen but alas, the man and woman failed to carry through. Instead, the Lord lined up the serpent, woman and man

and lectured them harshly, this being exactly what continues to be transmitted to subsequent generations. I'd call it a kind of inverse *anamnesis* which unfortunately can't be shaken off.

The second example that comes to mind is from the Book of Job: "a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them" [1.6]. Here Satan = Adversary, not some bright red colored demon running around with horns in its head. Immediately he caught the Lord's attention and singles him out by asking from where he had come. After saying that he had returned from the earth, without missing a beat the Lord strangely asked if he had seen his servant Job. Why? Job somehow got into the Lord's craw, bothering him to no end. He had to slam into him full force which as we all know turned out to be a series of dreadful afflictions.

The obvious question is why? It seemed that both Satan and Job shared the same courage, each in his own way, to stand up the Lord and make him question himself. Satan was alone among the sons of God to do this while Job was similarly alone among all the earth's inhabitants. It turns out that the Lord needs Job with Satan as a means to obtain a knowledge he was afraid to admit. That consists of self-awareness. To date the Lord had been way too occupied with his almighty-ness and needed to be taken down a peg or two. So despite being omnipotent, he is lacking something quite precious and goes about it in a typically divine way of bullying two beings who simply said no.

The third example is the centurion in Matthew's Gospel who describes himself to Jesus as a man under authority. This position enables him to boss around troops under him. Note how casually and simply he tells Jesus the way he does it: "I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes and to another 'Come,' and he comes" [8.9]. This is the only person at whom Jesus marvels (cf. vs. 10) and declares that he hasn't come across anyone in Israel. The centurion, of course, is a hated member of the Roman occupying force. For Jesus to attribute such faith was as close to treasonous as one could get. And so chalk up another reason why Jesus should be eliminated.

The centurion is the ideal candidate who perhaps unwittingly counters the first man's fear to encounter the voice of the Lord and hide from him together with his wife. So when Jesus says that he hasn't seen such faith in Israel, he's actually saying that he hasn't seen anyone—and that includes literally everyone

in the history of mankind—not so much to stand up to the Lord in an arrogant fashion but to express himself plainly and honestly. So if we could substitute the centurion for the first man, all would be well.

The fourth example is somewhat an oddity, the apostle Paul. While he's vital to the spread of Christianity, something says take him with a grain of salt. The reason? Paul is too serious as well as religious in the fanatical sense even though he's an apostle's apostle. His fanatical-ism is based upon his Pharisaical background and zeal for religion manifested when he had condoned the stoning of Stephen. After his conversion, admittedly no real difference. He carries over the same intensity to being an apostle for Jesus Christ.

So despite the beauty and profundity of much of his writing, Paul comes across as quite harsh with the need to tone it down a bit, even his best material. In this way he's not unlike the Lord himself. After reading him, you can't but help come away exhausted and with a desire for some kind of antidote. You don't know what it is, but please...just give it. As for Paul's epistles, one wonders what view we'd have of Jesus Christ if he hadn't composed them. Something better? Returning to the image of the aquarium, no doubt about it, Paul would be the alpha male fish...shark?...in the aquarium which all the others fear. Surely if the centurion and Paul had met, to put it mildly, they wouldn't have gotten along. In fact, that may have actually happened.

Getting back to example #3 or the centurion, we can say that he represents the "cure" for the transmission of what has become known as original sin. The first man was responsible for transmitting to succeeding generations the harsh lecture he had received from the Lord. More specifically, he had a deep, lasting grudge which comes down to us unabated. Indeed, this is our default state of mind.

Let's say we commit a fault or the like. We'd find it relatively easy to do a pay-back as long as we do it as quickly as possible. What we hate the most is the accompanying lecture or being talked down even if we had made amends. As for the Roman centurion, he's in a position to act in charge with regard to his subordinates as well as being on the receiving end if and when it was required. Thus his straight-forward admission of being in authority and exercising it only when required earns him praise for Jesus. That's why he stands out as extraordinary. It turns out to be an embarrassment for the native Jews who

became more intent on killing Jesus.

So let's wrap things up by briefly returning to the image of a bottom feeder in the aquarium. By reason of its position, it can represent a state where being lectured at has run its course and no longer applies. It simply hits bottom. The fish on the other levels don't realize this in the slightest. Granted, we're not exempt us from being hijacked as described above, but being at the very bottom enables us to watch everything above us in and by themselves. The best part is not to take any action. The act of watching in and by itself is the antidote.

Even if we wished to run away as did the first man when he had encountered the Lord, we couldn't. With the pressure coming from above, we're pinned literally to the ground. In this pressure from above freedom is found. It enables us to access the cure with relative ease and again by reason of our position the cure actually is simple. All we have to do is to stand still in our nakedness unlike the first man. This is something that on one hand is easy to do yet on the other is quite difficult...difficult because it's alien to our human nature. Down the centuries we've inherited an approach that tells us that yes, we must exert ourselves mightily to overcome the effects of that sin called original. Perhaps there is an alternative. So, then, who wants to become a bottom feeder? The aquarium sure could use some additional members.

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